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ABSTRACT

The Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) mandates that service delivery areas shall expend 40 percent of Title IIA funds on training and employment programs for youth. To ensure quality programs, a substantial portion of resources should be targeted to the most seriously at-risk youth. The most effective youth programs take a comprehensive approach to dealing with youth. Instead of seeking single, one-dimensional solutions, they provide a continuum of services aimed at addressing a broad range of employment-related needs. What works best is an approach that seeks to integrate a broad range of training elements, including basic education, job skill training, work experience, and pre-employment orientation. The approaches that seem to work best and are consistent with the lessons of experience are the following: (1) stress academic remediation; (2) opt for quality, comprehensive training; (3) concentrate on at-risk youth; (4) use a competency-based framework; and (5) seek a coordinated, collaborative working arrangement. However, producing better trained, job-ready youth is not simply a matter of offering more effective training programs. A coordinated effort is needed among the educational community, the business sector, local government, and community groups. Such cooperation is crucial to produce and maintain effective training initiatives. A brief resource list is provided. (KC)

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MAKING EFFECTIVE YOUTH
PROGRAMMING CHOICES
UNDER JTPA

by

Morton H. Sklar

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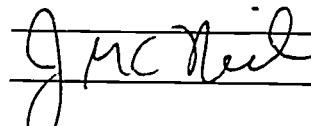
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MAKING EFFECTIVE YOUTH PROGRAMMING CHOICES UNDER JTPA

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PREFACE

The National Association of Counties Employment and Training Program is pleased to issue the third in its series of Issue Papers. This Issue Paper--"Making Effective Youth Programming Choices Under JTPA"--focuses on ways in which service delivery areas may spend effectively their 40 percent funds for youth. We hope that this paper will provide you with some valuable information on ways to address the needs of youth, especially the hard-to-serve.

In the near future, NACo will publish the remaining Issue Papers. The purpose of this series is to stimulate discussion within the employment and training community on issues which NACo believes are important to and impact on the future of employment and training in the United States. While these papers do not represent, necessarily, the views or opinions of the National Association of Counties, the NACo Employment and Training Program or the US Department of Labor, these papers do provide an important perspective on a variety of issues. Therefore, NACo welcomes your reactions to and comments on these Issue Papers. Please address your comments to Jerry McNeil, Director, Employment and Training Programs, National Association of Counties, 440 First Street, NW, Washington, DC 20001. Letters may be published in the future.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) mandates that service delivery areas (SDAs) shall expend 40 percent of Title IIA funds on training and employment programs for youth. There are important reasons why Congress and USDOL assigned a high priority to youth programs. While adult unemployment rates, on the whole, are declining, youth joblessness remains a chronic and increasing problem.

A recent report of the National Academy of Sciences points out that there are enormous differences in the quality and effectiveness of youth training and employment programs. To insure quality programs, a substantial portion of resources should be targeted to the most seriously at-risk youth. Recently, some researchers, private foundations and training organizations have made a sustained effort to initiate several innovative programs, and to publicize the needs of at-risk youth. They have shown that even the most disadvantaged can experience significant employability and earnings gains from specially targeted training efforts, and that the cost of these efforts is more than offset by the long-term savings that result.

The most effective youth programs take a comprehensive approach to dealing with youth. Instead of seeking single, one-dimensional solutions they provide a continuum of services aimed at addressing a broad range of employment-related needs. What works best is an approach that seeks to integrate a broad range of training elements, including: basic education; job skill training; work experience; and pre-employment orientation. Combining these elements greatly improves the job retention and earning capabilities of at-risk youth.

This type of training is sequential. It is designed to move participants through progressive stages of training that produce levels of job readiness. An emphasis on remedial education--training in basic academic skills such as reading and writing--is essential. Training programs that produce the most positive results for at-risk youth, and the most significant cost benefits for government, place a heavy emphasis on remedial academic assistance.

A competency-based youth training system, simply described, is one that uses standards of performance to measure whether, and to what extent, particular work-related skills have been reached for participants. These performance standards, or competencies are used not only to measure achievement, but as a framework for organizing and developing the components of a training program. An important dividend that comes with the development and use of a competency-based system is that it gives SDAs additional flexibility for dealing with JTPA performance standard requirements.

Producing better trained, job-ready youth is not simply a matter of offering more effective training programs. The educational community, the business sector, local government and community groups must play a major role. Unless methods can be found to facilitate a coordinated effort among these groups, it will be difficult to produce and maintain effective training initiatives.

During the first years of JTPA's operation, many SDA's experienced serious difficulties meeting the JTPA statute's 40 percent youth targeting goals. Many SDAs have found it difficult to resist the temptation of easing the targeting pressures and improving statistical results by "mainstreaming" youth into adult programs. Apart from the legal issues that may be involved, what is more significant is that experience has shown that "mainstreaming" youth simply is not an effective way of dealing with their training needs. Unemployed youth require specialized types of assistance geared to their particular needs.

If there is one overriding concern, it is the lack of adequate resources to deal effectively with the existing levels of need. One obvious solution to this problem would be a larger federal financial commitment to youth training needs and support for the policies and programs that can make the most substantial differences in the long-run. The approaches that seem to work best, and are consistent with the "lessons from experience" are:

- o to stress academic remediation;
- o to opt for quality, comprehensive training;
- o to concentrate on at-risk youth;
- o to use a competency-based framework; and
- o to seek a coordinated, collaborative working arrangement.

MAKING EFFECTIVE YOUTH PROGRAMMING CHOICES UNDER JTPA

I. INTRODUCTION: THE IMPORTANCE OF EFFECTIVE YOUTH TRAINING

The Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) mandates that service delivery areas (SDAs) shall expend 40 percent of Title IIA funds on training and employment programs for youth. The US Department of Labor (USDOL) has identified youth training as one of three areas to receive special attention.

There are important reasons why Congress and USDOL assigned a high priority to youth programs. While adult unemployment rates, on the whole, are declining, youth joblessness remains a chronic and increasing problem, especially among minority youth. For example, in September 1985, the unemployment rate for 16-19 year olds rose from 17.3 to 17.8 percent; this increase was attributable entirely to joblessness among minority teens.

Federal, state and local government officials are working to reverse this trend, not only because of the social consequences (such as increased crime rates and the greater potential for social conflicts), but because of the substantial long-term costs that chronically unemployed youth impose on present and future generations. The "cost of doing nothing";* the costs to the welfare and criminal justice systems; and the costs due to lost taxes and productivity far outweigh the cost of dealing with the problems of jobless youth.

A recent report of the National Academy of Sciences points out that there are enormous differences in the quality and effectiveness of youth training programs. The great majority fall short of the goals and objectives they were designed to achieve. It, therefore, is necessary for those involved in the development and implementation of youth training programs, particularly at the SDA level, to:

- o Inform themselves about the nature and effectiveness of various youth training options, and
- o Direct resources toward initiatives with the greatest potential for assisting those youth most at risk.

*"Youth Unemployment in New York City, The Cost of Doing Nothing," Interface, 251 Park Avenue South, New York, New York, June 1983.

This paper seeks to address these issues by providing some background on:

- o Youth training approaches that work best;
- o The types of issues and problems that local officials must deal with and overcome to develop effective youth training and employment programs; and
- o Specific resource materials and program models that are available.

II. WHAT WORKS BEST FOR YOUTH: SOME GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND EFFECTIVE MODELS

Youth training analysts point to underlying principles that emerge from the most successful efforts. These include:

- o Targeting assistance to those most in need;
- o Taking a comprehensive approach;
- o Emphasizing remedial education; and
- o Using a competency-based system.

Targeting Assistance to Those Most in Need

A substantial portion of resources should be targeted to the most seriously at-risk youth: those facing the most difficult obstacles to employment, such as those most at-risk of leaving school, school dropouts and economically disadvantaged minorities.

While the desirability of this approach seems obvious, the overwhelming tendency in youth training is in the opposite direction. There are practical reasons why local officials serve those who need less training, use fewer resources and require less complicated training interventions. These include pressures to place the largest numbers of trainees in jobs for the lowest cost, providing rapid interventions and having flexibility to deal with short term economic fluctuations. Pressures to concentrate on those who are easiest to serve are compounded by widespread unfamiliarity with youth training needs and program options, especially those geared to at-risk youngsters. One indicator of this difficulty is the fact that a large proportion of SDAs failed to meet the 40 percent spending requirement. Moreover, many practitioners have inadequate information about those program options that are most likely to assist at-risk youth.

Recently, some researchers, private foundations, and training organizations have made a sustained effort to initiate several innovative programs, and to publicize the needs of at-risk youth. Several recent research efforts have shown that even the most disadvantaged can experience significant employability and earnings gains from specially targeted training efforts, and that the cost of these efforts is more than offset by the long-term savings that result. Equally important, the chronic problems associated with long-term joblessness that constantly depress youth unemployment statistics seem to be concentrated among the highest risk groups. In November, 1985, while unemployment among white teens declined nearly two percentage points, the black teen jobless rate rose almost an equivalent amount.

Moreover, in November, the black teen jobless rate increased from 2.3 to 2.5 times that of white teens. We can do little to improve the youth unemployment picture as a whole unless we find effective methods for reaching youth who are locked into chronic joblessness.

There have been a number of recent initiatives, including some tied to JTPA, that focus on the training needs of high-risk youth. Two are part of national demonstration programs targeted to the special needs of at-risk youth.

JOB START*, the first of the national demonstrations, tests a variety of training strategies especially aimed at dropout youth. The Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC), which is handling the organizational and evaluation aspects for JOB START, identified a number of local projects that show particular promise in reaching and serving the needs of dropouts. They are working closely with each local project, monitoring and documenting the impact of these programs over time.

One example of the JOB START model is the Center for Employment and Training (CET) in San Jose, California. Like other JOB START programs, CET serves an especially disadvantaged population of which 60 percent are dropouts and 30 percent have limited English language ability.

What makes CET and the other JOB START projects unusual is their commitment to spend additional time, resources and energy on at-risk participants in order to produce the longer-term gains and cost savings that can result when adequate types and levels of assistance are targeted to those most in need.

The Summer Training and Education Program (STEP)**, operated by Public/Private Ventures, consists of projects in

*For additional information on JOB START contact Robert Ivry, Manpower Development Research Corporation, 3 Park Avenue, New York, New York, 10016, 212/532-3200 or Robert Johnson, CET, 425 South Market Street, San Jose, California, 95113, 408/287-7924.

**For additional information on STEP contact Thomas Smith or Carol Thomson, Public/Private Ventures, 399 Market Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 19106, 215/592-9099.

Boston, Baltimore and Pinellas County, Florida. STEP seeks to reach at-risk youth between the ages of 14 and 15 who are performing poorly in school and have a high potential of becoming dropouts before graduation. The goal is to intervene at this time of particular vulnerability in hopes of providing them with the incentives to remain in school. STEP operates during the summer. It provides participants with job placements as an incentive to improve academic skill deficiencies.

Taking a Comprehensive Approach

The most effective youth programs take a comprehensive approach to dealing with youth. Instead of seeking single, one-dimensional solutions they provide a continuum of services aimed at addressing a broad range of employment-related needs. Often this is tied to efforts to develop or encourage a coordinated service delivery approach among community groups dealing with youth, including schools, training service providers, and business and government officials.

Most commonly, program emphasis is placed on pre-employment counselling and placement assistance, including: improving interview techniques; developing acceptable work habits; and finding a job. However, this type of training has been shown to produce limited long-term benefits for at-risk youth with serious basic skills deficiencies, even though initial placement rates may be impressive. What works best is an approach that seeks to integrate a broad range of training elements, including: basic education; job skill training; work experience; and pre-employment orientation. Combining these elements greatly improves the job retention and earning capabilities of at-risk youth.

This type of training is sequential. It is designed to move participants through progressive stages of training that produce levels of job readiness. As a practical matter, this approach requires some framework for encouraging the various community groups to work together. A collaborative effort on the part of government officials, the schools, the business community and training program operators is at the heart of effectively integrated youth training initiatives.

Four types of training have been identified by youth experts which provide the essential ingredients to help youth develop their capacity to obtain and hold a job:

- o basic academic skills--reading, writing and computation literacy;
- o pre-employment counseling--effective methods for locating and applying for a job;
- o work maturity--familiarity with workplace behavior and needs; and
- o occupational training--acquisition of specific job skills.

Most youth training efforts concentrate on one or two of these elements. However, we have learned that most unemployed youth, and particularly at-risk youth, require a comprehensive approach to their job-related needs. Programs such as Jobs for America's Graduates and 70001, Ltd. that relied heavily on pre-employment counselling activities have added more substantial academic remediation components. Likewise, the school-to-work models, such as the Partnership Project and the Boston Compact (see Part III), feature all four types of training activities--academic remediation, work experience, counselling, and skills training.

All these elements need not be contained in the same program nor be required of every youngster, as long as they are available to all participants who need them through the range of activities provided by an SDA. In serving different groups of youth, SDAs may need to place greater emphasis on one or another program element. The key, however, is to provide each participant with a range of services, to provide those services suited to their individualized needs, and to do this in an integrated fashion. A Practitioner's Guide, distributed by Public/Private Ventures, offers examples of some of the better programs in each area of training. SDAs can use the Guide, and other sources, to help formulate a more comprehensive and integrated system of training for youth.

Emphasizing Remedial Education

An emphasis on remedial education--training in basic academic skills such as reading and writing--is essential.

Training programs that produce the most positive results for at-risk youth, and the most significant cost benefits for government, place a heavy emphasis on remedial academic assistance.

Recently, researchers, government agencies and training groups, have come to the same conclusion: the first and most important step is to provide assistance to youth to improve basic reading, writing and math skills. This approach is especially valuable when combined with, in the integrated,

sequential approach described above, a program mix of work experience or on-the-job training and pre-employment counselling.

Increasing numbers of SDAs have focused on the education needs of at-risk youth. Recent demonstration programs, including JOB START and STEP, have made academic skill remediation an essential part of training.

Another well-regarded project that has a similar focus is the Academies Program operated in Palo Alto and Philadelphia. The Academies Program seeks to keep at-risk youth from dropping out of school by establishing a "school within a school." Separate study centers are located within the high school and are designed to provide a mix of academic and job-related assistance in a setting that appeals to those experiencing difficulty in the traditional classroom setting.

The idea of linking academic skills training with other forms of job-related assistance is not new, even though it has only recently received the recognition and attention it deserves. One of the early demonstration programs that took this approach was the Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot Project (YIEPP) in the late 1970s. YIEPP, which operated throughout the school year guaranteed a job to disadvantaged youth who agreed to remain in school and meet established educational standards. YIEPP reduced dropout rates and increased the proportion of dropouts willing to return to school or complete their academic skills training.

The lessons learned from YIEPP are summarized in Linking School and Work for Disadvantaged Youth, an implementation report prepared by MDRC and in Lessons from Experience, a report of the Brandeis Center for Human Resources.

Congress also has been influenced by the growing body of findings on the value of academic remediation in youth programming. Under consideration are several new proposals for legislation that would mandate basic skills training in the summer youth employment program (SYEP).

Using a Competency-Based System

A competency-based youth training system, simply described, is one that uses standards of performance to measure whether, and to what extent, particular work-related skills have been reached by participants. These performance standards, or competencies are used not only to measure achievement, but as a framework for organizing and developing the components of a training program.

Competencies are useful because they:

- o give participants a concrete method for gauging their progress;

- o provide potential employers with a means of assuring themselves that potential employees have the necessary job qualifications; and
- o serve as a framework around which the components of an effective training program can be built.

The concept of youth competencies appears to be taking hold in the youth training and JTPA communities because:

- o it is keyed to concrete measures of progress and skill attainment, and
- o it offers, along with remedial education, considerable promise for producing dramatic improvement in the employability of at-risk youth.

Two models of how youth competency systems work and might be used in the JTPA system are the Remediation and Training Institute's Comprehensive Competencies Program (CCP),* and the experience of the City of Los Angeles** in developing and instituting a competency-based framework for the youth portion of its JTPA program. Both use youth competencies as the basis for training.

Competency-based programs are able to test or track skill attainment levels in a variety of academic and functional job skill areas. This evaluative framework can be used to:

- o design programs;
- o provide substantive content for individual participant training;
- o ascertain deficiencies, and mark the progress of program participants; and
- o validate trainees as job ready when they have reached selected skill attainments.

*For additional information on the CCP system contact Robert Taggart, Remediation and Training Institute, 1521 16th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036, 202/667-6093.

**For additional information on the LA competency system contact Susan Curnan, Brandeis Center for Human Resources, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts 02254, 800/343-4705.

Trainers and potential employers can play a major role in selecting specific competencies and testing devices, and in developing training activities best suited to the needs of available jobs.

The Remediation and Training Institute's CCP system, for example, offers a wide selection of competency standards and tests covering a complete range of academic and job skill needs. A variety of materials would be suggested that provide validated study and training materials for pre-selected skills, along with testing components to help measure skill attainment levels. These functions can be performed either in a computerized format or through the use of more traditional written materials. Participants can move from one skill level to another in pre-selected functional skill areas, using materials and tests that are validated and that correspond to individualized participant needs.

The City of Los Angeles, in contrast, developed its own competency system. This process, on the one hand, promoted closer ties and collaboration among the groups responsible for different aspects of youth training, including: government officials, program operators, school system administrators and teachers, private employers, and community organizations. Each group was encouraged to participate in selecting appropriate competency goals and to provide the substantive content. On the other hand, it was integrated into the JTPA process, and was able to draw upon JTPA resources, including state discretionary funds. As a result, training as a regular component of each of the JTPA projects operated by the SDA.

Whichever approach is taken--the more formalized, pre-selected process of the type used in the CCP system, the developmental method used in LA, or perhaps some combination of the two--the basic principle remains the same: the likelihood that a training program will accomplish its objectives effectively, and produce trainees who have mastered verifiable skill attainments, is substantially increased when a competency-based system is used.

An important dividend that comes with the development and use of a competency-based system is that it gives SDAs additional flexibility for dealing with JTPA performance standard requirements. These performance standards, which must be approved by local PICs, establish pre-determined outcomes or results that participants must meet. Some SDAs have found the outcome measures selected by the Department of Labor to be unduly restrictive, since they emphasize placement rates and other results that are not entirely appropriate for youth who need long range training geared toward academic skills attainment.

III. POTENTIAL ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

A variety of practical issues and problems may inhibit the development and operation of youth programs. Among the most significant are:

- o coordinating the efforts of government officials, private employers, training and employment administrators, and school systems;
- o meeting JTPA's youth and dropout targets; and
- o facing the problem of insufficient resources to adequately meet existing training needs.

Coordination

Producing better trained, job-ready youth is not simply a matter of offering more effective training programs. The educational community must play a major role, since basic academic skills are essential to job-readiness. The business sector must help to identify the types of skill training that are needed and must provide jobs. Government must help make resources available. Community groups must help identify and reach those needing assistance. Unless methods can be found to facilitate a coordinated effort among these groups, it will be difficult to produce and maintain effective training initiatives.

Several techniques are available to SDAs to promote coordinated youth training and employment. A number of SDAs have experimented with collaborative efforts, especially between schools and private business. Most are based on the school-to-work model which include job skills training and work experience components within the school curriculum. Successful school-to-work programs:

- o appoint full-time job counselors to help students plan training activities and help them find part-time placements during and after school hours;
- o grant academic credit for training and work experience activities;
- o involve employers in training curriculum development and provide instruction and equipment;
- o provide participants with on-the-job training or work experience before graduation with employers who are likely to offer full-time positions;
- o offer students "job shadowing" experiences so that students may have the opportunity to watch and take part in job activities first hand; and

- o educate teachers about current employer needs.

Among the most comprehensive and effective school-to-work models is the Boston Compact*. It is a collaborative effort organized by Boston's Private Industry Council. Each of the major sectors (government, business and the schools) make specific contractual commitments related to youth training. Collectively, the system produces a significantly higher proportion of job ready and employed youth. The schools work to improve students' academic attainments, and to decrease dropout rates. The private sector agrees to assist in school-based job training activities, to support the placement of full-time counselors in a number of high-risk schools, and to make job openings available to trainees. The government helps to fund these efforts. Collaborative approaches provide the framework for such well regarded youth training initiatives as the Partnership Project** (operating in such sites as Kansas City, Richmond, Birmingham, and New York City,) and the School-to-Work Action Program (SWAP)*** (operating in Albuquerque, Boston, and Philadelphia). At the heart of these efforts is a framework for improved and on-going collaboration among all segments of the community.

Service delivery areas can increase the number of private sector job openings available to youth after training through improved collaboration. Though SDAs have experienced difficulty obtaining adequate numbers of placements from employers to cover the needs of those completing training due to employer concerns that youth may not be properly trained, it is possible to allay these fears and to obtain placement commitments when employers develop and provide training in cooperation with other groups.

*For additional information on the Boston Compact contact James Darr, Director, Boston Private Industry Council, 110 Tremont Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02108, 617/423-3755.

**For additional information on the Partnership Project, contact Ruby Martin or Frances Rosi, 406 West Franklin Street, Richmond, Virginia 23220, 804/643-0301.

***For additional information on the School-to-Work Action Program, contact Robyn Govan-Kleckley, the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, 250 Park Avenue, New York, New York 10017, 212/986-7050.

Meeting JTPA's Youth Targeting Goals

During the first years of JTPA's operation, many SDAs experienced serious difficulties in meeting the JTPA statute's 40 percent youth targeting goals. Monitoring of sample SDAs nationwide by Grinker, Walker and Associates indicated on average, that only 23 percent of JTPA funds were spent on youth. While this problem has eased somewhat in recent months, this issue remains significant.

Many SDAs have found it difficult to resist the temptation of easing the targeting pressures and improving statistical results by "mainstreaming" youth in adult programs, that is, by counting participants in adult training programs who are 21 years old or younger to help satisfy the youth targeting goal. While this is legally permissible, it is not a sound approach for meeting youth training needs.

The Houston, Texas, SDA was the target of a major legal challenge based on their failure to effectively target JTPA funds to youth. That challenge, brought by the Gulf Coast Legal Foundation, resulted in agreement to increase youth expenditures and to provide English-as-a-second-language instruction as an integral component of training.

Apart from the legal issues that may be involved, what is more significant is that experience has shown that "mainstreaming" youth is simply not an effective way of dealing with their training needs. Unemployed youth, especially those who are at high-risk of becoming chronically jobless, require specialized types of assistance geared to their particular needs. Service delivery area administrators should be wary of mainstreaming and should make an effort, with their 40 percent funds, to identify and develop the types of training that are best suited to reaching and serving youth.

Lack of Adequate Resources

If there is one overriding concern, it is the lack of adequate resources to deal effectively with the existing levels of need. It has been estimated that three to five percent of persons eligible for JTPA assistance can be served under current funding levels.

Jim Darr of Boston's Private Industry Council described the problem this way:

Under JTPA we have a very modest federal tool that is having to deal with very major problems and needs. It is a ridiculously small amount of money to cope with the broad variety of deficiencies associated with youth unemployment, from lack of adequate basic academic skills training in the schools, to more complicated job

skill needs. It should be obvious from the start that the problems are much bigger than current JTPA resources can deal with.

Similar concerns were voiced by a Los Angeles JTPA youth training official who noted the "tremendous pressure for dropping quality performance and quality control from the JTPA delivery system...because of the minimal federal financial and program commitment."

One obvious solution to this problem would be a larger federal financial commitment to youth training needs and support for the policies and programs that can make the most substantial differences in the long-run. While substantial support for realistic approaches to the delivery of youth training and employment services is forthcoming from the Secretary of Labor and Assistant Secretary of Labor for Employment and Training, SDA and PIC officials must find other ways to try to overcome the shortfall in resources. The approaches that seem to work best, and are consistent with the "lessons from experience" outlined in the earlier parts of this paper are:

- o to stress academic remediation;
- o to opt for quality, comprehensive training;
- o to concentrate on at-risk youth;
- o to use a competency-based framework; and
- o to seek a coordinated, collaborative working arrangement.

Of the various approaches to addressing the needs of youth, local elected, service delivery area and private industry council officials should find that the collaborative approach, while difficult to implement, will prove the most rewarding. As Jim Darr said, in response to a question about the lack of resources:

Instead of trying to do it all through JTPA, we need to start a broader process that reaches the schools and other government programs, in addition to job training. That is what the collaborative effort that underlies the Boston Compact is all about.

The collaborative framework makes available and targets in a direct way the financial resources and energies of several programs and agencies. While that can not totally overcome the JTPA resource shortfall, it does represent a concrete step that local SDAs can take to substantially improve their youth training efforts.

IV. CONCLUSION: A SUMMARY OF DO'S AND DON'TS FOR YOUTH PROGRAMMING

Among researchers, government officials and practitioners a consensus is emerging on the nature of training and employment programs. These may be generalized to a number of basic rules which LEOs, SDA administrators and PIC chairs and executive directors may follow to insure implementation of successful youth programs.

DO's....

1. Do emphasize training specifically targeted to youth.

Even during periods of economic growth there are large groups of at-risk youth who become and remain chronically unemployed. Assisting these groups can produce long term economic and social benefits. But to be effective youth programs must be specifically targeted to meet the needs of youth.

2. Do target youth training assistance to those most in need.

High-risk groups such as school dropouts, economically disadvantaged minorities, and those likely to drop out of school, register the most gains from training, and produce the most substantial cost savings when they become more employable because of the training they receive.

3. Do make remedial academic training a major component of all youth training programs that are offered.

Competency in the basic skills--reading, writing and math--has been shown to be the most important factor in employability. Improving these competencies can have a significant impact on improving the employment and earning prospects of youth.

4. Do use a competency based-system as the framework for all youth training.

A competency-based system measures identifiable job related skill attainments, provides a method for increasing skill levels, and identifies whether, and to what degree, a trainee is job ready. It also gives service delivery areas greater flexibility in dealing with JTPA's performance standards requirements, since competencies approved by private industry councils can be substituted for US Department of Labor youth performance standards. Moreover, USDOL appears to be moving in the direction of mandating youth competencies.

5. Do seek methods for stimulating greater coordination and collaboration among all groups responsible for different aspects of youth training and employment.

The schools, government and Job Training Partnership officials, training agencies and service providers, private employers and community organizations all play important roles in helping youth gain job-related skills. Closer working relations among these groups provides an essential framework for improving the quantity and quality of training and job placement efforts.

6. Do make good use of the lessons that have been painstakingly learned from previous youth training program experiences.

Some of the more established and proven demonstrations and models, such as JOB START, STEP, CET, the Boston Compact, and the Los Angeles competency system effort can be used as models for the development and operation of more effective youth programs in your SDA.

DON'T...

1. Don't treat youth training needs as part of adult oriented programs.

Youth require specialized types of training assistance geared to their particular needs. "Mainstreaming" youth in adult programs may help to fulfill JTPA's youth targeting goals, but it will not produce significant improvements in their employability.

2. Don't settle for training approaches that appear desirable because they are less expensive and less time consuming in the short run.

The needs of at-risk, unemployed youth are complex and require an adequate commitment of time and resources if long-term improvements are to be made. As a general rule, short run savings are more than outweighed by long-term welfare and criminal justice costs.

3. Don't place too much reliance on one type of training approach.

The benefits of pre-employment counseling assistance may be impressive at first glance. But they quickly evaporate if they are not provided in combination with other types of training geared to areas of significant need, such as remedial education, work experience, or on-the-job-training and job skill instruction.

4. Don't permit valuable JTPA resources that are earmarked for youth training to go unspent.

Even imperfect youth training projects are preferable to a failure to meet JTPA's forty percent youth targeting requirement.

5. Don't hesitate to seek advice and assistance from experienced resource personnel to help you answer questions and plan effective programs.

The Brandeis Center for Human Resources (Andy Hahn, Erik Butler and Susan Curnan), the Remediation and Training Institute (Robert Taggart), and the youth training staffs at the National Alliance of Business (Steve Pines), the National Governors Association (Evelyn Ganzglass), the National Association of Private Industry Councils (Lori Strumpf) and the National Association of Counties have substantial expertise in these areas.

V. RESOURCE DIRECTORY

The resource materials that do the most effective job of explaining recent research findings on what works best for youth are:

What Works in Youth Employment Policy, by Andrew Hahn and Robert Lerman of the Brandeis University Center on Human Resources, published by the Committee on New American Realities, 1985.

A Practitioner's Guide, Strategies, Programs and Resources for Youth Employability Development, published by Public/Private Ventures, 399 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19106.

Applying the Lessons of Youth Programs, a monograph series by Eric Butler and Garth Margrim issued by the National Commission on Employment Policy, Olympus Publishing Co., 1670 East 13th Street, Salt Lake City, UT 84105.

Findings on Youth Employment: Lessons from MDRC Research, published by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, 3 Park Avenue, New York, New York 10016.

The resource people who do the most effective job of explaining these ideas and issues in training sessions are Andy Hahn and Eric Butler of the Brandeis Center on Human Resources (telephone 800/343-4705).

Additional documents that you may want to refer to on the specific issue of remedial education are:

"Back to Basics Under JTPA," a policy statement issued by the National Commission on Employment Policy in October, 1983.

"Educational Attainment, Academic Ability, and the Employability and Earnings of Young Persons," a research paper issued by Andrew Sum, Paul Harrington, and Paul Simpson of Northeastern University.

The resource materials that best explain the competency system approach are:

Volume I of the Comprehensive Competencies Program Reference Manual, published by Robert Taggart, president of the Remediation and Training Institute, 1521 16th Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20036.

"Issues in the Progressive Evaluation of Youth Competency Systems," by Rick Spill, Journal of Illinois

Employment and Training Association, Vol. 1, No. 1, winter, 1985; and

An Introduction to Competency-Based Employment and Training Programming for Youth Under the Job Training Partnership Act, prepared by the Brandeis University Center for Human Resources, Waltham, MA 02254.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Morton H. Sklar is an attorney and consultant. He specializes in welfare, job training and human rights issues. From 1979 through 1985 he was the director of Jobs Watch, a public interest group engaged in monitoring, clearinghouse and support activities on behalf of local communities and poverty groups. He is founder and chair of the American Bar Association's Subcommittee on Human Rights Education and the Washington Helsinki Watch Committee. Mr. Sklar is an adjunct professor at the Catholic University Law School. Currently, he is working with groups in California and New York on the implementation of statewide welfare-to-work programs and is conducting an evaluation of Job Training Partnership Act programs in Virginia.