

## CHAPTER 2

# A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM: 1965–2000

The Higher Education Act of 1965, which created the Talent Search program, has been reauthorized six times since it was first enacted (1968, 1972, 1980, 1986, 1992, and 1998), with each reauthorization introducing some changes to TRIO and Talent Search. This chapter presents an overview of Talent Search from 1965 to 2000 with a focus on indentifying how the program has changed and developed.

### Overview and Selected Highlights

- Talent Search began with 45 projects; in 2000-01 there were 360 projects across the nation.
- In 2000, Talent Search served about 321,000 participants at an average cost of about \$313 per participant. The average funding per project was \$278,291.
- Talent Search reauthorization in 1980 made elibigibility criteria more specific and focused on family income and potential first-generation college status.
- There has been a shift from indentifying those with exceptional college potential to serving middle achieving students and to improving access for all students.
- The minimum age of participants has been lowered twice and is now 11 years.
- The 1992 reauthorization encouraged coordination of services and allowed for less than a full-time project director if doing so would facilitate coordination.
- The grant selection process fosters continuity of services by providing extra points for prior experience as manifest by meeting specified objectives.
- Talent Search’s initial assumptions included the belief that small amounts of services targeted on informational and motivational services would lead to increasded college enrollment and use of financial aid.
- Talent Search has been changing in interaction with changes in U.S. demographics, educational reform and technology change.
- Few studies have been conducted previously using national-level data on Talent Search.

## STATISTICS CONCERNING THE TALENT SEARCH PROGRAM

Authorized in 1965, the first Talent Search projects began operating in 1967, when Congress appropriated \$2 million to fund 45 experimental projects under the Higher Education Act (table 2.1). The expressed intent was to encourage and assist disadvantaged youth in obtaining a college education by means of the first federal need-based student grant program, known then as Educational Opportunity Grants (EOGs) (Franklin 1985). To provide a context for the statistics that follow, we note that federal student financial aid has grown from \$31 million under the original National Defense Student Loans (NDSLs) in 1959 to over \$13 billion by 2000. Table 2.1 summarizes key statistics on Talent Search funding, number of projects, number of participants, average grant amount, and number of participants served per project since program inception.

**Table 2.1—Talent Search summary statistics: 1967–2000**

Year	Funding in millions (current dollars)	Funding in millions (constant 2000 dollars)	Number of Talent Search projects	Average grant amount (current dollars)	Average grant amount (constant 2000 dollars)	Total number of students served	Average number of students served per project
1967	\$2.0	\$9.5	45	\$44,444	\$210,637	50,000	1,111
1970	4.0	16.7	85	47,059	196,078	100,000	1,176
1975	6.0	18.4	114	52,632	161,447	110,975	973
1980	15.3	32.0	167	91,617	191,667	198,817	1,191
1985	17.8	28.5	164	108,537	173,659	185,560	1,131
1990	26.2	34.5	207	126,570	166,759	199,420	963
1992	59.6	73.1	294	202,721	248,738	303,000	1,031
1997	78.4	84.1	319	245,768	263,700	298,147	935
1999	98.5	101.8	364	270,604	279,550	323,541	889
2000	100.5	100.5	360	279,291	279,291	320,854	891

SOURCE: Calculated from information from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Federal TRIO Programs; the Council for Opportunity in Education (COE); and U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Price Index, various years (historical information can be found at [www.bls.gov/cpi/](http://www.bls.gov/cpi/)).

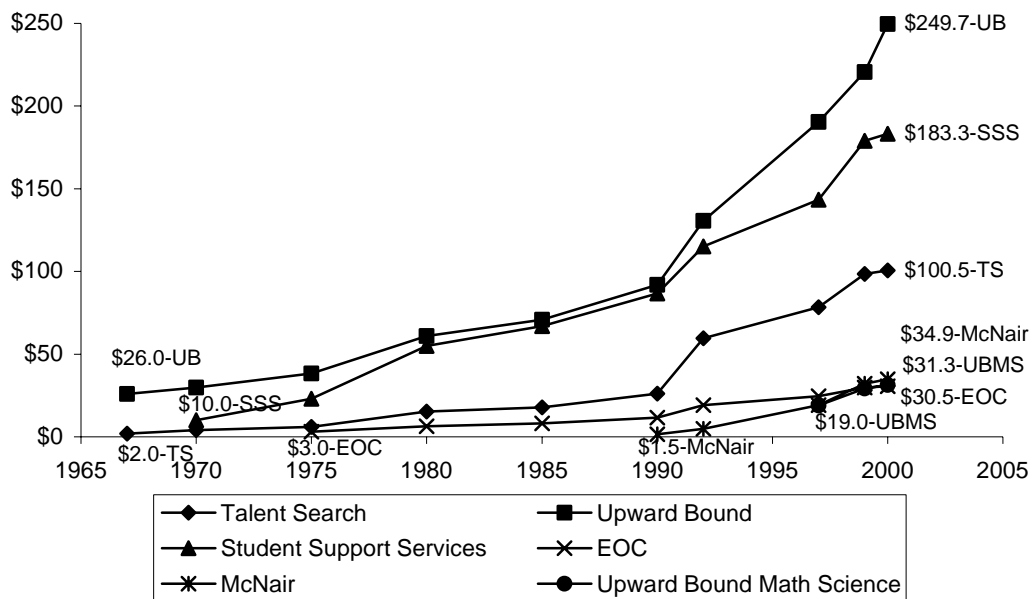
### TRIO AND TALENT SEARCH FUNDING HISTORY

Talent Search began with the lowest funding level among the first three TRIO programs. While it has seen larger percentage increases than Upward Bound or Student Support Services, it has remained the lowest-funded program of the original three programs. In current dollars, Talent Search funding totaled \$2

million in 1967 (figure 2.1).<sup>1</sup> In 2000, funding for Talent Search totaled just over \$100 million.

As demonstrated by table 2.1 and figure 2.2, most of the growth in Talent Search funding (in constant dollars) occurred in the 1970s and 1990s. After a flat period for TRIO and Talent Search in the 1980s, Talent Search funding increased in constant dollars by 190 percent between 1990 and 2000. Starting from a lower base, Talent Search received larger percentage increases in the most recent decade than Upward Bound or Student Support Services. In the same period, Upward Bound increased by 100 percent and Student Support Services by about 60 percent.

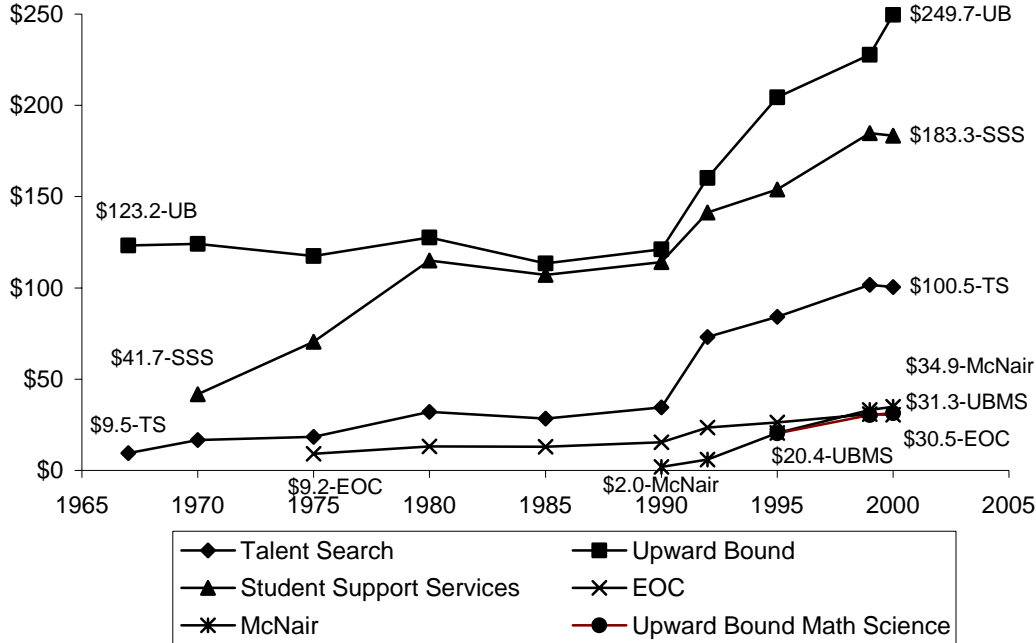
**Figure 2.1—TRIO funding in millions of current dollars: 1967–2000**



SOURCE: Calculated from information from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Federal TRIO Programs; Council for Opportunity in Education (COE).

<sup>1</sup>The programs were Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Services (originally known as Special Services for Disadvantaged Students).

**Figure 2.2—TRIO funding in millions of constant 2000 dollars: 1967–2000**



SOURCE: Calculated from information from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Federal TRIO Programs; Council for Opportunity in Education (COE); Consumer Price Index, various years.

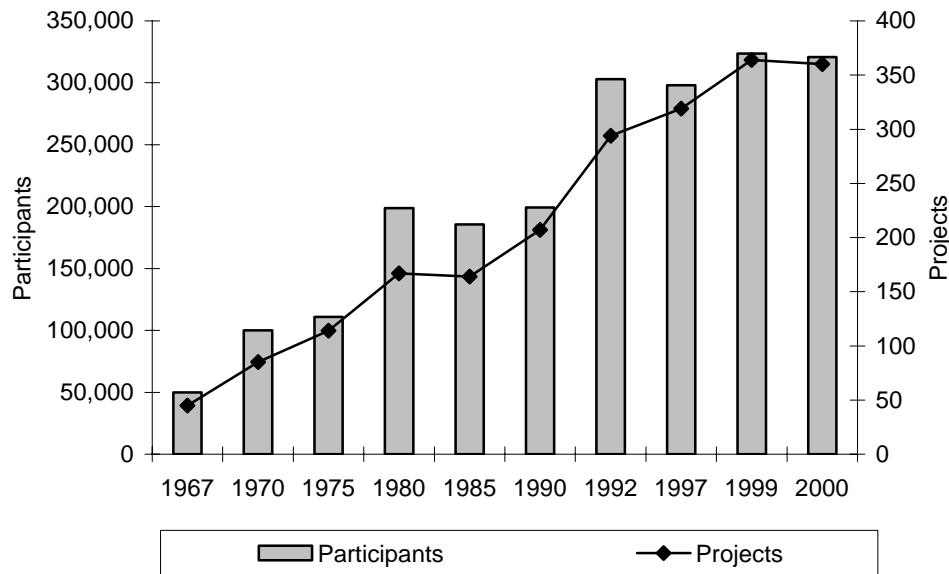
### TOTAL NUMBER OF PROJECTS AND PARTICIPANTS

The 45 initial Talent Search projects (in 1967) grew to 85 by 1970. By the end of the 1970s, the number of projects had almost doubled again, reaching 167. The early 1980s saw little growth in TRIO funding and a small decline in the number of funded Talent Search projects. By 1990, there were 207 Talent Search projects; by 1992, the number had increased to 294. Another large increase in the number of funded projects occurred with the 1997 competition. In 1999-2000, there were 361 funded projects; in 2000-01, 360.

The total number of participants served nationwide largely mirrors trends in the number of projects (figure 2.3). The initial 45 projects served about 50,000 students in 1967. In 2000-01, the 360 Talent Search projects were funded to serve about 320,000 students between 11 and 27 years of age.

competitions  
increases in  
of funded  
in the 1990s,  
of projects  
207 to 361.

**Figure 2.3—Number of Talent Search participants and number of projects: 1967–2000**

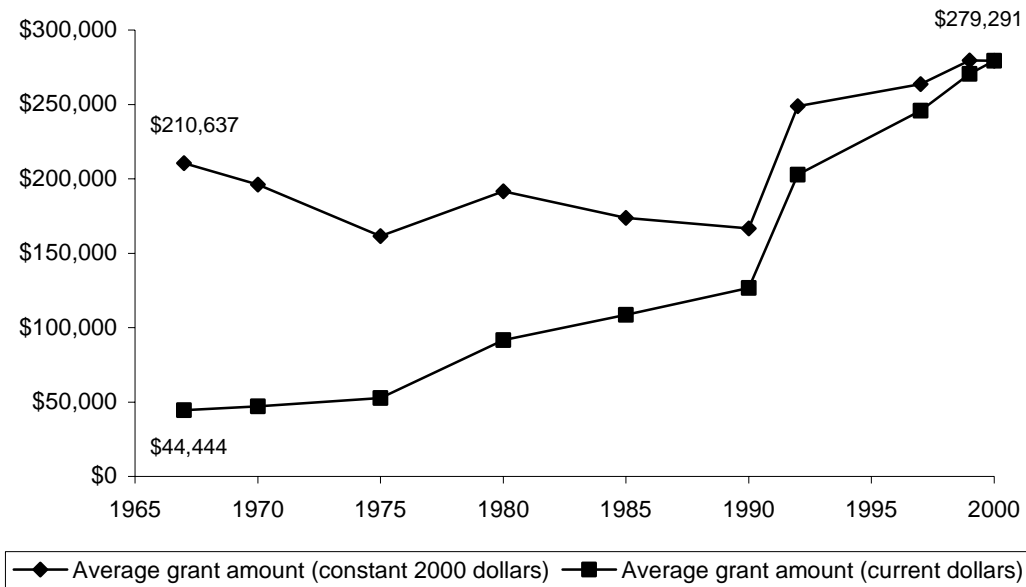


SOURCE: Calculated from information from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Federal TRIO Programs, and the Council for Opportunity in Education (COE).

### FUNDING PER PROJECT AND NUMBER SERVED PER PROJECT

Increases in funding have generally been accompanied by an increased number of Talent Search projects rather than by large increases in the amount of funding per project. As figure 2.4 indicates, however, the 1990s saw some increases in constant (2000) dollars. Funding per project in 1967 was just over \$200,000 in constant dollars. In 2000-01, the amount was about \$279,000. The lowest point in constant dollar funding per project occurred during the 1980s. In 1990, Talent Search funding per project was at about \$166,000 in constant 2000 dollars. As discussed later, the 1992 reauthorization provided a minimum grant size of \$180,000 unless a project requested a lower grant amount.

*In constant 2000 dollars, funding per project increased from about \$166,000 in 1990 to about \$279,000 in 2000.*

**Figure 2.4—Funding per project in current and constant 2000 dollars: 1967–2000**

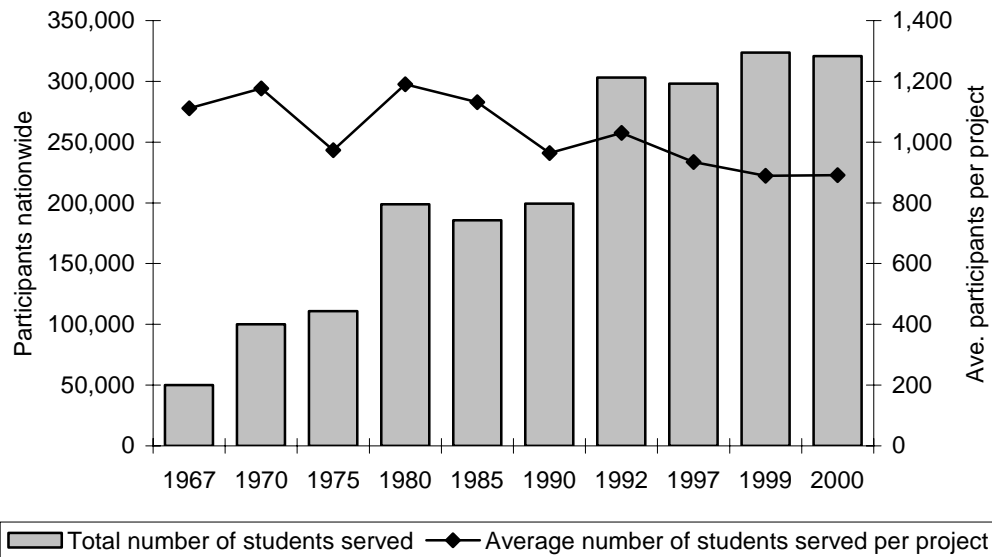
SOURCE: Calculated from information from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Federal TRIO Programs, and the Council for Opportunity in Education (COE).

### AVERAGE NUMBER SERVED PER PROJECT AND FUNDING PER STUDENT

Talent Search projects have historically been required by the ED to serve at least 600 students per year. The average number of participants served per Talent Search project has ranged from a high of 1,176 in 1970 to a low of about 890 in 2000 (table 2.1 and figure 2.5). The increases in funding per project since 1990 have not been accompanied by increases in the number of participants served per project. Rather, they have been accompanied by a stronger emphasis on providing more services to younger students and more services focused on academic preparation, such as summer camps, workshops, and tutoring during the academic year.

re required  
least 600  
ts per  
2000,  
ere funded  
out 900  
ts on

**Figure 2.5—Number of participants per project and total number served nationwide by Talent Search: 1967–2000**

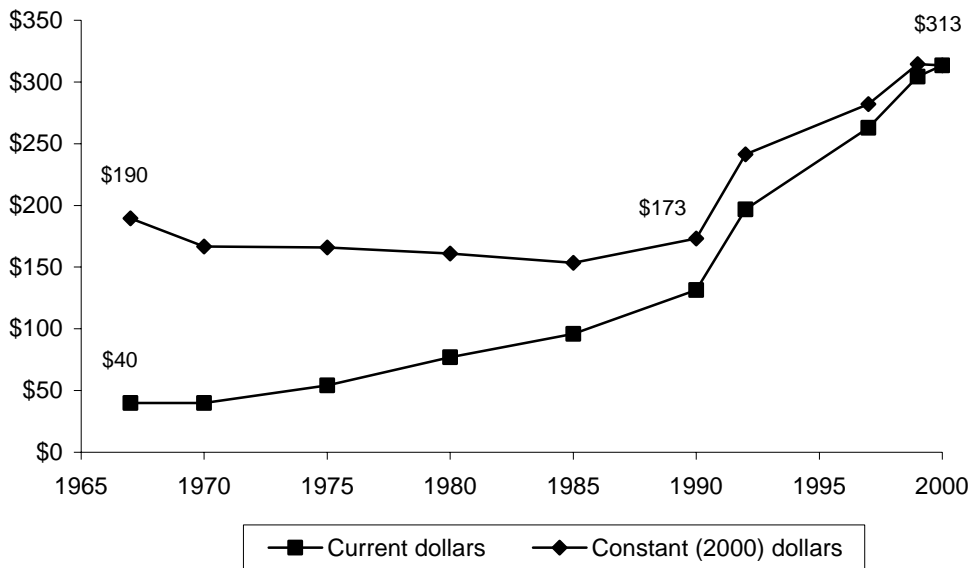


SOURCE: Calculated from information from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Federal TRIO Programs, and the Council for Opportunity in Education (COE).

This focus has meant that per-participant funding increased just under twofold in constant 2000 dollars—from about \$173 in 1990 to about \$313 in 2000 (figure 2.6). Talent Search remains the TRIO project that serves the largest number of participants per year (320,000) and is the second-lowest project in per-participant funding (table 1.1). EOC has the lowest per-participant funding at about \$190 per participant.

*Increases in project funding in the 1990s have been used to increase the amount spent per participant rather than increasing the number served. Talent Search funding was at about \$313 per participant in 2000.*

**Figure 2.6—Talent Search funding per participant in current and constant 2000 dollars: 1967–2000**



SOURCE: Calculated from information from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Federal TRIO Programs, and the Council for Opportunity in Education (COE).

### CURRENT PROFILE OF PROJECTS: FUNDING AND PARTICIPANTS

Until now this chapter has focused on changes over time in overall program statistics, including funding and participant levels. Table 2.2 provides basic information about the program at the time of the project survey, but broken out by type of host institution. Projects hosted by community-based organizations tend to serve more participants and thus have larger budgets than projects hosted by postsecondary institutions.

**Table 2.2—Number of projects, average grant funds, and number of participants, by type of host institution: 1999–2000**

	All projects	Host institution			Community org.
		Public 4-year	Private 4-year	2-year	
Number of projects	361	121	48	124	68
Average grant funds	\$279,291	\$274,983	\$242,239	\$241,079	\$307,759
Total number funded to serve	320,854	109,090	38,502	93,048	80,214
Average number served	891	902	802	750	1,180

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



---

## LEGISLATION AND REGULATIONS GOVERNING TALENT SEARCH: 1965–2000

This section highlights the basic guidelines governing Talent Search and the changes that have been enacted over time. These changes include a shift from conducting a search for talented youth to focusing on access for all, changes in eligibility criteria, targeting younger age groups, efforts to coordinate services; the grant selection process, serving the underrepresented, performance measurement, and the introduction of partnership agreements with ED.

### SHIFT FROM CONDUCTING A TALENT SEARCH TO FOCUSING ON ACCESS AND TALENT DEVELOPMENT FOR ALL

Initially, Talent Search was described legislatively as a program that identified students with high potential or talent for higher education (table 2.3). The initial language stated that the Talent Search was to identify those with exceptional potential for success in postsecondary education, those who demonstrated aptitude for entry into an educational program, and those who needed guidance, counseling, and assistance in gaining admission or readmission to an educational institution.

Talent Search’s mandate was to provide short-term assistance in completing financial aid and college application forms and gaining admission to college. Over time, as officials perceived that many eligible students had greater needs, the role of Talent Search in providing supplemental college preparation expanded. Moreover, as the goal of ever-increasing college attendance grew, Talent Search evolved into a program to assist those who requested services rather than a program seeking out those with “exceptional potential.” More and more, Talent Search became the program targeted to those in the middle who might not receive the attention given to the “talented and gifted” or the services delivered to students with special needs.

---

*Original legislation stated that Talent Search was to identify those with exceptional potential for higher education. Over time, its focus shifted to serving middle-achieving students and to increasing access for all students.*

---

**Table 2.3—TRIO program eligibility criteria before October 1981**

<b>Talent Search</b>	<b>Upward Bound</b>	<b>Student Support Services</b>	<b>Educational Opportunity Centers</b>
Age 14–27 (veterans excepted)	Age 14–17 (veterans excepted)	Students enrolled in or accepted at postsecondary institutions	Resident of area
U.S. citizen or national	U.S. citizen or national	U.S. citizen or national	U.S. citizen or national
Exceptional potential for success in postsecondary education	Resides in target area or attends target school	Individual with academic potential who needs remedial or special services as a result of a deprived educational, cultural, or economic background; a physical handicap; or limited English-speaking ability	
Demonstrated aptitude for entry into an educational program	Completed first year of secondary school and has not entered the 12th grade (veterans excepted)		
Needs guidance and counseling	Has ability to benefit		
Needs assistance in gaining admission or readmission to educational institution			

SOURCE: Adapted from material in Steven M. Jung, Jane Schubert, and Kim Putnam, "Evaluability Assessment of the Special Programs for Disadvantaged Students" (Palo Alto, CA: The American Institutes for Research, 1982), table 2.

NOTE: October 1981 is when the changes in the 1980 amendments took effect.

## DEFINING ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Before 1980, TRIO programs were mandated to serve students who were "disadvantaged" and needed project services. However, projects were not tied to formalized criteria for defining "disadvantaged." The 1980 legislation (that took effect in October 1981) for the first time defined specific criteria for service eligibility. The intent of the regulations was to make the criteria more uniform across TRIO programs and across projects that were using a variety of ways to demonstrate eligibility.

In recognition of how Talent Search was structured within schools, the legislation provided less rigid criteria for Talent Search than for Upward Bound or Student Support Services. As with other TRIO programs, the requirement stated that in each Talent Search project two-thirds of participants have to be both low-income individuals (defined as 150 percent of poverty) and potential first-generation college students (neither parent nor guardian held a bachelor's degree). However, whereas in other TRIO programs the remaining one-third of participants had to be

either low-income or first-generation (or disabled), in Talent Search this requirement does not apply; the remaining one-third do not have to meet any eligibility criteria.

Under the revised criteria, projects had to document the eligibility status of their participants. The regulations required documentation of the income of dependent students by means of a statement signed by a parent or legal guardian, verification from another government source, a signed financial aid application, or a signed tax return. Independent students may themselves submit signed statements. Finally, any veteran serving after 1955 is eligible for Talent Search services.

### TARGETING YOUNGER STUDENTS

Initially, the legislation stated that students had to be 14 years of age—typically in ninth grade—to participate in Talent Search. The Educational Amendments of 1980 lowered the minimum age to 12 years. In an effort to make all middle school students eligible for services, the current age requirements specify that participants must have completed the fifth grade or be at least 11 years of age but generally no more than 27 years of age.<sup>2</sup>

---

*Talent Search age requirements have been lowered from 14 to 11 over the history of the program.*

---

### COORDINATING SERVICES

During the 1980s, program regulations required that, except in special circumstances, Talent Search project directors be committed full-time to their respective projects. The general ED program regulations also required that programs not in any way duplicate other services provided by the host institution. Over time, the TRIO community concluded that these regulations discouraged staff advancement and, more importantly, discouraged potentially useful coordination of service delivery. Accordingly, with urging from the Council for Opportunity in Education (COE, formerly National Council of Educational Opportunity Associations), the 1992 reauthorization introduced new provisions addressing service coordination and the status of project directors.

---

*The 1992 reauthorization addressed issues of project coordination and the project director's level of commitment to the program.*

---

**Service coordination and duplication.** The 1992 reauthorization added a provision that “the Secretary should encourage coordination of programs assisted under TRIO with other programs for disadvantaged students operated by the sponsoring agency, regardless of funding source of such programs.” The provision also stated that the “Secretary should not limit an entity’s eligibility to receive funds because the entity sponsors a program similar to the programs to be assisted regardless of the funding source.”

---

<sup>2</sup>Projects may serve those over 27 years of age if no EOC services are available and if the individual’s participation would not diminish the Talent Search project’s services to the individuals within the main Talent Search age group. In addition, regardless of age, veterans are eligible for either Talent Search or EOC.

**Less than full-time project director.** Under the same provision, the legislation also permitted project directors to administer more than one program. The legislation specified that “the Secretary shall permit the Director of such a program receiving funds to administer one or more additional programs.” This provision has resulted in an increasing number of instances in which a senior project director is responsible for multiple TRIO programs at a host institution.

## THE GRANT SELECTION PROCESS

Many Talent Search projects have been in operation for many years (the average project age was 13 years in 2001; see chapter 4). The 1992 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965 increased the duration of TRIO grants from three to four years, with the top-scoring 10 percent of grant applicants awarded five-year grants. The 1992 legislation also specified minimum grants. For Talent Search, the minimum was \$180,000. A grant award is based on the following:

- The need for the project (24 points)
- Objectives (8 points)
- Plan of operation (30 points)
- Applicant and community (16 points)
- Quality of personnel (9 points)
- Evaluation plan (8 points)
- Budget (5 points)

**Experience.** Talent Search promotes continuity of program services by scoring grant applications partly on past experience. The legislation provides that the Secretary shall consider each applicant’s service delivery experience. Based on that experience, the applicant may receive up to 15 extra points. The annual performance reports contain a section in which projects report on their attainment of agreed-upon objectives specified in their partnership agreements with ED. Table 4.4 reproduces the key elements of the 2000-01 performance report form.

**Peer review process and under-represented groups.** The legislation specifies that, to the extent practical, people selected to review grant applications should include members of groups under-represented in higher education as well as representatives of urban and rural areas. Readers cannot be employees of the federal government.

<b>Table 2.4—Talent Search project performance outcomes used for experience determination</b>	
<b>SECTION IV: PROJECT PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES</b>	
In this section, state your approved project objectives related to each of the prior experience criteria in quantifiable terms (percentage of participants) and then provide the requested data under "Participant Status" that will demonstrate the extent to which your project achieved each of these objectives.	
<b>A. SECONDARY SCHOOL RETENTION, GRADUATION, AND REENTRY</b> (Talent Search — 34 CFR 643.22(b)(2)) Approved Objective(s):	
Secondary school retention	_____ % of secondary participants served this project period will continue in secondary school for the next academic term.
Secondary school graduation	_____ % of high school seniors (and GED or alternative education students) will graduate from high school or receive a certificate of high school equivalency this project period.
Secondary school re-entry	_____ % of secondary school dropouts will re-enter a program of secondary education this project period.
Participant status (at the end of this reporting period)	Number of Participants
Continued in middle school (Talent Search only)	
Promoted from middle school to high school (Talent Search only)	
Continued in high school (do not include those who graduated)	
Re-entered middle school	
Re-entered high school	
Received high school diploma	
Obtained a GED/high school equivalency degree	
<b>B. ADMISSIONS AND FINANCIAL AID ASSISTANCE</b> (Talent Search, 34 CFR 643.1; EOC, 34 CFR 644.1 and 644.22(b)(2)) Approved Objective(s):	
Assistance in applying for postsecondary admissions	_____ % of "college ready" project participants will receive assistance in applying for postsecondary admission this project period.
Assistance in applying for student financial aid	_____ % of "college ready" project participants will receive assistance in applying for financial aid this project period.
Participant status (at the end of this reporting period)	Number of Participants
1. Applied for admission to programs of postsecondary education	
2. Applied for student financial aid for postsecondary education	

<b>(Table 2.4 continued)</b>	
<b>C. POSTSECONDARY ADMISSION AND RE-ENTRY</b> (Talent Search — 34 CFR 643.22(b)(3); EOC — 34 CFR 644.22(b)(3)) Approved Objective(s):	
Postsecondary admissions	_____ % of high school (and high school equivalency) graduates will enroll into a program of postsecondary education this project period (or for the fall term).
Postsecondary re-entry	_____ % of postsecondary education stopouts will re-enter a program of postsecondary education this project period (or for the fall term).
Participant status (at the end of this reporting period)	Number of Participants
1. Enrolled in (or admitted to) a program of postsecondary education (first-time enrollment in postsecondary education)	
2. Re-enrolled in (or re-admitted to) a program of postsecondary education	
<b>D. POSTSECONDARY PLACEMENTS (TYPES OF INSTITUTIONS)</b> For those participants enrolled in or admitted to programs of postsecondary education as reported in Section IV, C above, indicate the number of participants enrolled in or admitted to the following types of postsecondary institutions:	
Type and Control of Postsecondary Institutions	Number of Participants
Public, two-year institution	
Private, non-profit, two-year institution	
Public, four-year institution	
Private, non-profit, four-year institution	
Public or non-profit vocational/technical institution	
Proprietary school	
Unknown	
<b>E. OTHER PARTICIPANT STATUS</b> (Talent Search, 34 CFR 643.22(b); EOC, 34 CFR 644.22(b))	
Participant status (at the end of this reporting period)	Number of Participants
Dropped out of middle school (Talent Search only)	
Dropped out of high school	
Did not continue in program of postsecondary education (EOC only)	
Other (i.e. military, death, illness, transfer, etc.)	
Unknown	

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

**Allowable services.** The legislation lists 10 services—revised over the years—as acceptable (the current list was presented in chapter 1). No project is expected to provide all the services. In the 1990s, Congress added to the list mentors in the

form of elementary or secondary school teachers, counselors, members of institutions of higher education, students, or any combination of the above.

**Allowable costs.** The grant application instructions indicate that applicants may include all costs that are reasonable and associated with carrying out the objectives of the Talent Search program. Funding may be used for the following:

- Personnel
- Fringe benefits
- Travel for employees and participants
- Equipment related to providing services
- Supplies
- Contractual services
- Other (equipment, required fees, communication, utilities, custodial services, printing)

Indirect costs are limited to 8 percent of total modified direct costs. The Office of Federal TRIO Programs developed travel guidelines that allow the project director to travel to one national conference, one regional meeting, one state meeting, and one professional development workshop per year. Full-time professional staff may travel to one national, regional, or state meeting and to staff development activities offered under the training program for federal TRIO programs.

**Assurances.** Host institution grantees are required to provide the following assurances:

- Participants are not receiving services from another Talent Search project or from an EOC
- The project and its services are located in settings accessible to the persons proposed to be served
- At least two-thirds of participants are low-income individuals and potential first-generation college students
- If the grantee is a higher education institution, it will not use Talent Search as part of a recruitment process

---

*Projects need to provide assurances concerning eligibility, duplication, service access, and not using the program for college recruitment.*

---

In addition to these provisions specific to TRIO and Talent Search, two other pieces of legislation have influenced the grant process. They are the General Education Provisions Act and the Government Performance and Results Act. Next we discuss each as they apply to Talent Search.

---

## SERVING THE UNDER-REPRESENTED: THE GENERAL EDUCATION PROVISIONS ACT

*ants need to  
s they are  
ure equitable  
ral services  
esented*

---

The General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) of 1994 required all new applicants for Department of Education awards to include as part of their applications a description of steps the applicant proposed to take to ensure equitable access to and participation in its federally assisted programs for students, teachers, and other program beneficiaries with special needs. The statute highlights six types of barriers that can impede equitable access or participation: gender, race, national origin, color, disability, or age. Based on local circumstances, applicants are instructed to determine whether these or other barriers might prevent their students and teachers from gaining access to federally funded projects. Applications need to specify actions underway to overcome the various barriers.

This provision (Statute 427) is intended to ensure that, in designing projects, applicants for federal funds address equity concerns that may affect the ability of certain potential beneficiaries to participate fully in the project and to achieve high standards. The applicant may propose to use federal funds to eliminate the identified barriers. The Talent Search application provides examples of how applicants might propose to overcome the access barriers, such as recruitment materials that address the concerns of the underserved group or how to take advantage of technology to provide instructional materials for use by disabled individuals.

The TRIO authorizing legislation also directs the Secretary to conduct outreach to those entities that propose to serve geographic and eligible populations that have been underserved by the projects assisted under the program.

## PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT: GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE AND RESULTS ACT

*resulted in an  
s on project  
king, record-  
performance*

---

The Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) of 1993 strongly influenced the activities of TRIO as well as those of other federal programs. GRPA requires all federal agencies and the programs for which they are responsible to consider the consequences of their management activities. Each agency identifies what is to be accomplished, specifies the available resources, and periodically reports to Congress on its progress. The intent is to improve accountability in expending public funds and to improve service delivery and customer satisfaction.

As indicated in the Talent Search application for funding, “the performance indicators for the Federal TRIO program are part of the Department’s [ED] plan for building a solid foundation for learning and ensuring access to postsecondary education and lifelong learning.” The specific performance goal for TRIO is to provide increased educational opportunities for low-income, potential first-generation college students.





## PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

The submitted applications typically set forth a detailed plan for services and the target number of participants to be served in identified schools. The applications also describe each staff person and his or her role and qualifications. In addition, the applications must include an evaluation plan. In practice, projects are seldom funded for everything described in their grant applications, and some reconciliation is needed after the grant award.

Following award, the Office of Federal TRIO Programs and the projects develop a partnership agreement that reconciles differences between the amount requested and the services proposed and the amount awarded and the services to be provided. Through the reconciliation process, projects also specify their objectives in various categories. The objectives then become the means for establishing the scores for experience points in the next competition.

---

*Partnership agreements reconcile grant proposals with funded amounts and specify agreed-upon performance objectives for experience points in the next competition.*

---

## CONTINUITY AND CHANGE OVER TIME

As indicated above, the grant selection process creates a good deal of stability in terms of the organizations hosting Talent Search projects, but funding, legislative, and regulatory changes have somewhat altered the way projects operate. In the final section of this chapter we consider the initial assumptions behind the Talent Search program, how the program has changed over time, and some of the factors that may have influenced those changes.

Talent Search emerged out of the War on Poverty, and reflected an increased focus on promoting equal educational opportunities. A few primary assumptions appear to have been operative in the creation of Talent Search—and continue to undergird the program even today:

- Small amounts of service *at key points* can make a difference in student decisions and actions concerning college attendance
- The program should target needy public schools serving large numbers of disadvantaged students
- Within the target schools, the program should target individual needy students with the potential for college
- The program can increase the chances of college going by providing information, motivation, and exposure to college

---

*Talent Search assumptions included a belief that small, targeted, informational, motivational exposure services could foster decisions to enroll in college when used in combination with financial aid programs.*

---

Just as the assumptions—and basic goals—of Talent Search have remained consistent since its inception, some program features appear to have been rather enduring, including the use of pull-out workshops as a common mode of service delivery, the focus on providing information about and assistance with financial aid forms, the focus on helping students with college applications, and exposing students to college through campus visits. In many other respects, however,

program operations have changed substantially over time. Some of these changes and issues were mentioned earlier in this chapter; some will be revisited in later chapters as well.

- Increased focus on targeting “middle-achievement” students
- Increased use of technology for completing college and financial aid applications
- Increased focus on program retention from year to year and from middle to high school
- Increased emphasis on academic support services
- Increased emphasis on parent involvement
- Increased sponsorship of summer programs
- Increased focus on high-stakes testing preparation
- Increased provision of mentoring services
- Increased emphasis on records and participant tracking
- Increased focus on developing individual service plans for participants

Some of these operational changes resulted directly and intentionally from legislative and regulatory changes. Others resulted from broad or large-scale changes or factors in American society more generally, such as demographic shifts. (The legislative and regulatory changes, too, were undoubtedly influenced by some of these same broad changes.) Key changes or developments include the following:

- Greater recognition that postsecondary education is the fault line between those who will prosper and those who will not<sup>3</sup>
- A growing belief in the importance of early intervention as a major approach for motivating and preparing students for college
- Awareness that while college enrollment rates have increased, the gap between those from high income families and those from low income families remains unacceptably wide

---

<sup>3</sup>For example, according to March 2000 CPS data, the median annual earnings of individuals whose highest level of education was a high school diploma was about \$20,900, whereas the median income of those with a bachelor’s degree or higher was about \$40,800.

- The spread of systemic reform of the education system at the district and school levels as a major method of increasing the educational attainment of all children, as well as an increase on high-stakes testing
- Increased focus on performance measurement in public and private programs at all levels
- Rapid proliferation and advancement of computer-based technology

## PREVIOUS STUDIES OF TALENT SEARCH

Studies of Talent Search conducted thus far have been descriptive. Other than the current study, the only major government-sponsored study of Talent Search was part of a larger review of Upward Bound conducted by Research Triangle Institute (RTI) and published in 1975 (Pyecha et al. 1975). The study used project and staff surveys and case studies as the major sources of information and arrived at the following major conclusions:

- It was not possible to identify a typical Talent Search project—while there was a common set of services, there were differences in clients, staff, hosts, and target schools that resulted in more program differences than similarities.
- The national impact of the program was “unevaluable” because of the nature of the services, the lack of project records, and differences in defining target populations.
- Identified program strengths included effective recruitment strategies; dedication to a common set of appropriate services; ability to respond to the needs of all who come for assistance—whether client or not; effective relationships with institutions to which clients applied and could attend; continuing and effective referral activity; staff dedicated to program goals and objectives despite limited training and high staff turnover; client recruitment from a wide spectrum of agencies; and a degree of meaningful impact on high school counseling programs and on a variety of postsecondary institutions.
- Program problem areas included failure to seek out all eligible individuals; the need to make greater efforts to match clients to appropriate institutions; inadequate funding for project activities; the need for content and organizational improvement of project files; minimal long-range follow-up of clients; the need to reexamine the nature and function of advisory boards in many projects; the need for enhanced communication with the U.S. Office (now Department) of Education regional office through greater attention to the considerable technical and support needs of individual projects; apathy or a lack of cooperation in high school recruiting of

---

*Previous studies of Talent Search have been descriptive, have noted the diversity of programs and populations served, and have pointed to the difficulty in conducting impact evaluations.*

---



---

*The 1975 study identified these strengths: effective recruitment, appropriate services, responsiveness to diverse student needs, effective referrals, and a positive influence on school guidance programs.*

---



---

*The 1975 study identified these problems: lack of resources, not serving some groups of eligible individuals, and limited record-keeping.*

---

disadvantaged students; some high schools' dependence on Talent Search to provide counseling-related services to disadvantaged students; staff ill-equipped to handle academic counseling, career guidance, testing, and interpretation of educational and aptitude data; Talent Search's lack of status and image as a national service program; and a feeling among Talent Search project personnel that the program should receive more national recognition and support.

Table 2.5 lists additional descriptive, empirical studies of Talent Search conducted over its history. In 1992, ED commissioned six papers for a design conference examining issues for a possible evaluation of Talent Search (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Policy and Planning 1992). The studies pointed out the difficulty in implementing a random assignment study for Talent Search but noted the potential for a comparison group design focused on short-term impacts. In the early 1990s, ED contracted with Decision Information Resources to conduct a small descriptive study of Talent Search to look at feasible measures of program performance criteria (Decision Information Resources 1994) and to prepare a review of target population needs and effective interventions (Arbona 1994). The first study concluded that it would be possible for projects to keep records of participants' services and perform limited tracking of outcomes. In addition, the National Council of Educational Opportunity Associations (NCEOA) sponsored a literature review (Nettles and Getzfeld 1990) and survey of Talent Search and Upward Bound in the early 1990s (NCEOA 1992). The literature review prepared for the present national evaluation summarizes selected results of some of these studies (Silva and Kim 1999).

**Table 2.5—Previous Studies of Talent Search**

<b>Authors and date</b>	<b>Description</b>
Pyecha et al., 1975	First national evaluation of Talent Search, conducted for the U.S. Office of Education by Research Triangle Institute. It included a survey of all 114 project directors (response rate 92 percent), a survey of the postsecondary institutions on the enrollment status of a sample of former program participants (response rate 93 percent), and case studies of 20 projects.
Franklin, 1985	Primarily focused on 11 purposefully selected Talent Search projects. It used a mail survey, telephone interviews, and document review and drew on a limited amount of national data—Annual Performance Reports—from ED for 1979–83. Conducted for the College Entrance Examination Board.
Coles, 1992	In-depth interviews with the directors of 19 purposefully selected Talent Search projects. Prepared for the Design Conference for the Evaluation of the Talent Search Program, hosted by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Policy and Planning, September 30, 1992.
Eisner, 1992	A review of data from Annual Performance Reports for 1986–87 and 1990–91. Data obtained for an estimated two-thirds of the Talent Search projects funded in 1986–87 and for 92 percent of the 177 projects funded in 1990–91. Included in the report from the Talent Search Design Conference.
Lee and Clery, 1993	A mail survey of all 294 Talent Search projects operating in 1992 (response rate 72 percent). Conducted for the National Council of Educational Opportunity Associations.
Decision Information Resources, 1994	Case studies of seven purposefully chosen Talent Search projects, focusing on current and potential program performance measures. Conducted for the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning and Evaluation.

SOURCE: Silva, Tim and Julia Kim, "The Federal Talent Search Program: A Synthesis of Information from Research Literature and Grant Applications." Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research, 1999.

