Decision Information Resources, Inc.

Youth Opportunity Grant Initiative: Process Evaluation Final Report

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Submitted to:

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About This Report

The Youth Opportunity (YO) Grant Initiative consists of 36 large and complex projects that provide comprehensive services to economically disadvantaged youths residing in selected high-poverty communities. The project sites span a range of ethnic groups; urban, rural, and Native American communities; and all regions of the U.S., from Hawaii to Alaska.

The U.S. Department of Labor contracted with Decision Information Resources, Inc. (DIR) to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the YO grant initiative. DIR was assisted in this effort by its subcontractors, Social Policy Research Associates, Westat, Lee Bruno & Associates, and the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University. The evaluation included an *area survey* of local youths to measure labor-market outcomes in YO grant sites; an *ethnographic study* to assess community well-being before and after delivery of YO grant services; a *management information system (MIS) report*, which analyzed detailed reports from each project over the 5-year period; and a *process analysis* to document how programs were designed and implemented to meet the employment, training, and educational needs of area youths. Results have been presented in a series of reports:

- this *process evaluation*, which examines the program strategies that are the heart of the initiative; it describes administrative and service delivery processes of the grantee and associated service providers

- an *ethnographic report*, which examines the communities served by the 36 projects

- a *management information system (MIS) report*, which analyzes detailed reports from each project over the 5-year period

- an *impact and synthesis report*, which describes impacts of the projects on participants and integrates the findings from the study components to address key study questions about the YO initiative

This report is the third and final process report. It relies on direct information from the projects, and, although it summarizes data from previously submitted process reports to address changes over time, it is dedicated to a close examination of the final stages of program implementation.

Please note the following features of the report:

- The "YO model" is mentioned frequently. The model was developed by DIR and is based on the grant guidelines that described the services to be provided and the program goals. The model forms a conceptual template for making comparisons to evaluate the grantees' operations and to form conclusions about the Youth Opportunity Grant initiative. The process evaluation follows the requirements of an operational evaluation, in which the YO model is the basis for comparing actual operations with a common standard.[1] The YO model is first described in Chapter 1, "Introduction," and is referenced throughout the report.

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[1] Bruno, Lee, and Erlanger, Wendy, *Quick Guide for Conducting Program Evaluations,* U. S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, May 2002, page 8.

- Some subjects, most particularly the services provided to youths, are discussed repeatedly. To highlight aspects of services in different contexts, the report is organized around study objectives that address different areas of inquiry, thus the repetition.

- MIS data are integrated throughout the report as additional data sources and were used as reference points during the fieldwork. The process evaluation used MIS data to guide discussions about the service delivery processes as a method for triangulation of data and also to connect the process evaluation with a standardized source of program data.

- MIS counts of enrolled participants include some youths who were enrolled before programs were fully operational and were never actually served. This inclusion artificially increases the cumulative totals by 11 percent and has the effect of minimizing the overall accomplishments of the projects studied.

Another caveat for this report is common to all qualitative evaluations. Although we took care in the analysis to accurately quantify responses from knowledgeable sources, most of the data in this report are the opinions and memories of people—generally staff associated with the project. We cannot attest to the accuracy of this information, although we controlled for both respondent and interviewer biases by:

- Incorporating MIS data into interviews and the analysis
- Using structured field instruments to guide and organize data collection and field reports
- Training field staff
- Carefully reviewing field reports to identify inconsistencies and omissions

These sources of data are building blocks that lead to the conclusions. To assist readers in evaluating these conclusions, we quantified the findings, an unusual feature of a qualitative evaluation.

Finally, by focusing on the projects exclusively, the report represents a limited view of the factors that influence program development and accomplishments. Equally important are the community context and the characteristics of the youths served. Caution should be exercised in making judgments about the YO grants on the basis of this report alone.

This report contains the following topics:

The **Executive Summary** gives a program overview and study objectives, discusses methodology and strategies, and summarizes program outcomes and conclusions.

Chapter 1 gives an overview of the projects and their key elements; contains a table that lists sites, grant amounts, and enrollments; presents the purpose and objectives of the process evaluation; and explains the methodology of the evaluation.

Chapter 2 describes strategies for the sample of projects during the first eight months of the fifth year of the YO grants. It describes the services offered—youth development services and core activities, long-term education and training, job placements services, and services associated with the YO centers. This chapter also examines the characteristics of youths and combines MIS

data and anecdotal references from respondent interviews to describe youths served by the projects. Each of these topics is quantified to demonstrate the extent to which the sample of projects reported each finding.

The final section examines changes over time in the services. This information is drawn from MIS data, past process evaluations, and respondent interviews during the last site visit.

Chapter 3 examines in-school and out-of-school programs for youths. It describes the interventions and discusses the factors that field staff believed were most influential in the outcomes. Once again, these findings are quantified so that readers may follow the analysis. The chapter compares how programs for in-school youths (ISY) and out-of-school youths (OSY) differed and their relative effectiveness in achieving their objectives.

Chapter 4 discusses program outcomes and factors that are associated with high and low levels of educational attainments and job placements. It compares projects that had either high or low percentages of educational attainments or job placements so that we could identify patterns that suggest possible explanations for the differences among projects.

Chapter 5 looks at the projects' links to the community. Three main topics are covered— partnerships and leveraging resources, program sustainment, and community benefits derived by the YO program.

Chapter 6 summarizes the lessons learned in administering the projects and implementing each of the components of the YO model. The chapter highlights problems encountered, how they were addressed, and best practices as reported by project staff.

Chapter 7 draws on the findings discussed in each of the preceding chapters to draw conclusions related to the general purpose of the process evaluation. This chapter is organized around the following topics: a discussion of the YO projects' success in implementing the YO model, major accomplishments of the model, and strengths and weaknesses of the YO model.

Executive Summary

This report is the final process evaluation report of the Youth Opportunity (YO) Grant Initiative, which provided comprehensive services to at-risk youths in 36 urban, rural, and Native American reservation communities. The evaluation included an *area survey* of local youths to measure labor-market outcomes in YO grant sites; an *ethnographic study* to assess community well-being before and after delivery of YO grant services; a *management information system (MIS) report*, which analyzed detailed reports from each project over the 5-year period; and a *process analysis* to document how programs were designed and implemented to meet the employment, training, and educational needs of area youths. Results have been presented in a series of reports:

- this *process evaluation*, which examines the program strategies that are the heart of the initiative; it describes administrative and service delivery processes of the grantee and contractor

- an *ethnographic report*, which examines the communities served by the 36 projects

- a *management information system (MIS) report*, which analyzes detailed reports from each project over the 5-year period

- an *impact and synthesis report*, which describes impacts of the projects on participants and integrates the findings from the study components to address key study questions about the YO initiative

This report is the third and final process report. It relies on direct information from the projects, and, although it summarizes data from earlier reports, it is dedicated to a close examination of the final stages of program implementation.

Program Overview and Study Objectives

The U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration (ETA) funded 36 YO projects in 2000. These projects were given the mission of increasing the high school graduation and college enrollment rates of both in-school (IS) and out-of-school (OS) youths and increasing the employment rate of OS youths. In the Solicitation for Grant Awards, ETA described a model of program services with the following features:

- **Geographic Saturation.** Rather than spreading available resources across the entire country, the YO program was intended to concentrate a large amount of resources in selected communities. Unlike other DOL youth programs, the YO grants were open to all youths residing in the designated target area, avoiding the stigma associated with income-based programs. The YO program was intended to reach out to as many youths in the targeted high-poverty areas as possible. By making all resident youths eligible and saturating a high-poverty area with staff intensive and comprehensive services, the program was expected to positively affect peer pressure, impact the larger community, and create a positive environment for promoting youth development.

- **Youth Opportunity Community Centers.** Under the YO model, each grantee was required to establish in the target area one or more Youth Opportunity Community Centers that provided a safe and accessible place for youths to meet. These centers were to be staffed with youth development specialists and offer a core set of services.

- **Youth Development Framework.** YO programs were expected to provide supportive services (including mentoring, support groups, and follow-up services) and services that develop the potential of youths as citizens and leaders (such as community service, sports and recreation, and life skills training as a means for achieving employment and educational outcomes. Emphasis was placed on staff-intensive individualized services in which youth-development specialists or case managers would play a key role.

- **Long-Term Engagement.** With the increased recognition that youths need to be "engaged" over a long period of time to receive meaningful benefits, no participant in the YO program was considered to be an "exiter." Youths were encouraged to maintain contact and seek assistance, even when they had completed their service plan.

- **Partnerships and Leveraging.** The YO model strongly emphasized that the grantee—the Workforce Investment Board (WIB) in most cases—establish partnerships with public, private, and nonprofit organizations and leverage resources that would enable the services to continue, even after YO funds cease. These partnerships should enable programs to serve youths in a variety of ways and provide a broad range of services.

The process evaluation had the following objectives:

- Describe and document the operations of projects as they near grant conclusion.
- Examine human capital outcomes in the form of education and job placements.
- Examine social outcomes in the form of changes in community resources that serve youths.
- Describe problems, solutions, and best practices during the evolution of the projects' program strategies.

Process Evaluation Methodology

The primary sources of data for this report come from group interviews of project administrators, line staff, and youths associated with the sample of 25 projects. Therefore, most of the information in this report is a synthesis of opinions and memories of these knowledgeable sources that were augmented by MIS data and past process-evaluation reports. These projects comprise 21 urban and 4 rural sites.[2] Data collection for the Year 5 report entailed onsite visits by experienced evaluators, who relied primarily on group interviews were guided by detailed topic guides and an instruction manual.

Combining the responses of administrative and line staff with MIS data provided a holistic view of key implementation issues while neutralizing respondent biases. The use of confidential group interviews also expanded the variety and number of knowledgeable sources of information.

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[2] An addendum to this report will addresses the implementation experience of five of the six Native American projects.

Subsequent field reports were reviewed for accuracy and completeness, which provided additional quality controls to the data.

Data analysis relied on comparisons across sites to identify trends and relied on individual site comparisons to the YO program model to identify strengths and weaknesses of the model. A key feature of the report is that responses to topics discussed during the interviews are quantified so that readers may follow the analysis leading to the evaluation conclusions.

Program Strategies

A key element of the YO model was a youth-development framework, which provided a comprehensive range of services leading to placement in long-term unsubsidized jobs, education, or training. Each YO project was free to find the particular mix of services and service strategies that would best accomplish long-term placement objectives, thus allowing variations in emphasis, methods, and approaches across the projects. ETA identified a list of 15 youth-development services, which were believed to be supportive of long-term placements and other desirable youth-development goals, such as leadership and citizenship. These services were examined to document how each was defined and to what extent MIS data captured accurate counts. Generally, the MIS data were fairly accurate by Year 5 and reflective of the numbers of youths served, but there was wide variance in how the services were defined.

The following youth development services were found to be core activities because they represented the greatest investment of participant time and were central to program strategies:

- **Job readiness training (JRT).** JRT was the most common core activity and usually a requirement before youths could apply for either subsidized or unsubsidized employment with the project.

- **Internship or subsidized employment.** The need for financial support and opportunities to learn essential work habits in a forgiving environment made internships or subsidized employment not only one of the most popular youth-development services but also a core activity.

- **Short-term occupational-skills training.** Short-term training was usually defined as training that took less than one year to complete. In many cases, the training was only a few weeks in duration—for example, long enough to acquire a basic skill needed for an internship or unsubsidized job.

- **Short-term unsubsidized jobs.** Short-term unsubsidized jobs were used, like unsubsidized jobs or internships, to teach good work habits, earn needed income, and as a stepping stone to a career path.

- **GED preparation.** Because OSY frequently had no high-school diploma, GED classes were a common core activity that typically called for structured classes headed by a teacher and augmented by tutors.

YO centers and job placement assistance were other services that played critical roles in program strategies.

Comparisons of ISY and OSY Program Strategies

The YO program served two distinct segments of youths—those who were in school (ISY) and those who were no longer attending school (OSY). Although the services available to both segments were the same, service strategies tended to vary. IS and OS programs served about equal numbers of youths who shared common demographics except for age. ISY were much younger than OSY and, for these reasons, had less-critical financial needs, were less likely to be single parents, and were less likely to be incarcerated than OSY. In other respects, the groups were similar in that they universally manifested poor academic skills and low motivation for attending school.

Projects had greater latitude in the types of services offered, greater variations in methods for delivering services, and greater access to OSY than to ISY; therefore, youth-development services represented a larger investment of OSY time than ISY time. Generally, services that were core activities were similar with one exception. College preparation was a core activity for ISY but was not named a core activity for OSY, even though OS programs were more likely than IS programs to have an intervention focused on college entry.

The most common IS intervention relied on a combination of the following services to help youths graduate from high school and enter the labor market:

- Reading or math remediation
- Job readiness training
- Case-management services

The most common OS intervention included the following core services to address basic education and job readiness deficits, mostly among youths without high-school diplomas:

- Job-readiness training
- Reading or math remediation
- GED preparation or alternative high-school classes
- Internships or short-term jobs

Long-term job placements were the primary goal of nearly all OS programs, while high-school graduation was the primary goal of IS programs. Case management, although not a youth-development service, figured largely in the interventions. In some projects, staff felt it was the most critical service for all youths.

This variance in goals and needs of youths was reflected in responses regarding barriers and enhancements to retention and goal attainment. Judging from responses from the group interviews, both groups suffered poor academic skills and a general lack of motivation. Substance abuse was cited more often as a barrier for OSY than it was for ISY. OSY were more likely to drop out because of incarceration. However, the greatest deterrent to completing program services for OSY that was not shared by ISY was the need for money. A relationship with a caring adult was the overwhelming enhancement for ISY. For OSY, the types of program

services and the quality of the services were considered more important than a caring relationship.

Program Outcomes

For the 25 projects studied, 67,710 youths were enrolled through June 2005.[3] Of these:

- 11,426 youths (6 percent of OSY and 29 percent of ISY) graduated from high school.

- 2,485 youths (6 percent of OSY and 1 percent of ISY) received a GED.

- 27,461 youths (44 percent of OSY and 36 percent of ISY) received a long-term placement of some kind.

- 14,860 youths (61 percent of OSY placed and 46 percent of ISY placed) were placed in unsubsidized employment.

- Fifty-seven percent of the total placed (23 percent of total enrolled)—15,743—were placed in long-term training or education, excluding those who returned to high school.[4]

Of the 11,895 ISY who have obtained a long-term placement of some kind, 54 percent—nearly 6,500—entered either a community college or a 4-year college. Nearly 5,500 (46 percent) of ISY placed were placed in unsubsidized employment.

By comparison, OSY are much more likely to take up full-time jobs than ISY and are less likely to go to college. Only 4,119 (26 percent) of OSY placed ever enter any kind of college, while 61 percent of OSY entering a long-term placement will be employed.

Due to the small number of observations, it is difficult to makes generalizations about the factors that influence education, training placements, and job placement rates; however, comparisons of high- and low-performing projects reveal some differences that suggest elements of good program design.

- **Unemployment rates and transportation barriers were major factors in whether projects would place youths in jobs, and those factors caused more successful projects to focus on educational attainments to help youths.** By designing programs that fit the characteristics of youths as well as the labor market, projects were able to make significant gains in education or employment benefits for youths, which did not occur when projects ignored these factors.

- **Although the types of youth-development services that form a program's core activities are factors in job placement rates, they are less critical to long-term education and training placements.** A more critical consideration in both types of placements is the quality

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[3] These statistics do not reflect the vast number of IS youths who were still attending high school and were not eligible to graduate or assume a long-term placement.

[4] These data represent transactions, not individual people. Some youths may have achieved a GED or high-school diploma *and* long-term training, education placement, or job placement. In these cases, the youths would be counted in each category.

of education and training methods and the level of resources expended, which was not systematically evaluated as an aspect of project implementation.

- **Intensive case management services are an essential element to good program design.** Such services call for case managers with special training and skills.

- **The financial needs of OSY frequently preclude long-term education and training placements and are a major factor in the length of stay for OSY.** ISY are more likely candidates for long-term education and training placements.

In addition to good program design, competent program management was a pervasive influence on project outcomes. Projects that were unable to accomplish average levels of program outcomes in one area of placements frequently failed in the others, too, because poor management influences all aspects of project implementation.

YO Links to the Community

ETA strongly encouraged grantees to link with community partners, especially youth-serving organizations, to leverage resources during the course of the grant and to sustain the demonstration at the end of the grant. To address the issue of partnerships and community links, the process evaluation identified current program partners and the ways partners changed over time; captured information about program sustainment plans to determine what role partnerships played in sustainment; and explored the effects YO had on each community's services to youths.

- Partners that made long-term commitments to the project rather than simply providing contractual services tended to realize some intrinsic value from their partnership with YO. Community-based organizations and state and local governmental agencies were the most common types of partners who met this criterion.

- At the time of the Year 5 site visits, only 9 of the 25 projects studied had reasonable expectations of being able to sustain some program services after the grant ended. Projects that had won the hearts and minds of the community were more likely to sustain at least some elements of the YO model than those that were detached from the community.

- The greatest changes in the communities' youth-serving agencies took the form of improved coordination among agencies and a better infrastructure for serving youths, particularly as that infrastructure related to the professional skills of staff and improved program designs that addressed multiple aspects of youth development simultaneously.

Lessons Learned

An overwhelming number of lessons learned from implementing the YO initiative related to problems encountered and suggestions for addressing them. Few "best practices" were cited.

Management of the program was the difficulty cited most often. The following challenges were mentioned:

- Managing the numerous contractors that were attracted to the large grant subsidies
- Finding qualified line staff
- Launching the project in time to meet 6-month enrollment objectives
- Dealing with leadership issues
- Benefiting from technical assistance

The second greatest area of difficulty was operating YO centers. Acquiring appropriate physical facilities, linking multiple centers, balancing multiple purpose centers, and gaining support from the community for centers demanded resourcefulness and resulted in no two YO centers being exactly the same.

Designing services around a youth-development framework was also considered very difficult for project administrators. Administrators shared a common position that there were few good examples for connecting the wide array of youth-development services to create a workable framework, and the new concept was neither well understood nor easily explained to staff and partners.

Achieving educational goals, though well understood, called for new approaches in remediation, especially for OSY. The following best practices were cited:

- Training case managers as teacher assistants and keeping them in the classroom to create better individualized services to address low academic or behavior challenges

- Using cohort classes so that youths of similar academic levels could encourage each other

- Hiring instructors who had rapport with youths and giving them flexibility to experiment with various teaching approaches

- Organizing classrooms around skill levels rather than mixing all skill levels in one class

The lack of interim goals between the point of initial learning to the point of passing the GED was a major problem for nearly all projects. Intensive case management was commonly viewed as critical to educational attainments for low-performing youths.

By contrast, few projects reported difficulties in achieving enrollment goals over the course of the grant period. Projects were experienced in conducting outreach and recruitment and found that community awareness of the project and good public relations were keys to success.

Projects learned that facilitating job placements and quality jobs called for the following actions:

- Establishing good employer relations
- Providing good JRT
- Screening youths to reduce the risk of failure on a job
- Transporting youths to jobs outside their communities

Maximizing long-term engagement of youths was the model element that projects felt least successful in accomplishing. YO youths are very mobile, and even those participants who benefit tend to leave when they do not want or need further services.

Although project administrators were well practiced in establishing links with community organizations, they felt strongly that the size of the grant mitigated against finding partners who would *contribut*e resources to the project. The general consensus is that partners must receive some intrinsic benefit, not just a monetary benefit, for the partnership to hold up.

Implementation of the YO Model

The process evaluation of the YO grant initiative documented that, although most projects were able to implement the model after a time, the process was challenging and inefficient. Some difficulties in implementation were due to the sheer size and scope of the grant, which exacerbated weaknesses in grantee management and infrastructure. In retrospect, either a start-up period of one year, which would allow more time for staff training and infrastructure development, or better screening of potential grantees would have led to better quality of services to youths and greater cost efficiencies.

Neither the characteristics of youths nor community context seemed to be critical variables in how well the model was implemented. The only factors that appear to be consistently associated with successful implementation of the model were management expertise and grantee support. By far the most critical element to the successful implementation of the YO model was project leadership.

In addition to exploring the extent to which the grantees successfully implemented the YO model, the process evaluation also examined the strengths and weaknesses of the model as a means of achieving human capital outcomes and social outcomes. The strengths of the model are that it addresses youths holistically and requires community partners who can sustain the programs as integrated community services to youth. The chief weakness of the model is its failure to address two major barriers to successful outcomes for OSY—the lack of financial resources to sustain youths during a long-term engagement and the lack of educational programs that address the learning deficits typical of high-school dropouts.

Conclusions

Overall, YO provided substantive services to numerous at-risk youths and also expanded organizational capacity and sensitivity to youths' needs. It demonstrated new and better models of service delivery, and it trained managers and line staff to function at a greatly improved level of skill and professionalism. In some communities, these benefits will continue as sustainable elements of the YO initiative.

Chapter 1. Introduction

This report is an integrative analysis of process data on a sample of 25 of the 36 Youth Opportunity (YO) Grant projects. It constitutes the final process evaluation report. Earlier process evaluation reports include a baseline report,[5] which covered the first year start-up period activities; a follow-up report in Year 2,[6] which provided an update of the projects' progress; and an interim report,[7] which covered grant implementation from startup through Year 3 of grant operations. This final report is based on data that represents months 3 through 8 of the fifth year of the operations of grant projects. It also describes lessons learned from experiences over all five years of program operations.

Overview of Projects

The YO grant program is designed to attack the persistent problem of unemployment among disadvantaged youths, which is particularly severe among school dropouts. In 2000, the overall U.S. unemployment rate was 4.02 percent, while the unemployment rate for teens (ages 16–19) was closer to 23 percent. For white teens, the rate ranged from 10.4 percent to 12.4 percent over the year, while the range for Black teens was 20.0 to 26.2 percent. School dropouts under age 25 also had rates well above the national average.[8] Labor-market conditions for the nation's teens and young adults (ages 20–24) from 2000 through 2004 reveal steep declines in the employment rates of nearly all youth groups.[9] Conventional employment and training programs generally have had limited success in helping out-of-school, disadvantaged youths find employment that leads to a career path and higher earnings.

Recognizing the many problems that youths face in high-poverty neighborhoods and the need for a comprehensive, targeted approach to these problems, the ETA launched a predecessor to the YO Grants—the Youth Opportunity Area (YOA) demonstration program. Demonstration (Kulick) grants were awarded to six pilot areas during 1996 and 1997, and five additional grants were awarded in 1999. YOA pilot projects were designed to provide coordinated employment, education, training, and recreational services to 16- to 24-year-old youths living in locally designated high-poverty communities and to provide these services within the context of an overall economic development initiative.

Preliminary evaluations of the outcomes of several of these pilot projects suggested that a comprehensive, multifaceted approach to providing support for youths to attain higher levels of education and better jobs could be promising. This conceptual approach, which was implemented

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[5] "Evaluation of the Youth Opportunity Initiative, Baseline Report," submitted by Decision Information Resources, Inc. to the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, 2001.

[6] "Evaluation of the Youth Opportunity Initiative, Year 2 Report," submitted by Decision Information Resources, Inc. to the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, 2002.

[7] "Evaluation of the Youth Opportunity Initiative, Year 3 Interim Report," submitted by Decision Information Resources, Inc. to the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, 2003.

[8] Search U.S. Labor Force Data from the BLS, www.economagic.com/blslf.htm

[9] "Changes in the Employment Status, Hours of Work, and Weekly Earnings of Teens (16–19) and Young Adults (20–24) in the U.S. and in Selected High Poverty Neighborhoods from Calendar Years 2000 to 2004: Their Potential Implications for the Impact Evaluation of the YOG Demonstration Programs," submitted by Center for Labor Market Studies to Decision Information Resources, Inc., May 2005.

in the YO grant programs, is referred to in this report as the "YO model."[10] The following key elements, described in the initial solicitation for grant applications and the WIA legislation, set the YO model apart from traditional approaches and reflect a new way of serving youth:

- **Geographic Saturation.** Rather than spreading available resources across the entire country, the YO program was intended to concentrate a large amount of resources in selected communities. Unlike other DOL youth programs, the YO grants were open to all youths residing in the designated target area, avoiding the stigma associated with income-based programs. The YO program was intended to reach out to as many youths in the targeted high-poverty areas as possible. Both in-school youths (ISY) and out-of-school youths (OSY) are included. Although providing service to all youths was not feasible given the resources available, the grants were expected to serve a sufficient proportion of youths to positively affect peer pressure, impact the larger community, and create a positive environment for promoting youth development.

- **Youth Opportunity Community Centers.** Under the YO model, each grantee must establish one or more Youth Opportunity Community Centers in the target area that provide a safe and accessible place for youths to meet. These centers would be staffed with youth development specialists and offer a core set of services.

- **Youth Development Framework.** In an effort to prepare youths for successful employment and improve their educational outcomes, YO programs are expected to provide supportive services (including mentoring, support groups, and follow-up services) and services that develop the potential of youths as citizens and leaders (such as community service, sports and recreation, and life skills training). These services support and link youths as they pursue their educational or employment goals through the program. Further, the programs should link employment experiences and academic instruction, when possible, to demonstrate the connection between them. Each program is also expected to maintain a core staff of youth development specialists, who serve as case managers and play a critical role in recruiting youths and assuring that intensive placement, follow-up, and other services are provided.

- **Long-Term Engagement.** There is increasing recognition that youths need to be "engaged" over a long period of time to receive meaningful benefits. Therefore, no participant in the YO program is considered to be an "exiter." This position contrasts with most other youth programming, such as the WIA formula-funded youth program, which assumes that a youth enters the program, participates in one or more activities for a while, and then "exits" or (as it was called in the Job Training Partnership Act) "terminates." The concept of an exiter or terminee simply doesn't exist in a YO project. Youths who complete their service plans may remain actively engaged and receive services as needed to sustain their continued development.

- **Partnerships and Leveraging.** The YO model strongly emphasizes that the grantee (the Workforce Investment Board or WIB in most cases) establish partnerships with public, private, and nonprofit organizations and leverage resources that will enable the services to

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[10] The model was developed by DIR and is based on the grant guidelines that described the services to be provided and the program goals. The model forms a conceptual template for making comparisons to evaluate the grantees' operations and to form conclusions about the Youth Opportunity Grant initiative.

continue even after YO funds cease. These partnerships should enable programs to serve youths in a variety of ways and provide a broad range of services. This concept of partnerships contrasts somewhat with previous youth programs, which have often relied upon individual agencies contracting directly with a WIB or service delivery area (SDA) to provide a specific service or set of services.

The 36 YO programs funded in fall 2000 were built on the experience of the 11 demonstration grants that, on a smaller scale, gave priority to high-school dropouts. Like their predecessors, the new projects were designed to provide a comprehensive range of services and long-term follow-up, this time for youth ages 14 to 21. The new sites focused their resources on specific high-poverty communities and enlisted the entire community—the residents, schools, businesses, government agencies, and community organizations—in that process.[11] Baseline survey results from the 29 non-Native American target areas show an unemployment rate of 41 percent for OSY and 54 percent for ISY. Further, 54 percent of OSY had neither a high-school diploma nor a GED.[12] Table 1-1 lists the 36 YO grantees with corresponding grant amounts and cumulative enrollment levels through June 30, 2005.

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[11] Native American sites have unique configurations. Two of the programs (Cook Inlet Tribal Council and California Indian Manpower Consortium) are statewide. Two (Oglala Sioux Tribe and Navajo Nation) operate in multiple communities in large reservation-based areas. Three sites (CIMC, Navajo Nation, and Mountain Ute Tribe) serve communities located in multiple states.

[12] Jackson, Russell et al., *Youth Opportunity Grant Initiative: Impact and Synthesis Report*. U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, 2007.

Table 1-1. YO Grantees—Total Grant Amounts and Cumulative Enrollments through June 30, 2005

Site	State	Grant Size	OSY	ISY	Total
Urban Sites					
*Birmingham/Jefferson County Job Training (City of Birmingham)	AL	$19.8M	1,054	582	1,636
Pima County, Tucson (Tucson)	AZ	$27.8M	1,509	1,404	2,913
*City of Los Angeles (Watts & Eastside of Empowerment Zone)	CA	$43.8M	2,021	2,391	4,412
*San Diego Workforce Partnership	CA	$27.8M	1,813	1,244	3,057
*PIC of San Francisco	CA	$27.8M	987	1,414	2,401
*City and County of Denver (Denver's Enterprise Community)	CO	$19.8M	1,296	1,239	2,535
Capitol Region Workforce Development Board (City of Hartford)	CT	$27.8M	1,178	1,600	2,778
*D.C. Department of Employment Services (District of Columbia)	DC	$31.8M	1,408	961	2,369
*Hillsborough County, Tampa (Tampa)	FL	$23.8M	1,097	1,213	2,310
*Louisville and Jefferson Counties WIB (City of Louisville)	KY	$27.8M	1,953	2,466	4,419
*Brockton Area PIC (City of Brockton)	MA	$17.8M	880	964	1,844
Economic Development Industrial Corp., Boston (Boston's Enterprise Zone)	MA	$23.8M	1,499	2,008	3,507
*City of Detroit	MI	$43.8M	2,488	1,679	4,167
*Office of Employment Development, Baltimore (Baltimore City)	MD	$43.8M	3,148	1,209	4,357
*Full Employment Council, Inc., Kansas City (Missouri SDA3, Kansas City)	MO	$15.9M	893	828	1,721
*Buffalo & Erie County PIC (Buffalo)	NY	$31.6M	1,471	1,521	2,992
*Work Systems, Inc. (City of Portland)	OR	$19.8M	1,015	932	1,947
*City of Cleveland	OH	$27.8M	1,791	876	2,667
*WIB of Philadelphia (City of Philadelphia)	PA	$19.8M	909	1,720	2,629
*City of Memphis (Memphis & Shelby Counties)	TN	$25.8M	1,411	2,124	3,535
*Houston-Galveston Area Council (Houston's Enhanced Enterprise Zone, Harris County)	TX	$43.8M	1,847	2,338	4,185
*Alamo Workforce Development Board (San Antonio & Bexar TX)	TX	$43.8M	2,311	1,997	4,308
*Seattle - King County PIC	WA	$17.8M	908	536	1,444
*PIC of Milwaukee County (City of Milwaukee)	WI	$23.8M	1,168	769	1,937
Rural Sites					
*Southeastern Arkansas Economic Development (Chicot and Desha Counties)	AR	$19.8M	869	1,322	2,191
*Imperial County Office of Employment & Training (Brawley, Calipatria, Niland, and Imperial Counties)	CA	$19.8M	618	527	1,145
*Georgia Department of Labor (Albany, GA)	GA	$14.6M	917	551	1,468
State of Hawaii (Maui County & Island of Molokai)	HI	$8.7M	297	696	993
PIC / SDA-83 Incorporated, Monroe (Enterprise Community covering East Carol and Madison Counties)	LA	$19.8M	1,001	876	1,877
*Lumberton River Council (Robeson County)	NC	$19.8M	778	1,256	2,034
Native American Sites					
Cook Inlet Tribal Council (State of Alaska)	AK	$31.8M	1,191	2,230	3,421
Navajo Nation, Window Rock (Navajo Nation)	AZ, NM, UT	$41.0M	940	3,080	4,020
California Indiana Manpower Consortium (Statewide CA, Douglas / Carson, NV)	CA, NV	$15.9M	391	1,005	1,396
Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, Towaoc, CO (Towaoc, Montezuma, CO; Montezuma Creek, San Juan, UT)	CO, UT	$8.0M	101	245	346
Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa & Chippewa (Leelanau County)	MI	$3.1M	29	114	143
Oglala Sioux Tribe, Pine Ridge (Pine Ridge Indian Reservation)	SD	$15.9M	1,184	1,975	3,159

* Programs included in the integrative analysis

Purpose and Objectives of the Process Evaluation

The general purpose of this process evaluation is to determine how well the YO model was implemented, what was accomplished in terms of human and social capital gains, and the strengths and weaknesses of the model itself. The process evaluation does not examine compliance issues, fiscal management, or the projects' influence on the community. Administration of the projects is examined only in the context of its effect on program services. In addition, when the efficacy of the model is judged, care is taken to make distinctions between flaws in the model and flaws in the implementation of the model. It is important to know what was accomplished by the projects beyond the intended results of program outcomes captured by the management information system (MIS). Within the broad purpose, the process evaluation has the following objectives:

- Describe and document the steady-state operations of projects as they near grant conclusion. The previous process evaluations examined all projects during their startup phase, with a follow-up in Year 2 and again during the third year when they were fully operational. The current evaluation examines a sample of 25 projects in the fifth year, when they have reached their highest evolutionary point in terms of lessons learned and have the greatest number of cumulative enrollments and program outcomes. At this time, grantees were not yet phasing down but had made final corrections in their programs based on their nearly five years of experience. We documented project operations by integrating respondent data with MIS data.

- Examine human capital outcomes. We examine education attainments and long-term job placements in terms of the program processes that seem to be most influential in either enhancing or depressing these two measures of human capital outcomes.

- Examine social outcomes. We review social outcomes in the form of changes in youth-serving resources.

- Describe problems, solutions, and best practices demonstrated in the grantees' implementation of the YO model. We study the elements of the YO model to determine what methods of service delivery or implementation strategies are linked to successful implementation of the model.

Process Evaluation Methodology

Data for this report comes from the following primary sources:

- **MIS data.** "MIS data" in this report refers to data collected by YO grantees for the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) at the U.S. Department of Labor. These data were compared to projects' internal data systems to document services provided to youths and to assess the accuracy of ETA MIS data as descriptors of project processes and outcomes. Internal data systems varied in their sophistication and reliance on computers but were more likely to be relied on by project management to assess project progress than were MIS data because internal data systems are customized to each project's program operations and procedures. The internal data systems constituted projects' "internal thermostats," by which managers made adjustments to programs and assessed their progress. Generally, the MIS data were aligned to other data sources, and respondents thought that their MIS data were reliable indicators of activity levels, program outcomes, and participants served.

- **Past process evaluation reports.** These reports provide the important historical perspective and are particularly useful in examining changes over time because they coincide with key evolutionary periods of program development. The previously submitted process reports covered all 36 projects and also relied on interviews with staff and participants associated with the projects

- **Year 5 field reports.** Year 5 field reports represent experienced field staffs' analysis of key program findings from onsite visits conducted during the fifth year of grant operations. Data for these reports are derived primarily from group interviews of three groups of respondents: project administrators, project line staff, and youths served by the project.

The remainder of this section focuses on the sample of sites studied and methods used to collect and analyze data from the onsite program reviews, which is the major source of data for this report.

Sample of Sites

Not all of the 36 sites are included in this evaluation. A reduction in the sample occurred because some site visit reports were not completed when an unexpected lack of resources ended all fieldwork. Therefore, the sample consists of 25 urban and rural projects for which complete field reports were available. The sample includes 4 of the 6 sites designated as rural sites and 21 of the 24 sites designated as urban sites. No Native American sites are included in this sample.[13] Asterisks in Table 1–1 denote sampled sites.

Data Collection

Data collection took the form of onsite program reviews conducted by one site visitor over the course of 3 to 4 days. The site visits comprised multiple group interviews of three groups of respondents using topic guides designed for specific purposes and particular groups.

Managers and Administrators. The first group of respondents were managers and administrators headed by the project director. The following topics were used to guide discussion and describe the current operations of the programs:

- Description of services. Each service is described, and levels of service for each are compared to MIS reports. YO center services are described. Core activities that represent significant investments of participant time are identified.

- Description of key interventions. Interventions are defined by linking combinations of core activities and ancillary services to identify common service strategies. An example of an intervention is Job Readiness Training (JRT), remediation and GED, and internships for out-of-school youths. Key interventions are those interventions that serve more than 30 percent of the youths.

- Administration of the project. This topic area includes the identity of service providers, how the project is organized and managed, and the types and effects of technical assistance.

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[13] The six Native American sites are excluded from this integrative analysis because they differ significantly from the other projects in terms of context and issues. Combining data of all 36 sites would lead to an integrative analysis that was representative of neither the Native American projects nor the rural and urban projects.

- Challenges and accomplishments

- Partnerships

- Sustainment

- YO influence on changes in the youth-serving network

Line Staff. Line staff associated with key interventions were interviewed in groups that corresponded to a key intervention. Typically, line staff included case managers, job developers, teachers, and tutors who were actively engaged with youths on a one-to-one basis. For each intervention, the following topics were covered:

- Description of the intervention, attrition rates, and outcomes as either educational attainments or job placements

- Characteristics of youths served by the intervention

- Factors that influence attrition rates

- Factors that explain either high or low educational attainments of nondropouts

- Factors that explain either high or low job placement rates of nondropouts

Youths. A group of youths was interviewed to review topics similar to those for the line staff to learn their perspective on factors that cause youths to stay in the program or drop out and, for those who are retained, factors that explain success in achieving educational attainments or job placements.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted at three points. The first analysis was conducted onsite by the field staff. At intervals, the interview guide called for an analysis of responses to form conclusions about the topic. Field staff shared these conclusions with the group of respondents. These scheduled points for reflection and restatement of conclusions from the respondent data is a check for accuracy, clarity, and completeness of the data. If the respondents did not accept the conclusions, discussions ensued to address and reconcile the differences while onsite. This preliminary analysis continued throughout the onsite visit.

The second analysis occurred in the preparation of the field report. The field report is a series of questions directly related to the objectives of the evaluation. Each question references a section in the interview guide where the pertinent information was collected. At various points in the field report, field staff can add insights or other information not called for directly in the report. Field staff were expected to complete each field report shortly after the site visit and before making another site visit.

Field reports were reviewed by one of two field supervisors for completeness, clarity, and consistency. Discrepancies in information were reconciled with follow-up telephone calls by the

site visitor. When reports were considered complete and clear, they were approved for the third stage of analysis.

The third stage consisted of an integrative analysis of all field reports, relevant MIS data, and Year 1, 2, and 3 process evaluations. Each data element in a field report is numbered, and each number is associated with a particular research objective. The analyst for each study topic examined the requisite data elements for each section of the report. This analysis provides study findings, which represent noninterpretive descriptive data. These findings then are the basis for more complex analysis to formulate conclusions that address study objectives elsewhere in the final report. By reviewing findings that are the basis for later conclusions, readers can judge the merits of the interpretation of data.

Limitations of the Data

All qualitative research has inherent limitations. Because the primary data sources for the analysis are usually project staff who have a vested interest, respondent bias is a factor in the objectivity of the data. The evaluation methodology addresses this factor by linking discussions about services to MIS data as often as possible. This technique not only anchors the respondents' remarks to another data source, but it also provides a means for validating the accuracy of MIS reports. In addition, group interviews tend to bring out individual biases that are not shared by the group. Covering some topics repeatedly across three different groups of respondents flushes out bias within groups.

Inter-rater bias is inherent to qualitative research also. Would a different site visitor interpret respondents' answers the same way? Correcting for variance in expertise, viewpoints, or biases of multiple site visitors is addressed in several ways. First, the interviews are interspersed with opportunities for analysis and conclusions that are shared with the respondents. Also, one person checks all field reports to make sure that data are treated with consistency. Instances of inter-rater bias are corrected before reports are released for the integrative analysis.

All of these precautions are moot if the integrative analysis does not build on findings from the field reports and other data sources with a degree of objectivity. Thus, this final process report starts with the findings tabulated directly from the reports. Sources of data are referenced for each subsequent interpretation that is needed to address the study objectives.

Chapter 2. Program Strategies

A key element of the YO model was a youth development framework, which provided a comprehensive range of youth development services leading to placement in either long-term unsubsidized jobs, education, or training. YO centers and practices that would engage youths and thus extend their connection with these comprehensive services were expected to play a pivotal role in the program strategies. Each YO project was free to find the particular mix of services and service strategies that would best accomplish long-term placement objectives, thus allowing variations in emphasis, methods, and approaches across the projects.

This chapter first examines how the services that compose the youth development framework are represented in the sample of 25 projects. Next, it discusses the characteristics of youth as factors that influenced program strategies. Finally, the chapter looks at changes in services over the 5-year study period and the events that changed service strategies.

This chapter discusses the following key questions addressed by the process evaluation:

- What form did services take at the conclusion of the grant?
- How were characteristics of the youths a factor in program strategies?
- How did services change over time and why?

Services Provided

ETA identified a list of 15 youth-development services, some of which are educational and others that are believed to be supportive of long-term placements and other desirable youth-development goals, such as leadership and citizenship. All projects were expected to employ these services in some fashion and to report on levels of participation in a standardized format sanctioned by ETA.

This section of the chapter describes

- how the 15 youth development services were represented in the sample of 25 projects

- how the job placement services were provided. Placement in unsubsidized jobs was the most common long-term placement goal pursued by the projects.

- the types of long-term education and training placements, including the methods used to keep youths engaged over time

- the roles played by the YO centers in the program strategies

Youth Development Services and Core Activities

The Year 5 site visits included group interviews with project administrators to discuss how the specified youth development services were provided and to see how accurately and reliably the MIS data characterized the level and type of services. Respondents were queried carefully to gather accurate descriptions of each service.

Generally, the MIS data were fairly reflective of the numbers of youths served, but there was wide variance in how the services were defined. There was little internal consistency within projects during the first two years and a general inconsistency in service tabulations across projects. To address the inconsistency within projects, we summarized descriptive data to be more or less representative of the project. To address inconsistency across projects, we described services to cover both the range of variation and patterns across projects.

Overview of Youth Development Services

Table 2-1 gives descriptions of each youth development service and the number of participants receiving each service as reported by the MIS cumulatively from program onset through June 2005. The organization of the table follows the format of the MIS reports submitted by the programs. The descriptions of each service are accurate for the fifth year but are not necessarily retrospective and may be less reliable for past years. For details on how services changed over time, see "Changes in Services over Time."

The fieldwork for the process evaluation revealed a wide disparity—both within projects over time, and across projects—in the meaning of terms used to describe the 15 services. Because of the variances, the report frequently clusters services into categories. For instance, basic academic skills classes and academic tutoring are described as "remediation" in later chapters.

Table 2-1. Composite View of Youth-Development Services (N = 67,710*; Total OSY = 35,051; Total ISY = 32,659)

Youth-Development Services	Description	OSY	ISY	All
Internship/Subsidized Employment	Favored by all projects. Usually was summer work experience for ISY and part-time year round for OSY. Wages were usually $5.15/hr. Skill development or links to unsubsidized jobs was the most frequent objective, but this service was also widely used to teach basic work skills and career exploration. Only 4 projects cited income as the single objective.	7,395	11,464	18,859
Community Service	Typically involves beautification, voter registration, and volunteer work for charities. Mandatory in 8 projects; provided either a substantive or lasting community impact in 5 and is used for job training in 2. Only 1 project does not engage in community service activities.	7,086	9,875	16,961
Sports/Recreation	Typically includes organized sports, mostly basketball, (14 projects) and youth-driven recreation at YO centers (11 projects). Negligible activities in 4 projects. Incorporates a learning element in 4 projects. Police Athletic League, Boys and Girls Clubs, and YMCA were the most frequently cited partners.	11,129	14,897	26,026
Support Groups	Usually informal staff led groups focusing on relevant academic or employment issues, parenting, male/female relationships, female empowerment, or health issues (15 projects). Some (12 projects) provide structured activities organized around specific objectives. Nearly all refer youths to community groups for substance abuse or mental health issues. Only one project provides no support groups.	9,488	10,803	20,291
Peer-to-Peer Mentoring	Poorly defined and unstructured in 10 projects. In 8 projects, it usually involves tutoring in an academic or training setting; 7 other projects involve YO participants as mentors to younger youths; 4 of the 25 projects offer no peer-to-peer mentoring.	5,916	7,627	13,543
Alumni Groups	Weak or nonexistent in 17 projects; poorly defined in 4 others; only 4 projects report specific ongoing activities. Projects cite lack of interest among alumni as the cause.	1,836	2,626	4,462
Life Skills Training	Typically described as a combination of either informal group discussions (9 projects) or structured formal classes (13 projects) and individual counseling. Three projects had no activities or poorly defined activities. Topics covered were similar to support groups (for example, personal grooming, health issues, and financial management). Casey Life Skills, Pace Life skills and CLOUD SEARCH were examples of proprietary curricula used in a total of 5 projects.	14,432	15,689	30,121

Youth-Development Services	Description	OSY	ISY	All
Individual Tutoring	Generally is for high school academic courses and is offered as either an integral part of the academic programs (9 projects), as stand-alone components (13 projects) or part of the mentoring component (4 projects). One project provided no individual tutoring.	3,787	7,931	11,718
HS Extracurricular	Four projects put some emphasis on extracurricular activities to reinforce youth development objectives; most did not track this well. Typical high school activities such as sports, band, choir, and clubs were reported by 20 projects. One project reported no extra curricular activities.	1,895	9,675	11,570
Job Readiness Training (JRT)	An intensive, structured, core activity in 15 projects; less structured in 10 projects. Typically required for all youths before taking subsidized work experience or job. Covers job interests, job behavior, applying for a job and job search skills. Overlaps with life skills training and job placement services.	17,485	18,057	35,542
Reading/Math Remediation	Nearly all ISY receive needed remediation through school resources. For OSY, unstructured, individual instruction is offered by 11 projects while 10 projects provide intensive classes that are usually associated with GED classes. Four projects relied on existing outside resources for remediation.	7,500	10,673	18,173
GED Preparation	Structured classes operated to fit OSY schedules and a core activity in 15 projects. Nine projects rely on less structured system of individual referrals to outside resources while one project offers no GED options, preferring classes for high school diploma.	10,523	2,279	12,802
College/SAT Preparation	All projects offered information and counseling about college courses, including paying for campus tours or sponsoring college fairs, and help with application forms and financial assistance applications. However, only 15 projects invested in more substantive help for OSY, such as preparing for SAT exams. ISY relied mostly on assistance available through schools.	4,680	10,227	14,907
Short-Term Occupational Skills Training	Most projects offered some formal training for entry-level jobs for OSY. Some ISY were able to take vocational classes integrated with either a work-study program or their academic program. Eleven OS programs tied occupational training to a short-term job.	7,672	7,174	14,846
Short-Term Unsubsidized Jobs	Typically refers to a job held for a short term; otherwise, jobs are reclassified as long-term placements. Short-term jobs that do not become long-term placements are used as a source of income while attending school and are typically entry-level jobs; however, 5 projects used short-term jobs for training purposes.	12,798	9,658	22,456

*Refers to sample of 25 projects.

Core Activities

Project administrators were asked which of the youth development services represented the greatest investment of participant time—in other words, were central to the youth's individual service strategy. According to that definition, the following core activities were most frequently cited:

- **Job readiness training (JRT).** JRT was the most common core activity and usually a requirement before youths could apply for either subsidized or unsubsidized employment with the project. For 60 percent of projects studied, JRT was an intense, highly structured service that could take from 24 to 60 hours to complete. JRT was sometimes linked to subsidized or unsubsidized employment where youths were monitored and coached as they practiced their classroom lessons. JRT was always linked to and closely incorporated with job placement services.

- **Internship or subsidized employment.** The need for financial support and opportunities to learn essential work habits in a forgiving environment made internships or subsidized employment not only one of the most popular youth development services, but also a core activity. ISY were more likely to take part in summer jobs as a means of earning next year's school expenses or as a reward for staying in school. For OSY, subsidized employment was usually coupled with education or training services as a strategy for gaining an unsubsidized job. Internships and subsidized jobs typically lasted 6 to 8 weeks at 32 hours a week for ISY and 3 to 4 months at 20 hours a week for OSY.

- **Short-term occupational skills training.** Short-term training was usually defined as training that took less than one year to complete. In many cases, it was only a few weeks in duration—for example, when some training in a basic skill requirement for an internship or unsubsidized job was needed. For OSY, nearly half of the projects studied used short-term training to prepare youths for an unsubsidized job. However, only a few ISY enjoyed occupational training that was integrated with their academic training—for example, work-study programs.

- **Short-term unsubsidized jobs.** Short-term unsubsidized jobs were used, like unsubsidized jobs or internships, to teach good work habits, earn needed income, and as a stepping stone to a career path. There was little to distinguish short-term jobs from long-term jobs. Most long-term jobs began as short-term jobs that worked out as a good match between youth and employer. Short-term unsubsidized jobs usually consumed between 20 to 40 hours per week and could last for months.

- **GED preparation.** Because OSY frequently had no high school diploma, GED classes were a common core activity that typically called for structured classes headed by a teacher and augmented by tutors. GED classes were frequently combined with reading or math remediation classes, and thus the overlap leads to students working on the same curriculum but reported differently across projects. Classes usually are scheduled at convenient times and highly individualized. Students are encouraged to attend at least 12 hours a week and may spend most of their time while enrolled in preplacement activities working on a GED.

Other Valued Services

Even though life-skills training did not represent as much investment of participant time, project staff viewed this to be a critical service for youths. Life skills training was defined differently but consistently involved staff-led discussions around highly relevant topics. Support groups did the same, so it was difficult to distinguish between the two. Their value seemed to be that they provided opportunities for caring adults to guide and instruct youths on subjects that they viewed as relevant and important (for example, pragmatic issues relating to schoolwork and getting and keeping a job, managing money, discussions on female empowerment, single fathers' responsibilities toward their children, male-female relationships, and personal hygiene). The variance among topics suggests that needs of youths are driving the agendas. This component seemed to be a testament to projects' efforts to individualize services when they could. Such individualization is not always possible where services depend on cooperation from other organizations or existing education or employment resources.

Least Valued Services

It was generally agreed among the project staff participating in the study that alumni groups never really got off the ground, usually because alumni were too busy with long-term training, education, or jobs to come back. Some projects were successful in organizing special events to draw in alumni, but staff did not view results to be justified by the staff work required.

Peer-to-peer mentoring was also identified as another least-valued service, possibly because it was inconsistently defined and generally confused with tutoring. Only 10 projects could be said to offer true peer-to-peer mentoring, and it described as an effective part of the program strategy in only two of these.

Placement Services

All of the projects placed a high priority on job placement services, especially toward the end of the grant. Job placement was focused more on OSY than ISY, but placement services did not vary, regardless of which youth segment was being served or whether the eventual job was a short-term or long-term placement. A typical strategy was to locate a short-term job after a youth completed job readiness training in hopes that it would turn into a long-term placement. In many cases, the classification of short-term jobs or long-term placement into unsubsidized jobs depended merely on how the same placement was reported.

All projects provided youths with information on likely job opportunities. In most cases, the information came from either case managers or job development specialists who actively marketed participants generally to potential employers and developed job leads that were then passed on to individual youths. Only one project relied on a One-Stop center for its job leads and placement services. Eight projects reported using job fairs as a means of opening doors to potential jobs. Ten projects made some use of job clubs to assist youths in their job search and job retention.

There were two common approaches to helping youths make the connection with a particular job. In one approach, job development specialists who worked with youths who were referred by case managers. The job development specialist assumed the assessment, matching, and referral responsibility or otherwise screened youths to make sure that they were good matches to specific

jobs. Youths had to pursue the job on their own, but once they were placed, the job development specialist would follow up. This approach was characterized by a tendency to protect the project's relationship with employers and otherwise cultivate relationships in which employers were an important training and placement resource. Job development specialists in this model were less participant-centered than in the second approach. Project staff said that it was difficult to coordinate a smooth hand-off between the case manager and job developer, and job developers were losing employers when the wrong match was made. Melding the case managers' superior knowledge of the youths with the job developers' superior knowledge of the job market proved to be difficult and a source of staff contention.

The second approach relied on case managers assuming responsibility for making the match between job and youth, following up after placement, and coaching the youth throughout the process. This approach was more effective with the less-able participant because it provided the greatest degree of support for the placement process. Staff would provide transportation to the job interview, check resumes for errors, and practice mock interviews. The complaint with this approach was that case managers did not have either the time or special skills to be effective job developers. This approach seemed to work best in rural communities or where there was a limited job market that was easily accessed without special skills.

Most projects placed the greater responsibility for finding a particular job on the participant. Youths were generally motivated to seek employment and were given help with job search skills, resume writing, and other needs through job readiness training. Clearly, JRT was an integral component of the placement services, regardless of the approach used.

Long-Term Education or Occupational Training

Besides long-term placement into unsubsidized jobs, YO participants could also achieve program objectives by a placement in either long-term education or training. Most projects viewed education or training lasting more than one year to be "long-term."

Generally, long-term education was favored over occupational training as a long-term placement option. Of the options open to youths for long-term education and training after completing youth development services, attending community college was overwhelmingly the most frequent option used. Twenty of the 25 projects reported that the option most frequently exercised by both IS and OS youths was long-term education programs, usually lasting 2 years at a local community college. The second most frequent option was attendance at a 4-year college (13 projects). Alternative high school was cited as a frequent choice in 10 projects, and vocational tech schools were high on the list of frequently used options for occupational training in 5 projects. All other options—Job Corps, proprietary schools, and preapprenticeship programs—were seldom selected as training options.

Long-Term Engagement

A key factor in the ability of youths to sustain a long-term commitment to an education or training goal is the project's ability to keep youths engaged. When asked about their strategies to keep youths engaged, all projects reported that regularly scheduled contacts with staff was one method. Seventeen projects contact placed youth monthly while four contact youth weekly. Three projects contact youth quarterly.

In addition to regular contacts by staff, 11 projects also relied on the positive relationships between the project staff and the youths and their families to keep youths engaged; six projects offer financial incentives for youth participation; and seven claim that supportive services that address multiple needs kept youths engaged. Six projects mentioned the roles of YO centers in keeping youths engaged. Three projects also sponsored special events to draw in youths who may have become inactive.

YO Centers

YO centers were expected to play a pivotal role in the YO projects' program strategies. To that end, 20 projects were operating multiple centers in strategic locations with the aim of offering youths an accessible, safe, inviting place to meet with staff and take part in program offerings. Only two projects had no recognizable YO center by Year 5, and only three had a single center. All YO centers had space reserved for youths to lounge, and most offered youth-driven recreational activities. Few offered facilities for sports such as basketball courts or playing fields.

The most common activity supported by the centers was meeting with case managers. All centers had staff dedicated for this purpose. As the program matured, the emphasis on recreation shifted to education and training, and this change is reflected in how YO centers were reconfigured. During the startup or first-year review, YO centers were dedicated to youth recreation and being an inviting youth hangout as a means to attract new recruits. At the time of the Year 5 visits, YO center space was clearly used more for education and training activities. At the time of the Year 5 visits, 17 of the projects viewed the primary activity, after case management, to be educational (for example, GED classes, tutoring, JRT). Although recreation was not eliminated, it was definitely occupying less of the centers' space.

Characteristics of Youths Served

Generally, the projects were designed to address the needs of low-income youths with multiple barriers to academic or employment attainments. Table 2-2 shows the gender and ethnicity of youths enrolled through June 2005 for the study sample. Non-Hispanic Black youths were the largest minority group, while Hispanics were the second largest minority group represented in the sample. Most of the youths served were members of a minority group.

Table 2-2. Gender and Ethnicity of Youths Enrolled in the 25 Sampled Projects

	OSY	ISY	Total
Gender	M = 48% F = 52%	M = 46% F = 54%	M = 47% F = 52%
Ethnicity			
Non-Hispanic Black	68%	69%	69%
Non-Hispanic White	5%	4%	5%
Hispanic	24%	24%	24%

Table 2-3 shows the highest educational attainment of participants at time of enrollment. The number of youths who entered the program with less than a ninth-grade education was about equal to the number who had completed the ninth grade, or the tenth grade, or eleventh grade. Only 18.7 percent entered the program with either a high-school diploma or a GED.

Table 2-3. Educational Attainment at Time of Enrollment of Youths Enrolled in the 25 Sampled Projects

Educational Attainment at Enrollment	OSY	ISY	Total
Less than grade 9	10.18%	27.49%	18.79%
Grade 9	15.84%	22.81%	19.31%
Grade 10	18.73%	19.78%	19.25%
Grade 11	18.77%	19.56%	19.16%
High school diploma	27.36%	5.1%	16.28%
GED certificate	4.43%	.31%	2.38%

During the on-site project reviews, respondents were asked to identify other attributes of youths that might be factors in their success in achieving either educational or employment goals. This was an open-ended question without any prompts. The following sections report respondents' answers.

Substance Abuse

Fifteen of the 25 projects cited substance abuse, particularly among OSY, as an attribute that limited work at school and the ability to get a job. One project in particular spoke to the growing popularity of marijuana, which youths do not regard as a serious drug. Alcohol was also frequently named as an abused substance.

Pregnancy and Parenting

Of the 25 projects, 14 said that being pregnant or having small children to care for was a common trait of youths that interfered with attending school or keeping a job. Supportive services that paid for safe childcare was a critical factor in whether youths would be able to participate in the program.

Unstable Home Life

Nine projects said that their youths were either homeless or had no stable home environment. One project explained that youths will deny that they are homeless because of the stigma attached to the label but are actually sleeping where anyone will let them. Not having a secure, fixed address also interfered with receiving mail or getting phone calls about jobs. Domestic strife or general instability at home also was a factor that limited youth's participation in the YO program.

Incarceration

Many projects said that involvement with the justice system characterized the youths they served. Being in jail, attending court, or being taken in for questioning disrupted school and work. Youths with felony convictions were not easily placed in jobs.

Other Findings of Interest

Sometimes the lack of an expected response is worth noting. Only three projects reported that gang involvement characterized their youths or posed a barrier to program participation or success.

Two projects reported that many youths had mental health needs or suffered learning disabilities. This report contrasts with the MIS data, which shows that less than 1 percent of the youths served suffered any disability that would constitute an impediment to employment. This discrepancy could be explained by the difficulty of diagnosing learning disabilities or mental health problems until youths have been enrolled for a while, long after the MIS data is collected on this feature. Nothing about the two projects suggested that they were very different from other urban projects, except that they felt strongly that mental health issues and learning disabilities characterized enough of their youths to warrant special activities and services for them.

Not all the responses were about bad attributes. Several projects felt that many of their youths had no problems and were very motivated. Another project had a high percentage of high school graduates.[14]

Changes in Services over Time

Any description of service delivery processes is, by necessity, a "snapshot" of projects at a particular point in time. Looking at changes over time provides a big picture of service strategies and how they responded to changes in the environment and experience. Generally, all projects evolve through at least three predictable stages—startup, where activities focus on infrastructure development; steady-state operations, where all planned program elements are in place and the learning curve starts; and completion, where the project is concluded and final results are achieved.[15] Within these stages, projects are constantly adjusting to either environmental influences or strategic decisions by project management.

This section of the chapter looks at how YO services changed over the 5-year period by comparing snapshots of the 25 projects at three points in time that coincide with the typical stages of project evolution. A process evaluation was conducted during each of these periods and, along with MIS data, provides the basis for a description of services for the following periods:

- **Early implementation: July 2000–April 2002.** This period covers the startup activities and early service strategies. It is characterized by the largest funding levels of any period, by major infrastructure development, and by the highest number of new enrollments. Half of all youths enrolled over the course of the grant were enrolled during this period.

- **Steady-state implementation: May 2002–April 2003.** In this period, generally all projects had all elements of the model operating. Because this period represents a one-year snapshot,

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[14] Program staff at that site reported that the state's compulsory school attendance law for youths up to the age of 18 may have been a factor.

[15] Bruno, Lee, *Grant Management from Startup to Phase-Out: Guide for New Earmark Grantees*, USDOL/ETA. Washington, D.C., 2003.

it provides a "typical" picture of YO operations. Intake of new enrollees during this period slowed to 16,204, but participation rates[16] increased.

- **Project completion: May 2003–June 2005.** During this period, enrollments slowed to an average of about 7,500 per year, but participation rates increased to reach their highest levels since project inception.

Early Implementation: July 2000 through April 2002

Grants were awarded in late April 2000 with a starting date of March 20, 2000. Enrollment of youths started during September 2000 with ETA setting an enrollment goal of 100 youths per project by September 30. This implementation schedule resulted in recruitment and enrollment activities occurring concurrently with projects setting up contracts, hiring staff, and creating the infrastructure during the first six months of the grant period. Implementation of full program services for most projects commenced during the period of November 2000 to March 2001. The first wave of process evaluation site visits occurred during the fall and winter of 2001 and extended through March 2002.

Grant funds were distributed so that the largest portion of money was available during this startup period with grantees receiving full awards the first two years and less than full awards the remaining years. The respondents interviewed during the first site visit characterized this period as a time of high expectations, excitement, and competition for grant money among local youth-serving organizations. Local agencies saw the YO grant as an opportunity to advance their organizations' respective agendas. Dividing the "pie" was a major startup issue. For most projects, this period represented the highest number of contractors and the largest number of entities to coordinate than at any other time during the 5-year grant period.

This period of early implementation was also marked by challenges associated with infrastructure development—procuring contractors, hiring and training staff, maneuvering organizational bureaucracies, and setting up YO centers. A new concept for most grantees was the creation of neighborhood centers that offered youths an attractive and safe place to congregate and their introduction to YO. YO centers were both a recruitment tool and a means for meeting youths' needs for a "home" that included caring adults and access to services.

The projects enthusiastically created YO centers to be as appealing as possible and were rewarded by good attendance. Once the logistical challenges of establishing a facility were overcome, YO centers became the service that most distinguished YO projects from other youth-serving agencies. First, projects usually let youths determine the amenities whenever possible. YO centers were youth oriented and accommodating. Second, staff adopted the role of mentors and friends rather than authoritarian figures.

During this period, ETA urged projects to accelerate enrollments. Systematically, projects enrolled more youths than could be served during the startup phase of the projects, resulting in 11 percent of all cumulative enrollments never receiving even one service.

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[16] Participation levels are the numbers of youth-development services received by participants who were active during the period.

A review of MIS data in Table 2-4 shows that 36,236 youths were enrolled at the end of April 2002 or a little more than half of what the total enrollment would be for the full 5-year period. The enrollment was evenly split between ISY and OSY. MIS data for the period show that half of the OSY were between the ages of 19 and 21. The rest were mostly between the ages of 17 and 18. About 18 percent had either a GED or high school diploma at the time of enrollment. This trend remained constant throughout the evolution of the projects.

Table 2-4. Enrollment and Participation Levels in the 25 Sampled Projects during Early Implementation (July 2000 through April 2002)

	Counts			Percentages		
	Out of School	In School	Total	Out of School	In School	Total
Enrollment Data						
New Enrollments	18,105	18,131	36,236			
Male	8,763	8,648	17,411	48.4%	47.7%	48.0%
Female	9,342	9,483	18,825	51.6%	52.3%	52.0%
14–16 Years	2,494	12,132	14,626	13.8%	66.9%	40.4%
17–18 Years	6,632	4,572	11,204	36.6%	25.2%	30.9%
19–21 Years	8,962	1,426	10,388	49.5%	7.9%	28.7%
Not Hispanic or Latino						
American Indian or Alaskan Native*	210	258	469	1.2%	1.4%	1.3%
Asian	225	198	423	1.2%	1.1%	1.2%
Black or African American	12,627	13,111	25,737	69.7%	72.3%	71.0%
Hawaiian Native or Other Pacific Islander	68	57	125	0.4%	0.3%	0.3%
White	909	758	1668	5.0%	4.2%	4.6%
Hispanic or Latino	4,066	3,748	7,814	22.5%	20.7%	21.6%
Participation In Youth-Development Program Activities						
Internship/Subsidized Employment	2,034	3,147	5,181	16.3%	24.4%	20.4%
Community Service	1,353	2,051	3,404	10.8%	15.9%	13.4%
Sports/Recreation	3,043	4,574	7,617	24.3%	35.5%	30.0%
Support Groups	2,766	3,111	5,877	22.1%	24.1%	23.1%
Peer to Peer Mentoring	1,008	1,801	2,809	8.1%	14.0%	11.1%
Alumni Groups	159	313	472	1.3%	2.4%	1.9%
Life Skills Training	3,858	4,073	7,931	30.8%	31.6%	31.2%
Individual Tutoring	1,100	2,748	3,848	8.8%	21.3%	15.1%
Secondary School Extra Curricular Activities	704	2,458	3,162	5.6%	19.1%	12.4%
JRT	5,624	5,240	10,864	44.9%	40.6%	42.8%
Reading/Math Remediation	1,382	1,916	3,298	11.0%	14.9%	13.0%
GED Preparation	3,978	701	4,679	31.8%	5.4%	18.4%
College/SAT Preparation	990	1,653	2,643	7.9%	12.8%	10.4%
Short Term Occupational Skills Training	1,792	1,279	3,071	14.3%	9.9%	12.1%
Short Term Unsubsidized Employment	1,923	1,508	3,431	15.4%	11.7%	13.5%
Total Participating Enrollees During the Reporting Period	12,515	12,894	25,409			

* Since the Native American sites are not included in this analysis, the number of NA youths shown here are from the urban and rural sites only.

Although recruitment was a priority among program services, there was little indication that meeting enrollment goals would be a problem. The greater problem for service providers was managing and serving youths, once they were enrolled. Only 25,409 enrolled youths (70 percent) actively participated, and participation rates for all services were lower than during early implementation than in any other period. These participation rates could be attributed to the effects of the distractions of project startup. A high level of staff turnover resulted in vacant staff positions and subsequent high caseloads for case managers. Training staff, particularly in the intricacies of reporting data for the MIS and the concepts and practices for youth development was another staff issue that affected quality of services during startup. During this time, grantees were struggling to find ways to coordinate and connect the large number of service providers, to track and serve youths, and to meet the goals of providing comprehensive services. This period was the time of trial-and-error learning.

Steady-State Implementation: May 2002 through April 2003

To review the progress of the projects, we conducted a telephone survey with all project leaders a year after the first series of site visits. These extensive telephone interviews confirmed that by this time, the projects were demonstrating a steady-state operation in which all elements of the model were in place. The penetration rate averaged about 34 percent with complaints that loss of housing stock in the target area had diminished the number of eligible youths. Most projects had multiple YO centers in place. Administratively, the MIS was finally operational with the help of ETA's "E-teams." Many of the projects had instituted professional training for line staff to address the problems of high staff turnover. Respondents reported that they soon learned that the typical case manager was not sufficiently schooled in youth-development concepts or in maintaining case files that were the basis for MIS data. These areas seemed to be the focus of staff training.

By April 2003, an additional 16,204 youths had been enrolled, raising the cumulative enrollment across the 25 study sites to 52,440. Of the new enrollments, OSY are slightly higher in number than ISY but there are few significant deviations in characteristics of youths enrolled in this period compared to early implementation.

During this one-year period of steady operations of the projects, 39,069 youths were actively participating in program services. Table 2-5 shows rates of participation, by service, for youths served during this one-year period. Compared to the early implementation period, the steady-state period showed an increase in participation rates in nearly all of the 15 youth-development services, with notable increases in peer mentoring, math and reading remediation, college preparation, and unsubsidized employment.[17]

During this period, a total of 8,040 youths were placed in long-term placements—3,581 more than the 4,459 who were placed before April 2002. Despite a downturn in the economy that made unsubsidized jobs harder to find for youths served by many of the projects, YO was starting to demonstrate momentum with placements.

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[17] This snapshot may be a more accurate representation of what services were being offered to youths than the earlier period because staff were better trained on the respective MIS procedures.

Table 2-5. Enrollment and Participation Levels in the 25 Sampled Projects during Steady-State Implementation (May 2002 through April 2003)

	Counts			Percentages		
	Out of School	**In School**	**Total**	**Out of School**	**In School**	**Total**
Enrollment Data						
New Enrollments	8,459	7,745	16,204			
Male	3,951	3,328	7,279	46.7%	43.0%	44.9%
Female	4,508	4,417	8,925	53.3%	57.0%	55.1%
14–16 Years	1,158	5,379	6,537	13.7%	69.5%	40.3%
17–18 Years	3,015	1,839	4,854	35.6%	23.7%	30.0%
19–21 Years	4,304	528	4,832	50.9%	6.8%	29.8%
Not Hispanic or Latino						
American Indian or Alaskan Native*	50	46	96	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%
Asian	73	54	127	0.9%	0.7%	0.8%
Black or African American	5587	4701	10,288	66.1%	61.0%	63.5%
Hawaiian Native or Other Pacific Islander	37	22	58	0.4%	0.3%	0.4%
White	448	237	685	5.3%	3.1%	4.2%
Hispanic or Latino	2,265	2,685	4,950	26.8%	34.7%	30.6%
Participation In Youth-Development Program Activities						
Internship/Subsidized Employment	2,748	5,094	7,842	15.8%	23.5%	20.1%
Community Service	2,544	4,703	7,247	14.6%	21.7%	18.5%
Sports/Recreation	5,074	8,634	13,708	29.1%	39.9%	35.1%
Support Groups	3,851	5,331	9,182	22.1%	24.6%	23.5%
Peer to Peer Mentoring	2,257	4,011	6,268	12.9%	18.5%	16.0%
Alumni Groups	394	789	1,183	2.3%	3.6%	3.0%
Life Skills Training	5,542	7,519	13,061	31.8%	34.8%	33.4%
Individual Tutoring	1,157	3,968	5,125	6.6%	18.3%	13.1%
Secondary School Extra Curricular Activities	1,024	5,882	6,906	5.9%	27.2%	17.7%
JRT	6,664	8,493	15,157	38.2%	39.3%	38.8%
Reading/Math Remediation	3,153	5,197	8,350	18.1%	24.0%	21.4%
GED Preparation	4,553	987	5,540	26.1%	4.6%	14.2%
College/SAT Preparation	1,991	4,630	6,621	11.4%	21.4%	16.9%
Short Term Occupational Skills Training	2,969	3,208	6,177	17.0%	14.8%	15.8%
Short Term Unsubsidized Employment	5,602	4,403	10,005	32.1%	20.4%	25.6%
Total Participating Enrollees During the Reporting Period	17,438	21,631	39,069			

* Since the Native American sites are not included in this analysis, the NA youth shown here are from the urban and rural sites only.

Operating with fewer funds,[18] project managers revisited their partners' contributions and downsized the numbers of partners. Projects with many partners seemed to have several motivations to reconsider their choices. First, the more partners, the greater the bureaucracy and the more resources consumed in coordinating, monitoring, and managing them. Some projects had more than 20 organizations under contract. Second, some partners were not providing high-quality services or services worth the funds consumed. Third, sustainability was surfacing as an issue. Partners with the ability and willingness to sustain the project or contribute to its sustainability later were more valuable than those who were not able to help with sustainment.

Project Completion: May 2003 through June 2005

By June 2005, the study sample of 25 projects had enrolled cumulatively 67,710 youths. Little had changed in how youths were distributed by age or education levels when enrolled. For long-term placements, a total of 14,962 youths had been placed, continuing the momentum from the previous period.

During the almost 2-year completion period, 15,270 new enrollments occurred, and 49,483 youths actively participated in youth-development services. This is an average of about 7,000 new enrollments per year, compared to an average of 18,000 per year during early implementation and 16,000 per year during the steady-state phase. Enrollments were occurring at a slower rate, suggesting that outreach and recruitment were taking less of the projects' resources and attention.

Table 2-6 shows the percent of youths who participated in various youth-development services. Overall, the percentages of youths actively participating in all service areas compared to earlier time periods increased. The greatest increases in participation rates occurred in support groups (8%), JRT (10%), life skills training (11%), and short-term unsubsidized employment (11%).

A reduction in funding and greater emphasis on services that lead to jobs characterized this project completion period. Changes in services were demonstrated in several ways. Five projects added activities that enhanced job placements, usually by revamping their job-development and placement activities. Projects improved their JRT to make it longer and more structured. A greater emphasis was placed on GED classes. Three projects reported moving this service in-house to ensure that youths were getting services tailored to their needs and to coordinate classes better with incentives for attendance.

The greatest change in service strategies occurred with the YO centers. Respondents reported that emphasis on recreation had diminished and YO centers had been reinstituted as centers for academic classes and staff offices. Many centers were closed and funds reprogrammed to support education and employment services. The primary reasons given for the changes were the less than serious attitude of some youths and the reduction in funds.

Staff observed that youths viewed the centers and YO generally as being about fun and recreation; this attitude interfered with learning-appropriate behavior as students and employees.

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[18] ETA released disproportionate sums so that sites would receive full awards the first two years, 75 percent awards the next two years, and 50 percent awards the fifth year to encourage sites to institute plans for cost sharing before the conclusion of the grant.

To address this issue, some YO centers divided the facility between recreational pursuits and more serious employment and training activities, with the latter demanding a more serious demeanor. Other centers simply restricted times for recreation to hours when classes were not in session.

The further reduction in funds and the struggle to sustain the project at grant's end made conserving money a higher priority. YO centers were consolidated, and several projects closed their centers in favor of using other community resources for recreation and sports. Centers were used more for staff offices and administrative purposes as projects looked for ways to stretch grant dollars to extend the program beyond the initial 5-year period. The expanded use of YO centers for non-recreational purposes was in part a cost-cutting move, but it was also part of a sustainment plan to hold on to the centers.

Table 2-6. Enrollment and Participation Levels in the 25 Sampled Projects during Project Completion (May 2003 through June 2005)

	Counts			Percentages		
	Out of School	In School	Total	Out of School	In School	Total
Enrollment Data						
New Enrollments	8,487	6,783	15,270			
Male	4,097	3.099	7,196	48.3%	45.7%	47.1%
Female	4,390	3,684	8,074	51.7%	54.3%	52.9%
14–16 Years	1,217	4,674	5,891	14.3%	68.9%	38.6%
17–18 Years	3,322	1,716	5,048	39.3%	25.3%	33.1%
19–21 Years	3,937	393	4,330	46.4%	5.8%	28.4%
Not Hispanic or Latino						
American Indian or Alaskan Native*	47	23	70	0.6%	0.3%	0.5%
Asian	79	77	156	0.9%	1.1%	1.0%
Black or African American	5772	4936	10,706	68.0%	72.8%	70.1%
Hawaiian Native or Other Pacific Islander	33	28	61	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%
White	577	342	921	6.8%	5.0%	6.0%
Hispanic or Latino	1,979	1,377	3,356	23.3%	20.3%	22.0%
Participation In Youth Development Program Activities						
Internship/Subsidized Employment	4,334	7,277	11,611	17.8%	28.9%	23.5%
Community Service	4,968	7,266	12,234	20.4%	28.9%	24.7%
Sports/Recreation	7,641	10,854	18,495	31.4%	43.2%	37.4%
Support Groups	6,884	8,759	15,643	28.3%	34.8%	31.6%
Peer to Peer Mentoring	4,454	5,469	9,923	18.3%	21.8%	20.1%
Alumni Groups	1,731	2,454	4,185	7.1%	9.8%	8.5%
Life Skills Training	10,172	11,576	21,748	41.8%	46.0%	44.0%
Individual Tutoring	2,139	4,555	6,694	8.8%	18.1%	13.5%
Secondary School Extra Curricular Activities	1,029	6,736	7,765	4.2%	26.8%	15.7%
JRT	11,161	12,873	24,034	45.9%	51.2%	48.6%
Reading/Math Remediation	5,037	7,969	13,006	20.7%	31.7%	26.3%
GED Preparation	6,542	1,660	8,202	26.9%	6.6%	16.6%
College/SAT Preparation	2,970	7,425	10,395	12.2%	29.5%	21.0%
Short Term Occupational Skills Training	4,651	5,200	9,851	19.1%	20.7%	19.9%
Short Term Unsubsidized Employment	10,018	8,006	18,024	41.2%	31.8%	36.4%
Total Participating Enrollees During the Reporting Period	24.341	25,142	49,483			

* Since the Native American sites are not included in this analysis, the NA youths shown here are from the urban and rural sites only.

Several projects reported a diminished level of services to ISY as a result of budget priorities. All but two projects experienced further reduction in the number of partners. The reasons given by respondents were similar to those given during the second round of site visits. Nine projects dropped nonproductive contractors and streamlined services to improve cost effectiveness overall. One project started with 34 contractors, dropped the number to 18 in Year 3, and further reduced it to 6 in Year 5. Four projects felt that they could provide some services better in-house—especially job placement services, remediation, and GED services. The complaint was that traditional GED providers (for example, Adult Education programs) did not know how to attract youths and keep them motivated.

Summary of Project Evolution

Most projects made a logical transition from an emphasis on fulfilling enrollment goals in the first two years to fulfilling long-term placement goals during Year 5. To encourage enrollments, projects focused their activities more on creating youth-friendly YO centers and providing recreation and enrichment services, subsidized jobs, and those youth-development services that were easiest to launch and most appealing to youths. This strategy was designed to establish a rapport with the youth community, build trust, and create bridges to more substantive services such as academic programs that were less appealing but essential to long-term benefits.

Startup distractions and inexperience combined with unprecedented recruitment and enrollment levels seemed to lead to low participation levels during early implementation. Youths' response to the services could be interpreted as a reaction to the quality of services during this period. Over time, projects naturally reduced recruitment efforts as enrollment goals were reached, and emphasis shifted to refining youth-development services to improve retention, increase educational attainments, and increase the number of long-term placements. As projects neared the completion of the grant, the emphasis was on maximizing youth placements, particularly college and employment entries, before services would end.

Generally, projects became more cost effective over time as a result of trial-and-error learning and the gradual reductions of funds. Scheduled incremental funding reductions over the course of the grant affected all the projects. The drop in financial resources forced projects to set priorities on service strategies, not only in terms of what services were most valuable but also in ways that services could be delivered with greater effectiveness. The planned reductions to "steady-state" funding motivated a search for greater efficiency and contractor accountability.

Projects learned that more is not necessarily better in terms of partners. The administrative costs in awarding and managing multiple contracts can reach a point where service quality is diminished and cost effectiveness declines. Also, it is harder to fine tune or change program services when they are in the hands of an independent contractor.

As projects neared the conclusion of the grant period, some of the projects reported at least a perceived ETA shift from developmental goals to long-term placement goals, such as job and education placements. This period also had the lowest level of incremental funding. Projects placed greater emphasis on basic education and employment services over time in an effort to move youths to meaningful long-term placements. This emphasis on basics led to a greater investment in better methods for teaching basic academics and job readiness skills.

Over time, YO centers changed to accommodate more in-house services and administrative functions. Many YO centers were eliminated to reduce costs. Consolidating centers or relying on other community resources became viable alternatives to the expense of maintaining multiple centers.

The project-completion stage for most projects was a time of well-focused services administered by fewer partners and better-trained staff for fewer participants.

Chapter 3. Comparisons of IS and OS Program Strategies

The YO program serves two distinct segments of youths—those who are in school (ISY) and those who are no longer attending school (OSY). Although the services are the same for both segments, service strategies tend to vary to accommodate different goals and different situations. For ISY, who were full-time students at risk of dropping out, the goals were to assist youth to remain in school, graduate, and advance to higher education. For OSY, most of whom were not pursuing an education, the goals were to assist them to complete high school or attain a GED, secure long-term training or college, or find employment. Nearly all ISY are high-school students with a few middle-school and college students included. A majority of OSY are high-school dropouts who have neither a GED nor a high school diploma.

Other distinctions between ISY and OSY could be expected to affect service strategies. First, ISY have the advantage of being the responsibility of a major community resource—the public school system—while OSY have no such resource. Second, ISY are typically younger and living at home, where they have some measure of parental support. Third, OSY who are dropouts have a presumed barrier to achieving a fundamental credential—a high school diploma—that handicaps all other ambitions.

The process evaluation compared descriptive data to understand better how YO was implemented to serve these two segments of youths. The following study questions are addressed in this chapter:

- What were the most common interventions for IS youths?
- What were the most common interventions for OS youths?
- How did interventions for IS youths compare to interventions for OS youths?

YO Programs for ISY

Forty-eight percent of the youths served in the 25 projects were ISY. In keeping with the goals of IS programs, youths received services that would enable them to remain in school, graduate, and enter college. Most of the IS participants were at risk of dropping out for reasons of poverty, poor school performance, drug or alcohol abuse, entanglements with the justice system, dysfunctional families, pregnancy, or gang activities. All of these barriers to high-school graduation were endemic to the target areas and presumed to be applicable to the eligible youths enrolled in the IS programs.

The process evaluation looked at the IS program in terms of how youth development services were clustered to form defined interventions or treatments to address needs of youths with these presumed barriers to school success. During interviews and discussions, both program managers and line staff were asked to specify *core activities*—those services that represented the greater investment of participant time—and the strategy that lay behind these service clusters if they varied. Line staff and youths were asked what factors either limited or facilitated the youth's progress in school. Retention in school and grade-level attainments were used as measures of school progress because they universally applied to all projects.

The interviews were structured to allow a free discourse among separate groups of managers, line staff, and youths. Specific questions were asked only to clarify responses. This open-ended discussion did not bias the respondents to any presumptions held by the interviewer. Responses were analyzed across the 25 sites to examine four aspects of the IS programs:

- What were the most frequently used core activities?

- What were the interventions or strategies represented by the core activities?

- What were the factors that line staff and youth regarded as barriers to retention or grade level attainments?

- What were the factors that enhanced retention and grade level attainments?

Core Activities for ISY

We investigated *core activities* because youths invested more time in those services while enrolled. We assumed that the more time youths spend in a service, the more the youths will benefit from that service. Core activities then are central to the treatment or intervention that is associated with human capital outcomes. The numbers of youths receiving a service does not address the issue of intensity or duration of services.

During interviews about core activities, respondents frequently cited the youth development services that they viewed to be most critical to youths' success, whether or not they represented the most time invested. In particular, JRT was a service that did not represent as much participant time as other services but was repeatedly mentioned as a core activity. Therefore, although the definition of core activity was not strictly adhered to, the objective of distinguishing the youth development services most responsible for program outcomes was met.

ISY usually attended regular high school classes and had access to all of the youth development services. They universally underwent an assessment and counseling that led to an Individual Service Strategy (ISS). Seven services were considered core activities across the study sample. The following summaries describe those services in order of the number of times cited by the 25 projects.

Reading/Math Remediation. Whether remediation was done in special classes or individual tutoring or was sponsored by the school or the YO project, it was considered a core activity by 20 of the 25 projects. The need for remediation corresponds with the poor academic performance that is characteristic of at-risk youths.

JRT. JRT was likewise cited by 20 projects as a critical core activity. JRT was a prerequisite for an internship or subsidized job and for all youths who were planning for a long-term job placement after graduation. Most IS staff believed that job readiness was an essential survival tool for low-income youths, regardless of their ISS. This belief held sway, even though employment was not a stated YO goal for ISY.

Life Skills Training. This service took various forms and generally covered topics corresponding to deficiencies that youths demonstrated at school. It was very youth driven in that respect. The training could be a structured lecture and group discussion event, or it could be

individual counseling or even planned activities designed to address life-skills learning. Sixteen of the projects cited life skills training as a core activity for ISY.

College/SAT Preparation. Although all of the projects offered ISY information about college admissions and financial aid and paid the cost of taking SAT tests, only nine projects cited it as a core activity representing a substantial investment of youths' time. These projects featured formal programs to help youths prepare for the SAT, usually in the form of classes or tutoring. The projects also usually emphasized college as a long-term placement goal for youths.

Internships/Subsidized Jobs. Eight of the projects claimed subsidized jobs as a core activity. These usually took the form of summer jobs and, in some instances, served as incentives for making passing grades.

Sports/Recreation. Seven projects listed sports and recreation as core activities because they played a major role as an incentive for ISY to attend school. There is confusion among respondents as to how sports and recreation differed from "extracurricular activities," but respondents used both planned and spontaneous fun activities to engage youths and keep them motivated over the long term. Many IS staff held contests, organized field trips, or offered prizes for attendance and other performance objectives. Thus, these activities collectively became a core activity.

Support Groups, Community Services, and Short-term Occupational Training. These youth development services were mentioned as core activities in 4 of the 25 projects. Support groups were most likely a core activity to remediate common problems such as substance abuse, gang activity, parenting challenges, or involvement with the justice system. Community service was sometimes used as the context for learning life skills and building self-esteem. Community service projects that made impressive contributions to the community were prevailing themes for several projects. Short-term occupational training typically involved school-based vocational programs and was an option only in schools that had such programs.

IS Interventions

A core activity is a building block for an intervention that constitutes the program "treatment." The field researcher studied interventions that were typical for at least a significant number of the youths served. For this study, we set 30 percent of all youths served as the criterion for a significant number. To help respondents describe their IS interventions, they were asked to think about the paths that they took to arrive at the long-term placement outcomes achieved thus far. These discussions usually led to a participant flow chart that diagrammed those paths from intake to long-term placement.

Most of the projects had only one intervention for all ISY, even though outcomes may have varied. Youths start out with similar services but may self-select into a job track or a college track as they near graduation. At that point, appropriate services are provided for either a long-term job placement or college. Four of the 25 projects reported two distinct interventions. This section relates what was learned about the different interventions that represented program treatments for youths.

Intervention 1. The most common IS intervention relied on a combination of remediation, JRT, and case management services to help youths graduate from high school and enter the labor market. Youths targeted for these services shared common deficiencies—low academic skills, lack of motivation, and low income, which were formidable barriers for a large number of ISY. Other barriers applied to some youths but not all, and these barriers were also addressed by selected youth development services. Supportive services, like case management, while not a youth development service, figured largely in this intervention. In some projects, staff felt it was the most critical service for all youths. However, the core youth development activities that represented the greatest investment of youths' time across most projects relied on the following critical combination:

- Tutoring or special remediation classes to bring youths up to grade level—English-as-a-second-language (ESL) was added for Latino students in some projects. A few projects combined remediation with make-up work to earn high school credits—the credit recovery program. The trend was to start youths with academic deficiencies in a remediation program and in normal classes, with remediation occurring during a free period or tutoring after school. This program would continue until youths were up to grade level. Close monitoring of student class work and attendance was critical to the success of this core activity.

- JRT and Life Skills—JRT and life skills training were often indistinguishable, but the point was to teach youths how to function as a responsible adult first and then as an effective employee second. A summer or part-time job funded by the grant or through other resources was an incentive for grades 9–11. A good job after graduation was the incentive for seniors.

Intervention 2. The second most common IS intervention emphasized services to help youths attend college after graduation and was targeted toward youths who were more academically proficient. These youths tended to be older and were in grades 11–12, or they otherwise tested well during the assessment or were functioning at grade level. This intervention served fewer youths and served only 30 percent or more in three of the projects. All projects offered this intervention to at least some youths. It was the most emphasized intervention in one project.

The core activities for Intervention 2 were:

- JRT and Life Skills—These activities usually led to a job, either subsidized or unsubsidized.

- College/SAT training—Youths would attend classes or receive special tutoring and support to prepare for the SAT or to gain high-school credits needed for college admission. They toured college campuses and worked with a placement specialist who helped them locate financial aid, negotiate admission requirements, or gain an orientation to college.

The differences between Interventions 1 and 2 are small but significant. Youths in both interventions may receive tutoring or remediation, but the remediation is not a core activity for youths enrolled in Intervention 2. Generally, youths enrolled in this intervention are viewed as more capable academically. Both interventions will feature JRT and jobs, but the Intervention 2 is more likely to place youths in unsubsidized jobs, again because they are more capable and more easily placed. The Intervention 2 is largely distinguished by its incorporation of college/SAT preparation as a core activity. Supportive services and case management are applicable to both interventions.

Another distinction between the two interventions is the degree to which youths are deliberately directed toward college in the course of their youth development activities. Intervention 1 offers college placement assistance when a youth demonstrates ability and interest. Intervention 2 sets out to identify and lead youths to the goal of college. In the Intervention 1, youths achieve college placements coincidental to the core activities. In the Intervention 2, college placement is a planned outcome.

Other Interventions. Other interventions were each unique to a few projects and are described here as examples of different approaches that expand options for service strategies. One intervention was to provide job placement services broadly to all ISY and, for those found to be unemployable, assign them to Intervention 1. Several projects operated a "school within a school" or a special school for ISY, where YO centers were nearby and well integrated in the school program.

Barriers to Retention and Grade-Level Attainments for ISY

Program staff and youths were polled during separate group interviews about the significant factors that posed barriers to staying in school or achieving annual grade-level attainments. During the discussion, we recorded the top four or five barriers identified, ranked in order of importance. The responses included any and all barriers, which served as useful information about the implementation of the projects and the soundness of the model's assumptions about needs of youths. We aggregated the results of the 25 projects into barriers related to:

- Motivation—lack of parental support, low self-esteem, impatience
- Academic performance—low grades and lack of "culture of education"
- Criminal activities, including gang activity
- Community—transportation and lack of housing
- Parenting responsibilities
- Physical or mental impairments—substance abuse, mental health problems, pregnancy
- Project operations—administration weaknesses and high staff turnover

Table 3-1 shows compiled responses from youths and program staff. Lack of motivation was the most frequently cited barrier to retention and grade-level attainment, and academic performance was second. Of course, all of these barriers can be interrelated, and so can remedies. But it is important to note what is *not* frequently cited by youths or staff—criminal activities (including gang activities) and physical and mental impairments (including pregnancy, substance abuse, and learning disabilities).

There are several possible explanations for the little mention given to crime, gangs, and substance abuse. These could be so common among this population that the respondents no longer register them consciously. The same could be true about pregnancy. These occurrences may be so common that they have become invisible. However, the issue of their relation to learning disabilities merits further exploration.

Only one project screened youths for learning disabilities and mental health issues, and this site found both of these issues to be common barriers to IS retention and grade-level attainment. This finding raises the question of whether learning disabilities are a significant barrier to school success and are not recognized because they are not identified systematically or are not reported.

Table 3-1. Barriers to Retention and Grade-Level Attainments for ISY

Barrier	Times Cited across 25 Projects
Motivation	13
Academic performance	11
Criminal activities	6
Community limitations	5
Parenting responsibilities	4
Physical or mental impairments	4
Project operations	3

Factors That Enhanced Retention and Grade-Level Attainments for ISY

Besides asking respondents (managers, line staff, and youths) to identify barriers to retention, we also asked them what seemed to help youths stay in school or achieve grade level promotions. The most overwhelming response was a relationship with a caring adult. Seventeen projects reported that the caring adult was a YO staff member. Six related responses said that parental support and a stable home life were positive factors. No other factor surfaced so strongly as the relationship with a caring adult. The interviewer did not cue the responses.

Table 3-2 lists the responses aggregated into the following categories:

- Relationship with caring adult

- Connections with the school—sports programs, social activities, peer support, teachers, occupational training

- Positive reinforcements for school performance that include financial incentives (YO bucks), prizes, and recognition

- Integration of school, parents, and program to closely monitor critical aspects influencing school life

- Special services from the program—YO centers, supportive services

- Self motivation

- Remediation

Table 3-2. Factors That Enhanced Retention and Grade-Level Attainments for ISY

Enhancements	Times Cited across 25 Projects
Relationship with caring adult	23
Connections with schools	14
Positive reinforcements	13
Integration of school, parents and program	10
Special services from the program	8
Self-motivation	7
Remediation	5

A comparison of barriers to enhancements tells an interesting story. Barriers that related to youth motivation were well addressed by the enhancements, most of which were part of the YO program. Relationship with a caring adult, usually a case manager or YO staff person, counters the barrier of lack of parental support. As one case manager said, "They do it first for you and then for themselves."

Also relating to motivation are the next two categories of enhancements—connections with schools and positive reinforcements. School connections speak to the value of social activities, friends, sports programs, skilled teachers, and learning options such as occupational training, that motivate school attendance among youths generally. To the extent that YO youths can make those connections, they are more likely to attend school regularly.

Although YO has little influence over these school activities, the projects can take full credit for creating opportunities for reinforcement to combat low motivation. Prizes for attendance, passing tests, or just simple recognition for hanging in there and all the attention that goes with this strategy does much to repair low self-esteem and reinforce good behavior. There is also an element of "connectiveness" with the school in this approach. Many of these activities reinforced school pride and the YO youths' identification and connection to their schools.

The second greatest barrier for success at school was poor grades and the lack of a "culture of education." Yet, only five responses mentioned the value of remediation services to maintaining school attendance and grade-level attainments. Both the relationship with a caring adult and the positive reinforcements that staff provided addressed the absence of a culture that valued education. If there was one message that the YO program broadcasted strongly and consistently, it was the value of education.

Special services from the YO project, such as supportive services and YO centers, acted as compensation for the lack of community resources, such as transportation to school and having a safe place to go after school for homework and recreation. No enhancements mentioned dealt specifically with the effects of pregnancy, contacts with the justice system, or substance abuse or gang activity. However, it can be argued that all of the enhancements dealt with these barriers if youths stayed in school.

Special attention should be paid to enhancements that integrated the YO project with schools and parents. Line staff reported that their ability to interface freely with parents and the schools enabled them to be better informed and more able to take appropriate actions to support youths in school. Line staff who had access to student attendance records, grades, and teachers and who

were on campus regularly not only were an asset to the school but also were able to maintain an effective system of positive reinforcements for YO youths. When parents were connected to the school and YO staff, student progress was better reinforced at home.

Most projects had case managers on campus daily. Some were on campus all the time or had ancillary offices on campus where youths could find them easily. Case managers would roam the halls, have informal discussions with teachers, and could easily check the day's absentees. This seemed to be the ideal situation and was modeled in most projects. There seemed to be no substitute for this hands-on involvement with the ISY.

YO Programs for OSY

To study OS interventions, we followed a process similar to the group interviews for IS interventions. A group interview with managers provided a basis for determining core activities and interventions that served significant numbers of youths (30 percent or more). We used group interviews with line staff—usually case managers and job developers—and interviews with OSY to confirm the key aspects of the major interventions and learn what specific factors were either deterrents or aids to retention and progress toward specific long-term placements. Grade-level attainments were difficult to define or measure for OSY, because most participants were enrolled in programs that had no standardized equivalents of high school grades. Instead of focusing on grade level attainments, the interviews focused on attainment of educational objectives— remediation goals, GED or high school diploma, short-term occupational training, and entry into long-term education or training placements—or job placements. In each case, the intervention was defined in terms of core activities that led to a long-term placement.

The interviews were structured to allow a free discourse among separate groups of managers, line staff, and youths. Specific questions were asked only to clarify responses. This open-ended discussion did not bias the respondents to any presumptions held by the interviewer. These responses were analyzed across the 25 sites to examine the following aspects of the OS programs:

- What core activities were most frequently used?
- What interventions or strategies were represented by the core activities?
- What factors did line staff and youth regard as barriers to retention or long-term placements?
- What factors enhanced retention and long-term placements?

Core Activities for OSY

A core activity is one that represents a major investment of participant time. For OSY, core activities are generally controlled and managed by the project and therefore are not as dependent on another institution's facilities and policies as the IS program is. For this reason, the core activities for OSY may be more representative of the project's capacity to apply the YO model. This section describes the core activities for OSY in order of the number of times they were cited by the respondents.

Job Readiness Training. Not surprisingly, JRT was cited by 24 of the 25 projects as a core activity for OSY. Only one project did not view JRT as a core activity, and this project was focused on educational attainments exclusively.

JRT underwent numerous revisions over the course of the projects' learning curve. It was used to prepare youths for both internships and pick up work that helped with living expenses. It was regularly cited as a requirement for all youths and was most likely to be the one component that all youths would experience at some early point in their enrollment.

GED Preparation. Working on a GED was the second most frequently cited core activity for OSY. Twenty-one projects emphasized GED, while one preferred an alternative adult high school program for OSY because a diploma was better recognized in the local workforce than was a GED. The trend, however, was to deal with the lack of a high school diploma through GED classes.

GED classes tended to be 2 to 4 hours long and offered daily. OSY programs seemed to hinge on GED preparation, which was eventually the component that experienced the greatest revision and upgrading as projects sought to find better methods to help youths attain this important credential.

Of the three projects that did not cite GED classes as a core activity, one had almost all high-school graduates enrolled, and two relied on remediation to secure either short-term training or long-term educational placements.

Academic Remediation. Remediation was cited by 20 projects as a core activity for OSY. The distinction between remediation and GED preparation was not always clear, because both were frequently conducted in the same class concurrently. Typically, youths would work at grade levels corresponding to initial assessment test scores until they were sufficiently competent academically to master GED preparation. A few projects used remediation to prepare youths for short-term training, bypassing GED preparation in favor of occupational training that could lead to a job. Some used remediation to help high-school graduates assume long-term educational placements.

Internships or Subsidized Jobs. Subsidized jobs were used to help first-time workers learn job skills or job training through practical experience in a forgiving environment before sending them out to the real world of work. This core activity was cited by 14 projects where long-term job placement was a goal and where youths needed income to sustain them. In some cases, internships were used to launch youths into permanent jobs with employers who were willing to invest in training.

Short-Term Occupational Training. Fifteen projects incorporated some form of short-term training to help youths find jobs. The training could be basic computer skills, CPR, or a skill needed to qualify for a job.

Life Skills. Life skills training was cited by nine projects as a core activity for OSY. Life skills training helped OSY acquire the social skills and deportment essential to hold a job. It was some times hard to distinguish life skills from JRT. Both focused on behavior that supported long-term placements.

Other Core Activities. College preparation, short-term jobs, and community service were each cited by three projects as core activities for OSY.

OS Interventions

YO projects consistently employed remediation/GED preparation and JRT as core activities, regardless of long-term placement goals. Generally, OS interventions that were focused on job placements added a variety of other core activities that distinguished their job placement interventions. Table 3-4 lists each of the study projects that pursued job placements as its primary goal for OSY and their corresponding *additional* core activities. Not all youths were enrolled in all activities, but these youth-development services were representative of the interventions used to achieve job placements.

Table 3-3. Common Core Activities of OS Interventions for Job Placements

Project	ST Occupational Training	Internship/ Subsidized Job	Life Skills	LT Training	Community Service
A	X	X			
B	X	X	X	X	
C*	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
D	X		X		X
E**					
F			X	X	
G	X	X	X		
H	X		X		
I	X		X		
J	X				
K	X				
L	X				
M		X			
N		X			
O		X			
P	X	X			
Q	X	X			
R	X	X			
S		X			
T	X	X			
U	X	X		X	
V	X	X			
W	X	X			
Y			X	X	
Z**					

Note: The alphabetical characters represent individual projects, which are not named in this study.
*Although job placement was a stated goal of this program, its OS interventions did not include any of the core activities listed.
** Neither of these projects reported job placement as a goal.

Four distinct interventions served at least 30 percent of the youths enrolled in the projects. All of the projects except two, focused on interventions that would help youths locate long-term jobs.

The two exceptions operated a single intervention aimed at getting OSY to finish high school. Although all projects helped youths also enter into long-term education or training placements, only three projects offered sizeable interventions that helped youths to either find jobs or enter into long-term education or training. This means that three projects had well-structured strategies to pursue both types of long-term placement. These three projects combined remediation, GED preparation classes, life skills training and college preparation in their interventions. Clearly, helping youths locate long-term jobs was the primary motivation behind most of the interventions represented by YOG projects. This section examines the features of the 4 interventions that served significant numbers of OSY across the study sites.

Intervention 1. The most common OS intervention, found in 24 projects, employed JRT, remediation, GED preparation or alternative high-school classes, and either internships or short-term jobs as core activities. These youth development services addressed basic education and job readiness deficits, mostly among youths without high-school diplomas. Nearly all of the projects defined "short-term jobs" as jobs that youths had held for only a short term, rather than as a particular activity incremental to the intervention. When youths maintained employment, these jobs were classified as long-term job placements.

Intervention 2. Where projects enrolled substantial numbers of high-school graduates who did not require extensive remediation, a second intervention emerged. This intervention employed some remediation services, but the key core activities were JRT, internships, and short-term or long-term occupational training leading to long-term job placements. This intervention varied from the first one in that youths spent more time in vocational training, and internships were considered developmental activities rather than a means for generating income.

Intervention 3. This intervention also focused primarily on youths entering the program as high-school graduates or those who were able to secure a GED soon after enrollment. Youths who demonstrated higher academic skills were given JRT, internships, and college preparation or life skills training to prepare for long-term education, usually college.

Intervention 4. One project focused only on the long-term educational goal of high-school graduation by using an intervention that combined JRT, remediation, and GED preparation classes to help youths return to high school.

Barriers to Retention and Goal Attainments for OSY

Group interviews with both line staff and youths examined reasons why OSY dropped out or failed to achieve a long-term placement. The discussion first reviewed long-term placement outcomes as long-term education or training placements (educational attainments) or as permanent unsubsidized jobs (long-term job placements) for OSY. For each, a protocol was used to focus the group on factors that either enhanced or deterred youths from staying in the program or, for those who stayed in, on factors that helped or detracted from their achieving a long-term placement. As was the case with the discussions concerning ISY issues, the interviewer did not prompt for answers but did query respondents to clarify responses to uncover root causes.

The responses from these interviews were aggregated into broad categories that seemed to share a common theme. Listed in order of the most cited factor to the least cited factor, the following categories describe the deterrents to youths' progress in YO.

- **Youth Skills, Age, and Experience.** Not surprisingly, the staff of 22 projects believed that the lack of work experience, lack of academic ability, and, in some cases, a learning disability, posed the single greatest deterrent to retention and progress. The most notable finding in this regard was youths' inability to complete the requirements for a GED. This was mentioned by 10 of the 25 projects during the interviews. When getting a GED is a cornerstone for nearly every project, youths who are functioning too low to complete a GED in a relatively brief time tended to drop out. Getting stalled in pursuit of a GED was cited repeatedly as a motivational issue.

  The age of youths was a challenge for 5 projects. Younger youths had greater difficulty completing the project—either because of their immaturity or their lack of experience and abilities needed for the workplace.

- **Motivation.** The second most commonly cited barrier (20 projects) was lack of motivation or issues relating to motivation of youths. These included youths' unrealistic expectations about what could be accomplished and their general lack of motivation to pursue educational objectives. The latter is no doubt related to the length of time that it takes many youths to complete the GED.

- **Financial Considerations.** The need for money to support themselves or meet obligations to their families was cited by 18 of the projects as a major deterrent to retaining OSY in the program.

- **Substance Abuse and Pregnancy.** Substance abuse was a problem for 10 projects, while pregnancy was cited only twice as a deterrent.

- **Program-Related Conditions.** The leading cause for deterrence in this category was the prolonged enrollment periods needed to achieve a long-term placement. Most youths were not willing to invest the time required or could not sustain themselves during that length of time.

- **Community Conditions.** The labor market was cited in five projects as a major factor in securing long-term jobs. Several projects reported that transportation to jobs was a problem.

- **Criminal Justice Issues.** Incarceration, more than gang activities, was identified as a significant factor keeping OSY from completing services leading to a long-term placement. Five of the 25 projects cited incarceration as a barrier, while only 3 projects cited gang activities.

Factors That Enhanced Retention and Attainment of Long-Term Placements for OSY

Besides asking respondents to identify barriers to retention and long-term placements, we also asked them to comment on those factors that either helped keep youths actively participating or facilitated in other ways youths' attainment of a long-term placement. The responses were overwhelmingly focused on features of the project—either a service that was a factor or the way services were provided. This section lists significant factors, grouped in broad categories, in order of the number of times that they were cited by the respondents.

- **How Services Were Provided.** Service-related factors that had an evaluative element are listed in this category. Over 43 responses fell into this category. Table 3-5 separates these responses into specific service areas where quality of effectiveness was mentioned in the response.

Table 3-4. Quality of Services as Factors Affecting Retention and Long-Term Placements for OSY

Quality of Service	Number of Project Citations
Immediate attention to supportive services	12
Quality of remedial/GED instruction	8
Small caseloads	8
Interesting jobs	5
Comprehensiveness of services	4
Follow-up to job placement	3
Good JRT	3

- **Types of Services or Activities.** The second greatest number of responses (26) was related to the value of a particular service with no evaluative element mentioned. These responses seem to suggest that certain program components were intrinsically valued because they improved retention or achievement of long-term placement. Table 3-6 lists those specific services in order of the number of times they were cited.

Table 3-5. Types of Services That Affect Retention and Long-Term Placements for OSY

Type of Service	Number of Project Citations
Short-term jobs or subsidized employment	8
Occupational training	5
YO Centers	5
Remedial education/support	3
Recreation	3
Life skills	1
Industry sponsored jobs	1

- **Relationship with a Caring Adult.** Eighteen of the projects' staff or youth respondents said that a relationship with a caring adult was a factor in retaining OSY and achieving long-term placements. In most instances (15 projects), the caring adult was a staff member, and most of those were caseload managers as opposed to teachers, who were mentioned twice. Parents were mentioned only three times.

- **Positive Reinforcements.** Giving youths positive reinforcement was cited by 16 projects as a factor that enhanced retention and achievement of long-term placements. Financial incentives such as YO bucks were the form of positive reinforcement mentioned most often (8 times). Staff encouragement was mentioned 3 times.

- **Self Motivation.** Six of the projects said that youths who were self-motivated were a significant factor in favorable retention rates and goal attainments.

- **Peer Support or Influence.** Four projects said that support from fellow participants was a major factor in retention and goal attainment. In some cases, projects reporting this finding had used approaches to foster bonds among youths (class cohorts), whereas in other cases, the bonds occurred spontaneously.

Comparison of IS and OS YO Programs

This section compares IS and OS programs, beginning with an examination of the differences in the contexts within which each operated. The characteristics of the youths, the differences in community institutions available to the two groups, and the differences in program goals had a major influence on how the programs operated.

We also compare core activities and interventions used for ISY and OSY and describe differences in barriers and enhancements to retention and goal attainment.

Variations in Context

IS programs were largely consumed with maintaining youths' attendance and grade-level attainments in regular community high schools. The overarching objective was high-school graduation, and jobs or long-term education or training were a secondary objective. Youths spent most of their time in high school classes, where the project had little influence. Consequently, core activities represented less time investment for ISY than they did for OSY and functioned under greater restraints than they did in OS programs.

OS programs, by contrast, pursued the primary goals of long-term placements in either jobs or college or vocational training. OS programs had greater freedom in terms of how core activities were structured and scheduled and in their duration. Many OSY were available to participate in YO activities during the day, while ISY were tied up most of the day in activities controlled by the public school system.

The characteristics of ISY were also different from OSY. Almost 68 percent of ISY were ages 14–16 while almost 86 percent of OSY were OVER age 16. Age was the most significant demographic difference between the two groups, but it is a critical one. Youths under the age of 16 are more likely to live at home with relatives than older youths are. They are less likely to require financial assistance to pay the rent, buy food, or buy clothes. They are also less likely to have children to support or childcare needs. But the most significant difference is that most states have a compulsory school attendance law for youths up to age 16. Achieving the primary goal of high-school education was greatly facilitated by the public school institutions and the states compulsory school attendance laws. OS programs did not have comparable institutional support for its goals from community institutions.

Comparison of IS and OS Core Activities and Interventions

The core activities in the IS and OS interventions had more similarities than differences. Remediation, JRT, and internships were common to both, although they necessarily consumed less time for ISY than they did for OSY. Sports and college preparation activities were more common to ISY, whereas GED and short-term jobs were more common for OSY.

Nearly all IS programs pursued an intervention in which students were exposed to the world of work through JRT and internships and were given help with basic academic remediation. Academically proficient ISY received assistance in preparing for college admission, but it was seldom a planned intervention. For OSY, at least four projects had interventions focused on getting youths into college.

Although ISY could receive the same job training services as OSY, either after graduating or as high school dropouts, such training was not common. However, for OSY, preparing for a long-term job was a primary goal in nearly all projects. Core activities such as JRT, internships, and placement services dominated interventions for OSY much more than for ISY.

Case management services and supportive services that paid for basic essentials to enable youths to participate were more critical for OSY than ISY. Nearly all projects provided both services to both groups; however, while all projects regarded the skills of their case managers to be critical to the operations of the OS program, some projects were comfortable maintaining minimal staff to oversee the IS youths' progress.

Comparison of Barriers and Enhancements to IS and OS Retention and Goal Attainments

Based on responses from the group interviews, both groups suffered poor academic skills and a general lack of motivation. Substance abuse was cited more often as a barrier for OSY than it was for ISY. OSY were also more likely to drop out because of incarceration. However, the greatest deterrent to completing program services for OSY that was not shared by ISY was the need for money.

OSY also seemed harder to motivate than ISY. While 13 projects reported motivation to be a barrier for ISY, 20 projects found motivation to be a barrier for OSY. In addition, although positive reinforcements were used for both, OSY required substantial financial incentives to motivate them, while ISY were motivated by such things as staff encouragement, prizes, and other symbols of success. The relationship with caring adults, although counting as a major enhancement for both, was mentioned more often for ISY than OSY. Program services were the most significant aid to retention and goal attainment for OSY, especially the quality of services. For ISY, neither the type of service provided nor the quality of the service was cited as a significant factor in either retention or grade-level attainment for ISY.

Summary of Comparison of IS and OS Programs

IS and OS programs served about equal numbers of youths who shared common demographics except for age. ISY were much younger than OSY and, for these reasons, had less critical financial needs, were less likely to be single parents, and were less likely to be incarcerated than OSY. In other respects, the groups were similar in that they universally manifest poor academic skills and low motivation for attending school.

Projects had greater latitude in the types of services offered, methods for delivering services, and greater access to OSY than to ISY; therefore, core activities represented a much greater investment of OSY time than ISY time. Generally, core activities were similar with one exception. College preparation was a core activity for ISY but was not named a core activity for OSY. This was remarkable because OS programs were more likely than IS programs to have an

intervention focused on college entry but apparently did not have a structured college or SAT service that represented a major investment of OSY time. Long-term job placements were the primary goal of nearly all OS programs, while high-school graduation was the primary goal of IS programs.

This variance in goals and needs of youths was reflected in responses regarding barriers and enhancements to retention and goal attainment. For ISY, a relationship with a caring adult was the overwhelming enhancement. For OSY, the types of program services and the quality of the services were more important than a caring relationship.

Chapter 4. Program Outcomes

Although there was no point at which an enrolled youth could be said to exit the program, a number of participant objectives were explicit in the YO initiative and were tracked by the MIS:

- Entry into long-term unsubsidized employment or jobs
- Entry into long-term education, such as college classes
- Entry into long-term training, such as vocational training at postsecondary schools
- Achievement of either a GED or a high-school diploma

The first three outcomes are stated goals for OSY while the fourth is the stated goal for ISY. All of these outcomes represent participant accomplishments for both OSY and ISY.

The process evaluation examined these short-term program outcomes as a measure of the effectiveness of program strategy that could be applied consistently across all 25 study projects. (Chapter 6 lists other accomplishments that pertain to individual projects only.) The analysis discussed in this chapter is based on data from two sources—MIS reports cumulative through June 2005 and responses from the onsite interviews that were summarized in Chapter 3. The analysis used aggregated data that described educational attainments in the form of GED certificates or high-school diplomas awarded and entry into a postsecondary school for either vocational training or college courses. The analysis also used aggregated data that showed the number of youths who received a first-time job placement in a long-term, unsubsidized job as a measure of employment gains resulting from program strategies.

This chapter examines both educational attainments and employment gains in terms of factors that seemed closely associated with the achievement of these outcomes.

Overview of Outcomes for the 25 Study Projects

Table 4-1 contains outcomes for OSY and ISY compared to enrollment levels for all 25 projects. Of the total enrollment of 67,710 youths through June 2005, 11,426 (6 percent of OSY and 29 percent of ISY) graduated from high school, and another 2,485 (6 percent of OSY and 1 percent of ISY) received a GED; 27,461 (44 percent of OSY and 36 percent of ISY) received a long-term placement of some kind, and of those, 14,860 (61 percent of OSY placed, 46 percent of ISY placed, and 22 percent of total enrolled) were placed in unsubsidized employment. The number of long-term training and education placements, exclusive of youths who returned to high school, was 15,743.[19] Since the goal for ISY is to keep them in school until they graduate and they are typically younger than OSY, these outcomes reflect only those ISY who either graduated or left school seeking a placement outside of regular school. In either case, only older ISY are candidates for placement.

An analysis of outcomes reveals interesting differences between ISY and OSY. Of the 11,895 ISY who have obtained a long-term placement of some kind, 54 percent—nearly 6,500—entered

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[19] These data represent transactions, not individual people. Some youths may have achieved either a GED or high-school diploma *and* a long-term training or education placement or a job placement. In these cases, the youths would be counted in each category.

either a community college or a 4-year college. Nearly 5,500, or 46 percent of ISY placed, were placed in unsubsidized employment. By comparison, OSY are much more likely to take up full-time jobs than ISY who seek a placement and are less likely to go to college. Only 4,119 or 26 percent of OSY placed ever enter any kind of college, while 61 percent of OSY entering a long-term placement will be employed.

Table 4-1. Comparison of Education and Employment Gains to Enrollment Levels for 25 Projects

	OSY	%	ISY	%	Total	%
Enrolled	35,051	51.8	32,659	48.2	67,710	100.0
Achieved HS Diploma	2,061	5.9	9.365	28.7	11,426	16.9
Achieved GED	2,046	5.8	439	1.3	2,485	3.5
All Long-Term Placements	15,566	44.4	11,895	36.4	27,461	39.7
Job Placements	9,461	27.0	5,419	16.6	14,860	21.9
Total Training and Education Placements*	7,475	21.3	8,268	24.3	15,743	23.2
College Placements	4,119	11.7	6,452	19.7	10,571	15.6
Long-Term Occupational Training Placements	3,356	9.6	1816	5.6	5,172	7.6

* Youths who returned to high school are excluded from this count, which has the effect of reducing the ISY who are candidates for placement.

For placement, OSY were more likely than ISY to pursue occupational training, but neither group favored occupational training as a long-term placement. Table 4-2 compares the distribution of OSY and ISY enrollments in long-term occupational skill training. Of the 15,566 placed OSY, 21.6 percent pursued occupational training, while only 15.2 percent of placed ISY did so. Only 18.8 percent of all youths placed pursued occupational training as a long-term placement.

Table 4-2. Comparison of Types of Long-Term Occupational Training Placements for OSY and ISY for 25 Projects

	OSY	%	ISY	%	Total	%
Pre-Apprenticeship Training	493	14.7	201	11.1	694	13.4
Job Corps	299	8.9	174	9.6	473	9.1
CBO or Proprietary Training	622	18.5	299	16.5	921	17.8
Vocational-Technical School	1,942	57.9	1,142	62.8	3,084	59.6
Total	3,356		1,816		5,172	

In summary, although MIS reports show that the distribution of OSY and ISY enrolled in YO programs is more or less the same, a disproportionate number of OSY are likely to assume long-term placements sooner in their course of enrollment, which has the effect of a greater number of OSY entering long-term placements than ISY at any time. This is partially explained by the younger ages of ISY and their interests in remaining in high school until they graduate. ISY become placement candidates usually after graduating or passing the age required to attend school. Of those entering some form of long-term placement, OSY favor job placements, while ISY favor college entrance. Of those youths who do enter some form of long-term occupational

training, both groups favor vocational-technical schools over all other forms of occupational training.

We made individual comparisons of placement rates among the 25 projects. Table 4-3 displays the 25 projects in rank order from highest to lowest across three categories of outcomes. Column 1 displays projects in order of overall placement rates. Column 2 is in order of job placement rates, and Column 3 is in order of education or training placement rates. Overall placement rates ranged from 19 percent to 87 percent. In between, 12 projects had placement rates in the range of 34 to 44 percent. Eight projects fell above the 34-to-44 percent range, and 5 projects fell below the middle range. Of the 5 that fell below the middle, one fell significantly below with an overall placement rate of only 19 percent.

Table 4-3. Projects Ranked in Order of All Placements, Job Placements, and Education or Training Placements as a Percentage of Youths Served in 25 Projects

Rank	All Placements	Job Placements	Education or Training Placements
1	V 87.1%	V 49.6%	V 61.3%
2	A 52.5%	A 42.0%	N 44.0%
3	N 47.3%	Y 28.7%	H 38.1%
4	U 47.3	I 27.7	O 33.8%
5	G 46.6%	H 26.5	C 33.3%
6	C 45.5%	U 25.8%	Z 32.7%
7	H 45.2%	C 23.4%	D 32.5%
8	S 45.2	G 23.1%	Q 32.2%
9	O 44.3%	N 21.3%	F 32.2%
10	Y 43.9%	B 21.1%%	G 30.6%%
11	D 43.3%	J 21.1%%	Y 29.9%
12	F 39.2%	M 20.6%	E 29.8%
13	Z 37.3%	S 20,5%	S 28.8%%
14	I 37.3%	O 20.3%%	L 27.7%
15	P 36.9%%	L 19.4%%	P 25.5%%
16	L 36.8%	Q 18.5%%	A 25.1%%
17	Q 36.6%%	R 18.1%%	U 22.8%%
18	J 34.6%%	P 18.0%%	B 22.0%%
19	B 34.1%	D 17.3%%	R 21.5%
20	E 34.1%	Z 16.2%	J 20.2%
21	M 32.2%	W 15.2%	M 18.8%
22	R 29.6%	E 13.7%	K 18.7%
23	W 26.3%	K 13.3%	W 18.3%
24	K 26.3%	F 12.3%	I 17.5%
25	T 19.3%	T 08.9%	T 14.3%

Note: The alphabetical characters represent individual projects, which are not named in this study.

Job placements counted for more than half of the total long-term placements for 15 of the 25 projects. Long-term education and training placements counted for more than half of the total

placements for the remaining 10 projects.[20] Comparing the rankings of projects across the three categories of placements shows how total placements were apportioned between either education and training or jobs. Generally, there is a significant difference between placement rates for jobs and placement rates for education and training. Projects' overall placement rates typically are a blend of higher rates in one category and significantly lower rates in the other, which suggests that projects varied widely in their respective performances in these categories.

To learn what factors seemed to be associated with variances in project performances, we compared the 25 study projects to identify those that demonstrated either high or low levels of placements in each category.[21] If this comparison of extremes in performance reveals factors that are consistently associated with high or low placement rates, important insights into project performance may be revealed. However, with only a relatively small number (24) of observations, the comparisons can only suggest factors that played a role in achieving either educational attainments or job placements. The results of this comparison are discussed in the following sections.

Factors Associated with Education and Training Placements

From this comparison, we identified three projects that had succeeded in placing relatively high percentages of youths in long-term education or occupational training. Projects "V" and "N" had education and training placement rates of 61 and 44 percent respectively, while Project "H" had a placement rate of 38 percent.

We compared these highest-ranking projects with the lowest ranking projects ("I," "W," "K," and "M") on that dimension. All of these projects showed education and training placement rates of between 17 and 19 percent of youths served.

We tested several possible explanations as we conducted the comparison:

- Management factors—Were management issues and decisions about policies or program design a factor in the variance in placement rates?

- Types of youth development services emphasized by the projects—Did the kinds of core activities vary for high and low performing sites?

- Barriers or enhancements to educational attainments identified by line staff—Could different challenges or assets in how the programs were designed and implemented explain the variance in outcomes?

- Characteristics of youths served—Did the youths served by the projects have any significant differences in the attributes that might explain variances in outcomes?

- Environmental factors—Would anything about the community context affect the educational attainments of the projects?

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[20] MIS reports for June 2005
[21] One project—"T"—was dropped from this analysis because its problems stemmed from an unusually dysfunctional administrative system that raised doubts about the validity of its MIS data.

Management Factors

Among the top three projects in education and training placement rates, one excels in all types of placements, and the other two had program strategies that facilitated youths' entrance into college. These strategies emphasized subsidies for college tuition and related expenses or for special courses and services to enable youths to qualify for college entrance. Both projects had close ties to local colleges and universities. In these cases, a management decision to design interventions that promoted college entrance was a factor in higher placement rates in educational programs. However, two other projects that made educational attainments a priority as a matter of policy ranked seventh and tenth in percentage of youths placed in education and training. This suggests that although a management decision to set educational attainments as a priority will have an effect on placement rates in long-term education and training, it is not sufficient to offset other influences.

Among the four projects with the lowest education and training placement rates, three are also ranked low in the percentage of all youths placed and of these, two reported systemic management problems. None of the four lower-ranking projects expressed a priority toward either type of long-term placement.

The use of outside contractors and the lack of control over the day-to-day operations of critical education and case management functions were cited frequently among the less successful projects. These projects also seemed to experience more reorganization, changes in leadership, and complaints from respondents about low-performing staff than did the more successful projects. Generally, successful projects seemed to be more stable over time, which would affect cumulative outcomes.

Types of Youth Development Services Emphasized

As discussed in Chapter 2, the trend is for ISY to attend high-school classes, which are usually supplemented by remediation and a mix of youth-development services, all of which are directed primarily to the completion of courses for a high-school diploma. MIS data show that ISY are more likely to go to college than OSY. We made a comparison of core activities to determine whether the types of youth-development services emphasized could account for variances in rates of education and training placement.

The top-performing project for educational and training placements featured a well-coordinated program of general education linked to short-term training and internships, which were sponsored by area employers looking for entry-level workers. Many of these internships accommodated college or long-term training placements. Both of the other top-performing projects had IS interventions that emphasized college preparation and assistance with college tuition. One project in particular subsidized large numbers of college-bound youths during its first 3 years of operation.

This comparison suggests that it is not the type of service offered but the emphasis and grant resources devoted to the service that are likely to influence long-term education and training placements. Youth-development services represent broad categories within which there could be considerable variation. For instance, although the lowest ranked project relied on the same core activities as the highest ranked project, the highest ranked project used contextual learning to

keep JRT and GED preparation classes well linked to a placement goal. Simply comparing the types of youth development services does not address critical considerations such as quality of instruction or teaching methods.

Barriers or Enhancements to Educational Attainments

A major objective of the site visits was to interview program staff and youths to get their opinion on significant factors that seemed to influence how well the program worked. The purpose of these interviews was to look beyond the type of youth-development service provided to how it was implemented and the effects on participants. We made a comparison between the program staff's opinions and youths' opinions about the effects of various aspects of the program on their educational attainments and the descriptions of problems and accomplishments related to education and training placements.

There was no appreciable difference in the challenges cited by the high- and low-performing projects. They all were fairly consistent in viewing low academic skills, motivation, lack of parental support, and poverty to be challenges in achieving long-term placements in education and training. They were equally consistent in their views of what aspects of their programs enhanced their educational attainments. They all listed attachment to a caring adult, supportive services, financial incentives, summer jobs, participation in sports, and YO center activities. We found the following differences between the high-and low-performing projects:

- Quality of instruction—The more successful projects all bragged about their GED preparation and IS educational programs in terms of features of the instruction or educational approach, whereas the less successful programs cited problems in these areas, particularly with the GED preparation programs. The successful projects' educational programs included the use of contextual, project-based learning, occupational training, alternative high schools, or college-preparation programs that included tuition assistance. The investment in a strong educational component that was linked to an immediate long-term education or training placement was apparent in the more successful projects but was lacking in the less successful projects.

- Intensive case management—Another distinction between the two groups is the reference to "intensive case management" and quality of staff in case-management positions, which was touted by more successful projects. The less successful projects frequently cited complaints about the case-management training, staff qualifications, and turnover.

Characteristics of Youths Served

The majority of youths served in the higher ranked projects were females. Even though they may represent parenting issues, females may also be better students with fewer behavior problems.

ISY are more likely to complete a high-school diploma, thereby having an option for entering college. Fewer OSY complete the requirements for either a diploma or a GED. The lack of a basic criterion for college admission is obviously a barrier to college entrance, which is the most frequent type of long-term education placement.

Another factor that may be influencing the types of long-term education and training placements of YO participants is the greater financial needs of OSY. The need for a paycheck precludes long-term training for some youths, even when the training comes at no cost to the participant. ISY who may have greater support at home are in a better position to enter long-term training.

Environmental Factors

Both high- and low-performing projects were located in urban centers. Although one low-performing project cited difficulties in working with the school system, the rest seemed to be equally well positioned to access public-school resources. No other variances were mentioned in terms of community factors that might influence education and training placements.

Factors Associated With Job Placements

We performed the same analysis to identify factors that influenced job placements. We compared three projects—"V," "A," and "Y"—that clustered as the highest ranked projects (with rates ranging from 49 percent to 28 percent) for employment gains to the five projects—"F," "K," "E," "W," and "Z"—that were ranked lowest for this criterion (with rates ranging from 12 percent to 16 percent). We compared the two groups of projects across the same dimensions of management factors, types of youth-development services, factors cited by line staff as either barriers or enhancements to employment gains, characteristics of youths served, and environmental factors.

Management Factors

Three of the low-performing projects decided to emphasize long-term educational placements over job placements. None of these projects invested in interventions aimed primarily at job placement. By contrast, all three of the high-ranked projects emphasized job placements over educational goals.

The remaining two low-ranked projects suffered major reorganizations and turnover at top management levels, which impaired their performance in all areas.

Types of Youth Development Services Emphasized

We made a comparison of the core activities used by the high-ranked and the low-ranked projects. Two of the three high-ranked projects included short-term occupational training and internships as core activities that supplemented the basics of remediation, GED preparation, and JRT. Among the low-ranked projects, only three of the five included either short-term occupational training or internships as a core activity, which is consistent with these projects' lack of emphasis on job placements.

We concluded that core activities that teach occupational and job skills distinguished higher-ranked projects from lower-ranked projects and that the choice of core activities is a result of a management decision to emphasize job placements.

Barriers or Enhancements to Program Implementation

Our review of factors that line staff said either enhanced or impeded achievement of employment gains for youths was inconclusive. Both high- and low-ranked projects thought that youths' lack of work experience and employment skills were major obstacles to being competitive in the job market. OSY all seemed to want to work and needed the income that a job would produce. Likewise, substance abuse, pregnancy, and incarceration were cited as common barriers to job placements.

Characteristics of Youths Served

We observed no differences in the characteristics of youths served that would be associated with job placements. Projects with both high and low rankings served comparable groups of youths.

Environmental Differences

Unemployment rates and proximity to jobs were factors that seemed to influence a project's ability to achieve long-term job placements. All of the top-ranked projects in terms of job placements were in areas with below-average unemployment rates, which ranged from 2.9 percent to 4.6 percent. In all instances, these were urban centers with public transportation that made jobs accessible to YO youths.

Among the five lowest ranked projects, four were in areas with unemployment rates that ranged from 5.4 percent to 9.8 percent, with most of the projects hovering around 6 percent unemployment. Only one project was in an area where unemployment was below the national average. Two of the lower ranked projects complained about the inaccessibility of jobs.

Summary

The small number of observations makes generalizations about the factors that influence education and training placements and job placement rates difficult. However, comparisons of features of high- and low-performing projects reveal some differences that suggest elements of good program design.

- Unemployment rates and transportation barriers were major factors in whether projects would place youths in jobs, and those factors caused more successful projects to focus on educational attainments to help youths. By designing programs that fit the characteristics of youths as well as the labor market, projects were able to make significant gains in education or employment benefits for youths, which did not occur when projects ignored these factors.

- Although the types of youth-development services that form a program's core activities are factors in job placement rates, they are less critical to long-term education and training placements. A more critical consideration in both types of placements is the quality of education and training methods and the level of resources expended, which is an aspect of project implementation that was not systematically evaluated.

- Intensive case management services are an essential element to good program design. Such services call for case managers with special training and skills.

- The financial needs of OSY frequently preclude long-term education and training placements and are a major factor in the length of stay for OSY. ISY are more likely candidates for long-term education and training placements.

In addition to good program design, competent program management was a pervasive influence on project outcomes. Projects that were unable to accomplish average levels of program outcomes in one area of placements frequently failed in the others, too because poor management influences all aspects of project implementation.

Chapter 5. YO's Links to the Community

The YO grants came with a requirement that the demonstration be sustainable after the grant concluded. To this end, ETA strongly encouraged grantees to link with community partners, especially youth-serving organizations, to leverage resources during the course of the grant and to sustain the demonstration at the end of the grant. The ETA also encouraged community links that integrated the YO projects with other empowerment zone (EZ) community development projects.

The process evaluation examined the community links aspect of the YO implementation by first identifying the current partners and ways that the partners have changed over time. The definition of *partner* excluded contractors who were paid for their services; they made no real contribution to the project for which they were not compensated. The definition of partner reflects the intent that partners make an investment in the project, not merely provide services as vendors.

Second, the evaluation captured information about the projects' plans for sustaining their projects to determine what role partnerships played in sustainment.

Finally, the evaluation explored the effects YO had on each community's services to youths.

This chapter addresses the following key questions:

- Who are the current program partners, and how have the partners changed over time?

- What are the projects' sustainment plans, and what role, if any, do their partners play in these plans?

- What effect did YO have on the youth-serving network in each community?

Partnerships and Leveraging Resources

Understanding partnerships and their role in sustaining the project at grant conclusion was an important study objective for the process evaluation. Yet, the term *partner* was never well defined. Historically, partner has referred to almost any association between a grantee and another entity. However, the operational definition for this process evaluation limits partners to organizations that were invested in the project and contributed to project goals. It does not include contractors who made no contribution to the project and were compensated for their services. Organizations can be both contractors and partners if they make contributions for which they were not compensated. These were the most common types of partnerships.

Partners are those organizations that added value to the project as an ongoing, invested, collaborator rather than a service provider. As the projects matured, this distinction became easier as projects looked for cost savings by paying fees for specific services, and the less productive partners were dropped. When contractors provided only paid services to the project, such contractors were frequently eliminated from the list of partners.

We asked the following questions about true partners. What types of organizations were making contributions to the project, and what was their motivation? What was the nature of the contributions? What project expenses needed outside funding? The sections that follow address these questions.

Types of Partners

Over time, the number of organizations associated with YO was reduced as funding levels dropped and as experience demonstrated the worthiness of various service providers over others. By Year 5 of grant implementation, funding levels were at their lowest while the learning curve was at its highest. A frequent comment from respondents is that by the time they had figured out how to be effective and efficient in operating YO, the funds were reduced. It was at that point in project maturation that the final process evaluation examined the number of entities then associated with each grantee and applied to each the operational definition of partner discussed above. Most, but not all, partners received grant funds as partial payment for program services. All partners made uncompensated contributions but, just as importantly, had maintained a consistent partnership role with the project over time. Of the 25 projects studied, about 160 partners were identified. Most fall into the following four categories:

- **Community-based organizations (CBOs)**—CBOs were listed as partners 52 times. Examples of CBOs varied widely with most CBO partners being local organizations rather than national organizations.

- **State and local governmental agencies**—Fifty-two state and local government agencies were listed as partners. The agencies most likely to partner with YO were those working with youthful offenders and gang prevention and those with health and social services missions.

- **Colleges and universities**—Twenty-three colleges and universities partnered with YO projects, with community colleges being the most common example.

- **Public schools**—Although nearly all of the YO projects collaborated with public schools to implement IS programs, only 18 public schools were considered true partners. In most instances, the projects that partnered with a public school partnered with only one, but one project listed three public schools among its partners.

It is noteworthy that nine faith-based organizations were partners; chief among these was the YMCA. (Not included in this number is the project where the YMCA was the grant administrator.) Six projects considered justice-system organizations as true partners, while employers were partners for three YO projects. Most interesting were the two instances in which private-for-profit consulting firms were considered partners because they contributed much more than the services paid for in the their contracts.

Past relationships seemed to be the basis for the grantees' choices of particular partners. Grantees tended to draw together with organizations with which they had long-established relationships. However, YO inspired new relationships as well, particularly with organizations associated with the justice system and community improvement.

Contributions

The contributions made by partners were varied and followed no particular pattern. Some partners provided space and facilities, particularly for recreation or classrooms. Some provided standard services but through special access points or at no or reduced cost. Some partners created new services and systems, such as GED instruction, JRT, or academic tutoring. All partners' contributions reflected their individual missions; that is, partners were unlikely to undertake services that were unrelated to their organizations goals and priorities.

Motivation

The lack of a pattern in the type of contributions suggests that grantees selected YO partners because they fit the service strategy requirements. Partners made contributions to YO because YO helped them to fulfill their individual missions. The YO partnerships served the interests of both partners and grantee. The evaluation did not determine which came first—the program strategy or the partners.

Project Sustainment

Only 9 of the 25 projects had reasonable expectations of being able to sustain some program services or level of service after the grant ended. For the most part, projects were just coming to terms with the issues of sustainment at the time of the final round of site visits. These projects spoke generally of securing other grant funding, either through ETA or foundation grants. Several of the projects mentioned joining the YO Director's Association with this objective in mind. In most cases, plans were hypothetical.

Only two projects expected to fully sustain their programs. One was to accomplish sustainment through its current partners. As grant funds run out, partners will sponsor their respective program components that are now jointly funded. This was the plan from the grant inception and was also the basis for program strategy and choice of partners. The second YO project that is assured of sustaining its YO project was expecting to receive alternative funding through other federal and foundation grants with the help of the local member of Congress.

Various sites had the following plans to keep at least some components of their YO programs in place:

• Two projects had actually started the grant application process and had reason to expect that some grant money would be available to sustain some of the YO programs.

• A charter school partner will sustain three centers while the YO choir raises money for other services.

• A credit recovery lab will be sustained by the school system.

• WIB funds will be used to sustain job development and JRT. YO centers are cost free, and vans purchased under the grant will provide transportation. Core services will be provided at lower levels of service.

- Boys and Girls Clubs will sustain the center, even though they are not a current partner. Other partners will sustain some services at lower levels.

- Funds will be raised at the local level to fund half of the current number of internships.

- Some components will be continued by using funds from United Way and local schools.

Several factors seem to influence YO sustainment strategies. The first is long-term planning. The one project that developed a sustainment plan as it developed its program strategy and partnerships is expected to fully sustain its programs.

Second is the importance of political support and leadership in the community. Projects that won the hearts and minds of the community were the ones that could rely on local funds for financial support, which was the most common source of sustainment funds in evidence. Local tax money and charities are frequently overlooked as sources of program support. Political support was also a key to gaining outside funding through grant applications.

Third, the complaint was voiced that the WIBs had no youth advocate. Although some of the projects expected to get sustainment help from their WIBs, the absence of WIB support was more common.

Changes in the Youth-Serving Network

The evaluation inquired about how the YO project impacted the youth-serving network either in terms of the numbers of youths served or in terms of the quality and variety of services. There were also many community service projects, and some of the more notable ones are presented in Chapter 6.

Better coordination and integration of available services was cited by seven projects as a major change in youth services generally. Embraced in this statement is improved communications among youth-serving agencies and a better mutual understanding of each other's strengths and weaknesses and operating procedures.

Complementary to this achievement is a better infrastructure for serving youths. At a practical level, three projects thought that the training of staff to a professional level was a major contribution to the youth-serving network. Some projects mentioned actualizing a sophisticated but heretofore unused case management database and using standardized forms. Several projects mentioned the development of good models for serving youths, while one talked about demonstrating how not to do it. One project thought their individual referral system was an important contribution.

The following additional noteworthy contributions were attributed to the YO grant initiative:

- Introduction of case management to IS services and the subsequent impact on public school programs serving at-risk youths

- Reduction in crime

- More churches involved in serving youths

- Opening a special center for younger youths

- Youth-friendly One-Stops

- Increase in numbers of youths being served by the system

- Increased awareness within public agencies of the needs of youth (for example, homeless youth).

Chapter 6. Lessons Learned

One of the most valued benefits from a process evaluation is the synthesis of lessons learned by the people operating the projects. These lessons provide useful insights into the challenges endemic to the model and into challenges that arose as a result of the context in which the projects were implemented. This chapter shares the insights of the practitioners who were invited to share their experiences in implementing YO.

Program managers and administrators representing both grantees and their contractors were interviewed as a group to discuss what they learned from the nearly five years of experience operating YO. The discussion was organized around nine topics that included general management of the projects, technical assistance efforts, elements of the model, key outcomes, and community links. Other than to focus the discussion around these broad topics, the evaluator made no effort to guide the conversations. The objective of these interviews was to elicit the most remembered events and learn what made them memorable. This discussion revealed problems that arose along the way, how they were solved or why they were not solved, and good ideas. The good ideas in some cases could be viewed as "best practices." In other cases, they were recommendations for improvements that never came into practice.

The results of these interviews were tabulated to see what themes or patterns emerged across the 25 projects for each of the broad topic areas. The same data is incorporated in Chapter 7, which addresses the overall implementation of the model.

Managing the Program

More than any other topic, program management evoked the greatest number of responses. Generally, project administrators found YO to be larger in both scale and range of services than any project previously administered. The group discussed several aspects of size and range. One related to managing contractors, while another related to the length of time required to start such a major enterprise, which called for unfamiliar services and new facilities for YO centers. Qualifications for line staff for the YO program were also different, and getting qualified line staff was listed as a major problem by 11 projects. Other less frequent but interesting comments about project management could be grouped as leadership issues and may be worth noting.

Each of these aspects of management, along with opinions on technical assistance efforts, is presented in the rest of this section.

Managing Contractors

The well-advertised multimillion-dollar YO grants attracted a large number of interested service providers and created a political arena for making funding decisions. The grantees' unfamiliarity with some of the youth development services complicated their task of choosing of service providers and necessitated their going outside their usual list of such providers. The result was that a very large number of contractors who were new to the grantee or were providing services that were new to the grantee were awarded contracts. The competition among contractors was cited frequently as a problem for managing the contracts, especially when funding levels were later reduced.

Most of the projects complained about the difficulties in managing the large number of contractors. Initially, there was duplication of services, poor accountability, and problems getting forms and MIS data collected from such a variety of organizations. One grantee contracted the management of the project to an organization whose accounting system did not meet OMB requirements. Eventually, projects dropped many of the original contractors, usually for performance reasons, but also to fit lower funding levels. One trend was to bring more services in house, particularly where they directly related to case management and job placement. Generally, grantees found it hard to manage program services through other organizations and were not well equipped to monitor or correct shortcomings in service delivery by contractors.

In some cases, problems with contractors resulted in starting over again. At least one project had to start over with all new contractors, but others also reported that dysfunctional contractors caused major realignment of responsibilities with the concomitant loss of productivity in the form of services to youths.

Respondents offered solutions less drastic than reorganizing; chief among these was to set up performance-based contracts that imposed a system of accountability tied to contract payments. Performance-based contracts are more exacting to write but have the advantage of creating a measure of performance, usually in the form of service units or placement outcomes. Contractors who could not perform by these criteria were not paid, or their contracts were cancelled.

Other solutions led to improvements to the youth-serving network. Standardized forms, individual referral systems, interagency case management databases, and better coordination among agencies were the direct result of the difficulties YO project managers encountered when managing a large number of diverse contractors.

Finding Qualified Line Staff

Acquiring enough qualified staff—people who worked directly with the youths as case managers, job developers, etc.—was the most frequently cited management challenge for YO projects. Although youth programs were not new to the administrators, YO's model, particularly the youth development framework, was new. The size of the projects, the demands of the MIS, and the variety of contractors' staff who had to follow common procedures further complicated the implementation of a system of youth development.

Implementing many of the youth development services, such as life skills training, community services, recreation, alumni groups, peer mentoring, and support groups, was a particular challenge. Understanding these terms was also a challenge. An even greater one was learning how to implement them as a holistic strategy of youth development.

The tension that generated many of the complaints about the qualifications of staff came from the belief initially that line staff who shared common cultures with the youths could relate better to them. Although this was found to be a good hiring principle during the project's recruitment activities, staff hired on this basis were less likely to have professional training or college educations that would support their role as youth development specialists.

Project administrators addressed the staff's inability to coordinate or deliver youth development services in several ways:

- Training options were developed. Chief among these was the Youth Practitioner training, which was developed by Baltimore and was reported to be adopted by other projects. Other projects also invested resources in developing structured in-house training programs for line staff or made special efforts to institutionalize professional development of their staff.

- Projects hired new staff with college degrees, both to gain better general educations to build on and to provide youths with role models.

- Projects reorganized internally to create specialties that would take advantage of the relative strengths of the qualifications of line staff.

Generally however, hiring with more emphasis on qualifications relevant to youth development activities was the universal recommendation.

Launching the Project

Launching the project within the 6-month time period set by ETA was cited as a major problem by 6 projects but referenced by all of them as a factor contributing to other problems. Besides the unfamiliar aspects of the project, the large number of contractors to accommodate, and the sheer size of the project, three of the projects also had complaints about starting the project without a well-articulated and functioning MIS in place. The struggle to catch up and get data into the system two years later was cited as a major problem that took time away from services to youths.

Other start-up problems were related to setting up physical plants for YO centers. Negotiating leases and making repairs and improvements could not be done in less than a year in many cases. Just finding suitable locations within the communities took time; then, many of the projects had to go through a lengthy process to enter into leases before contractors could renovate buildings. To accomplish this within six months even once was a challenge, but most projects needed multiple centers. Once leases were signed, projects were committed to make the best of deals negotiated under a lot of pressure. Therefore, one recommendation was to provide more time to secure space before recruitment, not during recruitment.

Dealing with Leadership Issues

Leadership issues include all the management challenges and problems, such as those that resulted directly from a Workforce Investment Board (WIB) serving as grantee. Six of the projects claimed that one of their most serious management challenges was dealing with the WIB. In some cases, the problem stemmed from a general lack of support for the project, either because of the model, DOL's policies, or lack of sympathy with the target group. Clearly, some grantees were reluctant hosts of YO projects.

Other complaints stemmed from the bureaucratic processes instituted by the grantee, which limited the project staff's autonomy to make purchases, hire staff, enter into contracts, or make decisions in the day-to-day operations of the programs. One project reported that the solution

was to hire two project directors. One traveled around and represented the project to the grantee, and the second actually ran the program.

Here are other leadership issues:

- **Lack of accountability**—Some projects suffered because their leadership did not institute a system that made staff and contractors accountable for their actions. One site addressed that issue by instituting a computer-based case management system that was tied to the MIS. The staff's caseloads were monitored regularly to evaluate progress and identify problems. Other projects used performance-based contracting to address accountability among contractors.

- **Disorganized and decentralized operations**—Some projects were so fragmented that YO was more like a funding source for individual contractors. This led to inconsistent treatment of youths and to services that were duplicated in some neighborhoods and not available in others. Changing leadership corrected this issue, usually by finding a more effective administrator or project manager.

- **Instability in leadership**—Many projects experienced high turnover in upper management. Very few projects kept the same managers throughout the 5-year period. In many instances, these changes were due to complaints about the project management's leadership of the project and ability to manage a large operation like YO. Unfortunately, changing project directors did not always lead to improvements. Some projects had a high turnover rate of directors with each change creating instability and loss of momentum.

Here are some of the management practices that the current managers recommend:

- Empower the staff so that they can use their creativity to solve problems and help youths.

- Include line staff in strategy meetings; after all, they are experts on what is going on in the field.

- Give project directors enough autonomy to run the project. Every decision should not have to be reviewed by the grantee.

- Make use of middle management to supervise. The project director cannot personally supervise numerous staff, so avoid flat organizational structures if the span of control is strained.

- Encourage multitasking and cross-training so that staff can serve in several capacities.

- Be consistent and objective by using performance criteria to judge staff and contractors.

Role of Technical Assistance in Successful Implementation of the Model

DOL furnished most of the technical assistance for implementing the model, but projects engaged consultants on their own and also provided technical assistance to each other. The evaluation focused on the technical assistance provided by DOL. Respondents for these discussions were groups of managers or administrators.

DOL technical assistance typically fell into seven categories:

- National conferences where topical subjects were presented and discussed

- Coaches who were subject matter experts on the model or on youth programs and worked one-on-one with assigned projects

- Peer-to-peer exchanges

- Regularly scheduled conference calls among project managers

- Written products that provide guidance on various topics

- Several Leadership Institutes to provide training to front-line staff and directors. These training seminars were led by subject-matter experts and dealt with specific content and objectives (for example, case management training)

- On-site technical assistance visits to deal with a site-specific problem, (for example, MIS technical support)

- Eight quarterly site directors meetings, typically held at a project site

Respondents were asked what types of technical assistance they had received and which was most helpful or least helpful. They were also asked for their suggestions for improvements or areas where there were unmet needs for assistance.

Over the course of five years, nearly all of the projects had received all types of technical assistance; therefore, their opinions about which types were most or least helpful are meaningful. Note that during the course of the 5-year period, project managers changed as technical assistance changed. It is possible that the more recently provided technical assistance is biasing respondents' opinions.

The following summaries of the opinions of project administrators describe the type of assistance and how it was rated collectively. The summaries synthesize feedback that represents the prevailing viewpoint. Following the summaries, we present suggestions for improvements that are *not* representative of the group.

Reactions to Types of Technical Assistance. By far, the overwhelming type of technical assistance preferred by the respondents and deemed the most helpful was peer-to-peer exchanges. Project administrators felt that their peers offered concrete examples and advice that were immediately relevant to their situations because they shared common challenges. Some of the peer-to-peer exchanges were set up by DOL or occurred as a by-product of national conferences. However, many were informally set up without DOL's help.

The exchanges included telephone conferences, visits to each other's sites, and sharing materials and written products. One example of peer-to-peer exchanges is that Baltimore made its staff-training program available to other projects.

The second most helpful form of technical assistance was the coach. However, the value of this form of technical assistance was based on the attributes of the individual who assumed the role of coach. Most of the coaches received high marks from the projects; others were not only considered ineffective, but some were also disliked. Judging the merit of complaints about coaches is beyond the scope of the evaluation, but clearly, not all coaches worked well with all projects. The absence of any specific complaint about expertise suggests that the personality of the coach, along with expertise, is a factor in how effective coaches are in providing technical assistance.

National conferences also received mixed reviews. Some thought the conferences were helpful, but no one ranked them as their most preferred type of technical assistance. A general complaint heard from several projects is that the national conferences were geared for urban projects and were not relevant to rural and Native American projects. A small but significant number of respondents thought the national conferences were a waste of time and tax money. The expense associated with trips to costly venues was repeatedly cited as a complaint. Also, the time away from work to attend a conference made it inaccessible to all but a small number of staff.

Also getting mixed reviews, with as many liking it as disliking it, was the subject-specific training. Some complained that the training was not relevant to real-life situations, while others thought the training—particularly the YO Practitioner's Institute, whose seminars mimicked college courses—were very useful.

Scheduled conference calls were helpful but were limited by time and the nature of the medium. On-site visits from federal staff or contractors generally received good reviews but did not seem to occur that often. These visits seemed to be focused mostly on MIS or federal requirements, and the early visits—Year 1 and 2—were not as well received as later visits. Some projects had high praise for their respective federal project officers and their technical assistance.

The least helpful type of technical assistance was written guidance.

Suggestions for Improving Technical Assistance. All projects believed that technical assistance was important and that they needed more than they received, particularly at the onset of the project. In hindsight, they thought that many of the problems that they had could have been averted if more technical assistance was available during the start-up period. Beyond more opportunities for peer-to-peer technical assistance, the respondents offered the following suggestions for improvements.

These topics needed more coverage:

- Definitions of terms specific to the YO grants
- MIS data entry and documentation of data systems
- Performance measures
- DOL expectations for the projects
- Individual service strategy (ISS)
- Organizing grant start-up
- Strategies for sustaining projects

Tactical suggestions for technical assistance were also mentioned. The most pervasive was finding ways for training to filter down from the few people who can travel to contractors and staff who are most likely to apply the training. Training off-site is not practical for most staff, especially those employed by contractors. Respondents recommended sending a trainer to the project and conducting training on site.

Respondents felt that national conferences would be better if they were not gripe sessions and were more sensitive to the variety of cultures represented by the projects. Special activities or exercises should not exclude people from rural environments, nor should examples always reflect urban settings.

Coaches should be schooled on ways to avoid conflict of interest or the appearance of such when they are working with different factions within a project. Also, the practice of first providing coaches at no cost to the project and then leaving it up to the projects to continue coaches' services at project expense was awkward. Whether or not to hire the former coach was a very sensitive area for projects.

Operating YO Centers

Except for grantees that had operated similar projects in the past, all respondents thought that locating appropriate physical plants to serve as YO centers was a challenge. OMB requirements rule out building or buying facilities, so each grantee had to find a building or space to lease that was located in or very near the community being served. Because the communities were, by definition, areas impoverished with limited infrastructure, finding a building that was safe and adequate in size and physical properties to accommodate both recreation and youth development activities was difficult. Each of the projects that did not already have YO centers as a result of operating the YO progenitor projects had to find novel ways to address this program requirement. Their solutions reflected the unique character of their community resources, which made the YO centers the most distinguishing feature of the model among the projects. Problems, solutions, and best practices seemed to fall into four categories:

- Acquiring appropriate physical facilities
- Linking multiple centers
- Balancing multiple purposes of centers
- Gaining support for centers from the community

Acquiring Appropriate Physical Facilities

Six of the projects said that simply finding a physical plant to house YO activities in their respective target areas was a major challenge complicated by the pressure to get the centers operational as soon as possible because the YO centers played a major role in recruiting youths. Landlords took advantage of them by charging higher rents. Many times, they made choices that they later regretted when they found better facilities.

One of the delays and sources of frustration was the bureaucratic process associated with entering into a lease and hiring building contractors. Both of these major tasks were controlled by bureaucratic procedures. In addition, project staff lacked expertise in negotiating with

landlords or supervising the rehabilitation of buildings. They had to learn about fire and building inspections, building codes, and other technical issues that caught them by surprise.

Another challenge to finding appropriate space for YO centers was making sure that the centers were accessible to youths. Where gangs were in control of some neighborhoods, only that gang's members could get to the YO center. Some potential center locations were not convenient to public transportation or were surrounded by freeways that effectively cut them off from foot-traffic.

Several solutions were proposed:

- Allow more time for setting up YO centers.

- Hire someone with expertise in setting up a physical plant who can negotiate leases that protect the project's interests. Don't try to accomplish this with the typical skills of a well-meaning project director.

- Share space with other youth-serving organizations, such as Boys and Girls Clubs, the YMCA, and charter schools. Projects enjoyed better recreation facilities and also saved money either because the space was donated or was shared at low cost. However, this solution also had drawbacks, one of which was a certain loss of independence. YO center hours were constrained by the other organizations' own policies and needs, as was the centers' need to configure space to fit YO youth development activities. But the greatest drawback to sharing space is the loss of YO identity. "If you want to do your own thing and create a presence in the community in your own name, you need space that is clearly identified as YO space."

Linking Multiple Centers

Most YO projects operated more than one center in response to accessibility issues and also because it was difficult to find a facility that was large enough to house all YO youth activities. Multiple centers created their own challenges because project staff tried to keep core services consistent across centers and coordinate youth activities across centers. The tracking issues were more a matter of coordination of staff who usually worked under a center supervisor. Coordinating staff at different off-site locations taxed some of the project directors, who could not personally observe how these staff were functioning.

One solution was to hold joint staff meetings and training sessions, making sure that some staff from each center attended each session. That way, each center got the same information.

Other projects found that operating multiple centers provided opportunities to share the unique assets of each center. Some centers might have space for classrooms while another had space for recreation or other benefits. Projects that operated multiple centers could expand their range of youth-development activities by having a greater variety of facilities to draw on. Projects that seemed to take advantage of the diverse features of multiple centers usually had their own vehicles to shuttle youths from one center to another. One project maximized the unique features of multiple centers by letting centers specialize. Youths could move among centers to take

advantage of a variety of special activities. For example, one center offered training in mapping and urban planning, while another center specialized in theatrical and musical activities.

Balancing Multiple Purposes of Centers

Although YO centers were intended to provide youth-friendly space, they were also the best place for staff, particularly case managers, to counsel youths and supervise their recreation. Consequently, centers were logical places to house staff's offices and their supervisors. Some centers were used more for staff and administrative space than for youth activities later in the project when cost-cutting required greater consolidation of space and when a project tried to extend the terms of the grant for another year. No one came up with a solution for balancing staff space with youths' recreational activities, but staff felt that being housed in the same space helped them to get to know youths in their case loads and better serve program participants.

Even without consideration for staff needs for space, most projects reported that mixing recreational activities with the more serious academic and training activities was a challenge for the YO centers. To make the centers youth friendly, staff created centers where youths could feel at home, socialize, watch TV, play music, hang out, and enjoy various recreational interests. The atmosphere needed to be relaxed to maintain the proper ambience of a recreational center. On the other hand, academic classes, JRT, tutoring, and other activities located at the center called for a different atmosphere, more discipline, and acceptance of authority in the form of a teacher or staff person. Switching from one to the other proved a challenge at the centers.

One center color-coded its rooms for recreation, education, and training. Certain colors called for a demeanor that was appropriate for the activities represented by the color. For instance, youths could be loud, play their boom boxes, and flirt in the green room, which was the lounge area, but in the blue room, which was the GED classroom, youths had to be quiet, stop playing around, and turn off the radio. Another project solved the problem by designating certain areas of the center for recreation and other areas for education or training. Each had its own entrance.

Most projects' YO centers did not accommodate ISY very well, but where they did, they found that there were also problems mixing ISY with OSY at the centers. ISY tended to be younger than OSY. Their mere presence at the YO center was a turnoff for the older OSY, who did not want to associate with youngsters. Balancing the ends of the spectrum of age groups worked only when major events or activities were scheduled at different times. For example, OSY would have their classes or recreational periods before 3:00, when ISY would arrive after school. Then, both groups would take part in individual mentoring, tutoring, or support groups, where there were common needs or interests.

Gaining Support for Centers from the Community

Some of the respondents spoke to the difficulties of gaining support of contractors and community residents. Some contractors did not want to operate their services in the center, rather than in their own facilities. One respondent advised that contractors should not be forced to provide services at the center—they will resent it, and it will damage the relationship. Other respondents spoke to the value of having community support for the center. YO centers should be viewed as assets in the community. When they are not well maintained or when youths create public disturbances (for example, throw trash on the sidewalks or harass passers-by), the centers

become unwelcome in the community. The loss of community support also occurs when YO does not deliver what it promises to the community. Perceived failure of the program can cause communities to disparage the center and withdraw their support.

Examples of that support take many forms. First, community residents encourage their children and neighbors to join YO and are a good source of new recruits. Second, they will also volunteer their time as mentors, tutors, coaches, or chaperones for YO activities. Many community residents supervised community service projects or connected YO to their churches or clubs. In some cases, community residents helped with fundraisers.

Respondents gave the following advice for getting community support:

- Have staff attend community events and meetings of community organizations to raise public awareness of YO.

- Let YO centers be used by community organizations for their meetings.

Designing Services around Youth Development Framework

A youth-development framework in the context of YO includes comprehensive services that not only address education and employment issues of disadvantaged youths, but also target personal development in leadership and social skills generally. Many of the youth-development services prescribed in the YO model are the means for achieving youths' full potential as citizens and self-actualized adults. Services such as mentoring, life-skills training, community services, support groups, and cultural activities are included in this objective.

The managers interviewed on this topic shared a common position on the youth-development framework. They believed that this aspect of the YO model suffered from the lack of good examples for connecting youth-development services with the more traditional education and employment-related services to achieve a holistic approach to youth development. Neither staff nor contractors understood the concept, which motivated intensive staff training at a number of sites. Contractors also found it hard to shift to a vision for youth development that differed from their standard practices. Consequently, it was common for youth-development services to occur independently of one another.

Part of the problem was that the holistic approach was a new concept, but even as the concept became better understood, few projects believed that they achieved the lofty goals of helping youths develop leadership or reach their full potential. The more urgent needs of youths, particularly OSY, were constant distractions to youth-development goals. The chief complaint with the youth-development framework was that it did not address the need for supportive services or subsistence needs, leaving the projects to create a means for meeting the almost universal physical needs of youths who were homeless, hungry, or desperate. Some projects met these needs with cash payments as incentives for school attendance or found short-term jobs or internships for youths, which, in turn, made these youth-development services less developmental and more a source of financial assistance. The need for immediate employment short-circuited the long-term education or training placements that may have better served youths' long-term needs.

Another complaint was that the youth-development framework required a YO center or a physical facility as well as a well-trained staff. Both were difficult to come by.

Facilitating Educational Attainments

All projects had the educational goals of helping youths graduate from high school, pass the test for their GED, or qualify for admission to a postsecondary school; however, the low academic skills of so many youths tested the projects' capacities and underscored the deficiencies in traditional approaches to education. The most common difficulty was to get OSY a GED when youths were testing below sixth-grade levels and, in many instances, were barely literate. The time required to move youths from such low academic levels to a GED created challenges for keeping youths motivated long enough to accomplish anything. Projects also realized that OSY had many barriers to passing the GED that traditional adult programs were not able to address. The following solutions were tried and seemed to be best practices for improving traditional methods of teaching disadvantaged youths:

- Staff were given literacy training so that they could help teachers in the classrooms.

- Staff were located with classrooms so that they could observe and be in a better position to assist youths with tutors, reinforce attendance, and work on behavior problems. In many instances, GED and literacy classes were brought in-house and operated at the YO centers.

- Academic assessments were improved and better linked to instructional materials.

- Cohort classes were used so that youths of similar academic levels could encourage each other.

- Instructors were hired who could relate to youths and be flexible without losing control over the classroom structure.

- Classrooms were organized around skill levels of youths rather than having youths of all levels mixed in one classroom.

Many of the projects spoke highly of the public school systems' credit-recovery programs. A credit-recovery program allows a high school student to take only those classes that he or she needs credit in, as opposed to repeating the entire grade. Several projects were active in either expanding or introducing credit recovery programs. Both OSY and ISY were eligible for credit recovery programs. ISY went to summer school to make up failed courses, while OSY attended special classes set up by the school system for this purpose. Credit-recovery programs greatly reduced the time required for OSY to complete work for a high-school diploma when they were missing only some credits.

Intensive case management was also a factor in getting both ISY and OSY through high school or a GED program. Most project administrators said that case management and good instructors were essential. One of the reasons for the trend to move GED and literacy classes in-house was to have more control over selection of instructors and case-management services.

Another suggestion for improving basic education classes was the use of interim goals. One project observed that barely literate youths were enthusiastic learners at the onset because they were learning to read well enough to function more effectively. They didn't feel so dumb. But moving from literacy—about the sixth-grade level—to a GED, had no interim rewards, causing youths to dropout and lose interest. To maintain motivation during this lengthy interval, some projects offered reinforcements in the form of financial incentives or more desirable jobs.

One project launched contextual learning programs with the support of local businesses. Both ISY and OSY were eligible for three levels of training. The first level was a general orientation that included life skills, customer service, and computer literacy. The second level was industry-specific training, which included general education and short-term occupational training. The third level was transitional jobs, in which OJT was combined with classroom instruction under a business partner's supervision. Other services, including remediation and GED preparation, were integrated with the occupational training. Stipends equal to the minimum wage were paid for attendance. The combination of financial support and connection to meaningful jobs in nine different occupational areas provided the motivation needed for disadvantaged youths to achieve high levels of educational attainment.

Some instructors expressed the belief that some youths would never achieve a GED or finish high school. Those youths suffered learning disabilities or had other mental disorders that the project could neither address nor find community resources for. One project included testing for youths with learning disabilities or special needs and found more learning-disabled youths than could be served in the community.

Maximizing Geographic Saturation

Generally, most projects felt that they had succeeded well in reaching eligible youths in their respective communities. Two challenges were cited by several projects. The first was that the Empowerment Zone (EZ) boundaries that frequently defined the high-poverty areas that could be served dissected the community and made a determination of who was eligible difficult and seemingly arbitrary. This created ill will among community residents and confusion during intake. In some instances, EZ boundaries eliminated most of the youths in the community.

The second challenge was that different gang turfs divided the EZ. One project saw it as a serious impediment to recruitment, while several others found it to be an issue that could be overcome with good community relations.

Community awareness and good public relations were considered to be the best approach to maximizing geographic saturation. Although door-to-door recruiting was the most common method of successful recruitment, many projects believed that creating a presence in the community was just as important. One project accomplished this by making contact with as many people as possible in the community during the recruitment period and later by organizing a youth choir and other theatrical performances. Another held special events that resembled block parties where community residents were invited. The employment of satellite YO centers were, in part, a tool for community awareness and for making YO program services more accessible.

The following lessons were learned about door-to-door recruiting:

- Recruit in pairs to assure safety.
- Youths can more easily recruit other youths.
- Youths may move around, so give them information they can carry easily with them and are likely to keep, such as key chains or pens.

Facilitating Job Placements and Quality Jobs

Only one project had a systematic approach to facilitating job placements that represented quality jobs. This project was located in an area of low unemployment, where employers were competing for available skilled workers. The project also had the support of the WIB and local elected officials. YO youths' education programs were linked to industry-specific training and transitional jobs; thus, youths were highly motivated to matriculate through the various phases of training in this well-publicized job-training program.

This was not the case with other projects, which experienced varying levels of success in finding youths jobs. Projects addressed the following common challenges in different ways:

- Establishing good employer relations
- Providing good JRT
- Screening youths to reduce risk of failure on a job
- Getting youths to jobs outside their communities

Establishing Good Employer Relations

All of the projects recognized that placing disadvantaged youths in jobs would require direct access to employers, which would come only if the project established relationships with employers. Youths on their own or with nominal assistance of One-stop centers are not competitive enough to secure employment. Most projects relied on job developers whose primary function was to establish those relationships and market YO youths directly to employers. In most cases, the primary service provided to employers was careful screening of the job candidate, but projects found that it also helped to offer employers free labor (an internship), tax breaks, or public recognition as incentives to open doors to YO youths. A few projects organized collaborations with employers, in which businesses were considered partners whose input and support influenced how services, particularly training, were provided.

Projects learned that assigning job developers to a specific industry was an effective best practice. Job developers learned enough about the industry to understand the occupations involved and the work habits needed for success while establishing personal relationships with businesses in that industry.

Providing Job Readiness Training

JRT was a core activity for every project, indicating that all projects believed JRT to be essential to helping all youths, even college-bound youths, to acquire basic survival skills for getting and keeping jobs. Project staff believed that the inexperience of all youths required that they be given JRT, regardless of their long-term placement goals. Many of the JRT services included skills

needed to conduct individual job searches, write resumes, and hold interviews with prospective employers. Most of the projects changed their JRT over time, usually by enriching and lengthening the training. Holding job fairs was one innovative type of JRT, but the fairs included only employers who had immediate job openings. Eligible youths applied during the fairs, and staff got feedback from employers, which enabled them to fine-tune their JRT programs.

Screening Youths

All projects cited the importance of screening youths carefully before referring them to an employer. Employers had little patience with job candidates who were not appropriate referrals and, worse yet, damaged equipment or customer relations. The all-important relationship nurtured by job developers was easily lost if many referrals did not work out.

The following screening methods were considered best practices:

- Mock interviews
- Drug tests
- Testing for adequate basic academic skills
- Time in a work experience situation that would permit observations of general work ethic and work habits

Work habits were the hardest attribute to measure because there is no particular test for them. Projects believed that one of the best uses of internships was to create places where more forgiving work-place supervisors would coach youths and work closely with case managers to identify and correct behavior problems. In some cases, projects used community-service projects or created jobs around the YO center for this purpose.

Some projects placed candidates referred by their case managers into special internships while awaiting short-term job placements by a job developer. This was viewed as a transition period, during which youths were being screened. For more employable youths, short-term unsubsidized jobs were used for screening. Some youths might go through both an internship and a short-term placement before being considered ready for a long-term placement.

Getting Youth to Jobs

Generally, most jobs available to youths were located outside their immediate neighborhoods and the EZ. Youths had to learn how to commute to unfamiliar places in the city and use public transportation. Staff helped youths, usually on a case-by-case basis, find rides with other employees and use subways and buses. Projects usually offered to pay for public transportation until youths were established in their jobs and had received their first paycheck.

Three projects reported transportation problems that could not be relieved by these methods. One was an urban center whose jobs were in the suburbs. This project worked with employers to start youths in city jobs at an entry level and as they grew in skills and confidence, the youths would be transferred to better paying jobs in the suburbs. At that point, they could afford transportation to the job.

The closest source of jobs for two rural projects was in distant cities. These projects invested in education and training placements that prepared youths to be competitive in these job markets.

Maximizing Long-Term Engagements

Keeping youths engaged over the long term was one of the most difficult elements of the model to accomplish, and no project believed that they did well in this regard. Respondents cited several challenges. First, the pressure to enroll youths before the project was fully operational resulted in youths who were technically enrolled but never received any services and never established a connection with the project. Most methods for long-term engagements relied on some connection, a relationship with staff or other participants, interest in recreation or other services, etc. Long-term engagement depends on some link with the project.

Second, YO youths, particularly OSY, are very mobile. They move around, changing addresses and telephone numbers so that it is difficult to maintain contact if they have no reason to return to the YO center.

These challenges necessitate that projects keep youths engaged by building relationships and offering them reasons to come to the YO centers. Most projects regularly contacted youths who were either inactive or in long-term placements. Some projects held special events designed to recognize the achievements of those in long-term placements or just bring youths back to the center for a party. YO centers sometimes used recreational activities as inducements to keep youths who were still in the neighborhood in contact with the project.

Generally, youths who do not want or need services disengage, and staff have little control over that. One exception was a project that was so closely identified with the community that the YO centers and staff were community institutions. Even youths who were not receiving services visited the centers from time to time.

Creating Effective Links and Partnerships to Leverage Resources

The topic of effective links with partners to leverage resources evoked heated discussions. There were strong feelings among project administrators that the greater the size of the grant, the more problems in finding partners who are willing to *contribute* resources. Potential partners viewed YO as a valued funding opportunity for their organization rather than an opportunity to invest their resources. At times, this engendered competition between potential partners for YO funds and generated ill will and contention that troubled projects throughout the grant period. One respondent wished that the grant amount could be kept quiet so that there would be less pressure on the grantee to arbitrate among the multitude of community organizations.

The general consensus is that partners must receive some intrinsic benefit, not just a monetary benefit, for the partnership to hold up. This benefit also reduces the competition for grant funding to those organizations who are able and willing to make a contribution.

Limiting partners to a manageable number was another lesson learned. Respondents found that the difficulty of getting partners on the same page whether it related to youth development or the MIS increased as the number of organizations increased.

Chapter 7. Implementation of the YO Model: Conclusions

The previous chapters reviewed findings on various aspects of the YO model's implementation. This chapter interprets these findings to address the primary purpose of the process evaluation—to learn how well the YO model was implemented and to what end—by answering the following questions.

- To what extent did the grantees successfully implement the YO model?

- What was accomplished by the implemented model?

- What were the strengths and weaknesses of the model as a means of achieving human capitol outcomes and social outcomes?

Answering these questions calls for some interpretation of the data to draw conclusions about the meaning of trends and patterns reflected in the synthesis of study findings.

Success of YO Projects in Implementing the Model

To implement the model, projects must have the following five elements fully operational and integrated:

- Target area saturation
- Long-term engagement of youths
- YO centers
- Services based on a youth-development framework
- Partnerships and leveraging to extend grant resources

Although it took some projects longer than others and most needed two years to have all elements of the model in place, all of the 25 projects implemented the model at some point in the 5-year grant period. The initial delays in getting the model operational seemed due to confusion about the model or managing the start-up of YO centers.

Neither the characteristics of youths nor community context seemed to be critical variables in how well the model was implemented. Generally, the views of project staff about the needs and challenges of youths served were consistent across sites; and, even when community context varied in terms of resources, labor market demand, urbanity, or community ethnographic features, community context had no discernable effects on how well the model was implemented.

The only factor that appears to be consistently associated with successful implementation of the model was management expertise and grantee support. By far the most critical element to the successful implementation of the YO model was project leadership. Experienced, innovative managers were the ones who grasped the concept of the YO model early and could find solutions to the many administrative issues that arose in its implementation. Management expertise and leadership, more than any other single factor, including community context, determined the course of the implementation.

Management expertise and leadership were particularly critical to:

- Understanding the model and training staff and contractors on the elements of the YO model

- Managing large numbers of contractors

- Coordinating youth development services

- Setting up YO centers

- Mastering the MIS

- Finding solutions to youths' low academic skills

- Maintaining a consistent and objective system of accountability for staff and contractors

- Creating stability that allows sufficient time for the grantee to master the operational intricacies of the model

- Gaining the support of the community to extend grant resources

The sections that follow look at the projects' relative success in implementing the five elements of the model and the role technical assistance played.

Relative Success with Various Elements of the Model

The YO model comprises divergent elements, each of which represents a unique combination of services and activities and presents different challenges. Each element is discussed in this section to better understand the implementation issues for the YO model.

Saturation. The element of the model easiest to implement was saturation. Outreach and recruitment are familiar services that most grantees and youth-serving organizations could perform.

Generally, projects achieved high penetration levels limited mostly by grant resources. According to *Youth Opportunity Grant Initiative: Management Information System Report,* the greater the grant funds were relative to the eligible population, the better the penetration rate. This report shows that when projects achieve an overall penetration rate of 39 percent, "YO grantees clearly succeeded in reaching an appreciable proportion of the eligible service population and, accordingly, could substantially affect the communities they served." [22] According to this report, the 25 projects studied for the process evaluation ranged between a penetration rate of 20 percent and 86 percent. Eleven of these projects fell below a penetration rate of 39 percent and six fell below the rate of 30 percent.[23] Therefore, of the 25 projects in the sample, 14 achieved a desirable level of penetration.

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[22] D'Amico, Ron *Youth Opportunity Grant Initiative: Management Information System Report.* U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, 2007.
[23] D'Amico, Ron *Youth Opportunity Grant Initiative: Management Information System Report.* U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, 2007.

Long-Term Engagement. The hardest element of the model to implement was long-term engagement. Youths who had no perceived need for services because they were either in long-term placements and doing well or had exhausted all the services that appealed to them, disengaged.[24] Youths connected with the program when it offered them a service or connection of value. That, rather than contacts from staff, largely determined the extent of their engagement. When the program connection was broken, in part because the youths did not want or need available services, the program could not keep them engaged. Engagement is, then, a 2-way transaction in which youths have control. Youths who left the programs demonstrated that they were not sufficiently motivated by program offerings to remain engaged or else no longer needed program assistance. This is not necessarily a negative indictment of the program. Youths who are successful in achieving their goals are unlikely to remain engaged.

YO Centers. A close second in difficulty to long-term engagement was setting up YO centers. This was due, in part, to factors beyond project management control, such as the availability of existing structures that would be suitable facilities for YO activities. The condition and cost of available facilities in the YO communities largely dictated how this element of the model would be implemented. YO centers were more directly reflective of the community context than any other element of the model.

YO centers frequently failed to succeed in achieving both a youth friendly, safe haven and adequate space for implementing youth development services, particularly recreation. Finding a physical plant with the combination of space that afforded classrooms, lounge areas, team sports, and staff offices was rare. But most programs were successful in establishing a definable community-based YO center that youths found attractive. Centers were not always accessible to all eligible youths; however, nearly all of the projects understood and implemented this element to the extent practical, given the community resources.

Youth Development Framework. Many projects had difficulty understanding and implementing the youth development framework. Some projects viewed the pursuit of youth development to be in competition with helping youths find jobs rather than a means to that end. They expressed their consternation that DOL started out emphasizing youth development and then switched to an emphasis on job placements.

Evaluation findings showed that nearly all projects in the study sample incorporated an array of youth development services in youths' individual service strategies (ISS); however, the services were seldom connected to provide the synergy for a system of holistic services. Youths were steered toward services that addressed the obvious needs of academic and job readiness, but youths selected most other services on the basis of their interests with no particular regard to a plan for youth development. The evaluation found little evidence that projects could articulate youth-development goals, objectives, or measures of success in achieving them beyond long-term placements. The concept of "youth development" was murky.

One example of the lack of this disconnection was the general absence of links among services to complement one another and achieve maximum benefits. Only a few of the 25 projects used a youth development service to advance more than one objective. For example, community

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[24] Youths who moved away, were incarcerated, or were otherwise not able to participate are excluded from this discussion.

service, which is used to build good citizenship, was also used by one project to assess youths' work habits and therefore supported JRT and placement activities. Another project blended life skills with occupational training to teach important social skills in a work context. These are rare examples of an integration of youth development services that achieves greater benefits when combined than when used independently.

A signal failure in the implementation of a youth development framework occurred in the case of addressing the needs of youths with low academic skills in the OS programs. Although nearly all projects cited this missing element as a major challenge, only a few projects created a youth development framework that addressed educational needs of OSY. Most projects had no strategy for mixing occupational training and other youth development services to help youths achieve employability without the requirement of high school or GED. Although successful models exist for assisting adults with educational limitations to achieve stable employment, none of these were in evidence except in one project that used contextual learning along with occupational training and work experience.

Generally, youths who were unlikely to achieve either a high-school diploma or GED were left in basic education classes until they dropped out or were placed in unskilled jobs. Of all the segments of youths served by YO, the OSY unable to master GED or high-school requirements were the segment that benefited the least from this element of the model.

In summary, the rather mechanical implementation of conventional services, largely dictated by youths' interests and implemented by disparate and independent contractors, failed to generate the momentum that moves youths to increasingly higher levels of ability or actualization that may signify "youth development." Nowhere did the evaluation find any examples of youth development objectives or measures beyond educational and employment gains. Respondents expressed confusion and uncertainty over the meaning and implementation of the concept of "youth development."

Partnerships and Leveraging. Partnerships and leveraging was another element that was not well understood at the onset of the implementation of the project. And, even if it was, the politics of distributing funds from the largest DOL grant in the community may have made the goal of establishing sustaining partnerships moot anyhow. In hindsight and as the grant concluded, nearly all of the projects knew the difference between a contractor and a partner. The partners were the organizations that made a contribution and realized some intrinsic value from the partnership. Contractors performed services for compensation and were unlikely to be part of a project sustainment plan. There were many contractors and few partners—too few to sustain much of YO. This element experienced mixed results where some programs benefited from leveraged resources and partnerships that extended YO's effectiveness. Other projects simply provided a valued funding source for a wide range of community youth-serving organizations.

YO's Accomplishments

Each YO project understood the importance of various long-term placements for youths. In this respect, the YO model pursued conventional benefits for individual participants in the form of permanent jobs and entry into long-term occupational training or education. Long-term placements, as measures of human capital outcomes, is one indication of successful implementation of the YO model.

At least 7 of the 25 projects planned to continue operating YO services beyond June 2005; therefore, the following data represent an incomplete picture of YO accomplishments.

As of June 2005, the 25 projects reviewed for this report had collectively:

- Served 67,710 youths
- Placed 14,880 youths into long-term jobs
- Returned 1,075 youths to high school and another 2,748 youths to an alternative high school
- Assisted 11,426 youths to graduate from high school and another 2,485 youths attain a GED
- Enabled 5,972 youths to enter a community college and 4,599 youths to enter a 4-year college

In addition, YO seemed to have had an impact on the youth-serving agencies in the target areas. Generally, YO communities saw noticeable improvements in the communication and coordination among youth-serving agencies and an increase in the professional skills of staff associated with the agencies—particularly line staff. The staff development resulted from the demands of the youth-development framework element of the model.

YO also demonstrated new methods for addressing the needs of disadvantaged youths and new models for programs. In some communities, community leaders became more aware of the needs of youths who are struggling with poverty, low academic skills, and unemployment. Most of the respondents felt that YO had a positive impact on youth-serving agencies in their respective communities.

YO projects will continue in at least two locations, and some parts of other projects will continue under the auspices of YO partners in 9 other projects.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the YO Model

In the "Success of YO Projects in Implementing the Model" section of this chapter, the process evaluation compared the YO model as a theoretical template to the actual operations to assess the extent to which the model and its various elements were implemented by the 25-project sample. The "YO's Accomplishments" section described the accomplishments of the projects in terms of human capital, expressed as long-term placements and educational attainments, and it described social capital, expressed as changes in the youth-serving agencies in the community. This section discusses what the process evaluation findings say about the model itself as a plan for achieving human and social capital outcomes.

Model Assumptions

Certain assumptions are implied in the structure of the model. The one assumption that is clearly challenged by the process evaluation findings is that low-income youths residing in high poverty communities have the personal resources needed to pursue lengthy engagements to be educated and trained. OSY, for the most part, do not.

The effects of lack-of-subsistence provisions in the youth-development framework are shown in the variances in human capital outcomes between ISY and OSY.[25] ISY, who were typically younger than OSY and were more likely attached to family that provided shelter, food, and basic needs, surpassed OSY in overall educational attainments and long-term education placements. Forty-five percent of ISY achieved measurable educational attainments and also enjoyed better retention rates in high school than did their counterparts who were not enrolled in YO. By contrast, only 28 percent of OSY achieved recognizable educational attainments. OSY expressed urgent needs for immediate employment to sustain themselves and their children. The youth development framework part of the model failed because it did not address the obvious subsistence needs of low income OSY.

Size and Scope of the Model

The size and scope of the model presented a number of challenges to the grantees. First, the saturation of the target area and long-term engagement of youths in a variety of services combine to mandate a massive project requiring large grants of federal funds. The YO grants had high visibility among resource-starved community organizations that saw the YO grant as a source of new funding for their respective organizations. Rather than being a force for cohesion, in most instances, the large grants inspired competition where procurement processes were unduly influenced by issues unrelated to effective implementation of grant programs. Contractors were more invested in their own survival than the goals of the project, and YO grantees struggled to coordinate and link opportunistic rivals.

Second, the scope of the grant called for 15 distinctive youth development services, many of which were unfamiliar to the grantees. These services represent 15 components of a comprehensive program that must be integrated into a cohesive strategy for both OSY and ISY. Coordinating these services into a meaningful individualized service plan for so many youths taxed the management skills of many grantees. The difficulties were exacerbated when outside contractors were engaged to provide the services comprising individualized service plans. Grantees found that even as they became more astute in providing services, written agreements with contractors constrained their flexibility to incorporate better methods into their service strategies. The coordination and management of service providers and getting proficient with unfamiliar services created inefficiencies. Over time, grantees were able to winnow out ineffective approaches and vendors and develop better contractor management and monitoring tools.

Another aspect of size and scope of the grant was the length of time for getting fully operational. Grant administrators reported feeling they had too much to master at one time. Even grantees who were experienced with earlier generations of YO projects expressed frustration with how long it took them to master the elements of the model and the MIS. Staff training was essential, yet staff were overwhelmed by implementing the program and recruiting youths to have time for training.   In retrospect, starting each project on a reduced scale for the first year may have allowed the grantees to test their ideas, fine-tune them and then expand the project to scale with greater efficiency and better results.

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[25] Other explanations for these differences are unrelated to program operations.

Value of Youth Development Framework to Social Outcomes

The youth-development framework, once understood by project administrators, made a major impact on youth-serving agencies by demonstrating models for holistic programs that address multiple aspects of youthful learning by combining a variety of services. The conventional approach focused on one or two facets of youths' needs, such as job training and basic academic skills. Youth-serving agencies saw the value of including recreation and activities that addressed citizenship and leadership development. This element of the model, more than any other, also called for greater coordination among organizations that could deliver a variety of services. This had the effect of bringing together organizations that had not served disadvantaged youths before or had not participated in programs with educational and employment objectives. More than any other element of the model, the youth-development framework influenced community youth-serving agencies.

Value of YO Centers to Human and Social Capital Outcomes

YO centers were a decided strength of the model, providing youths with safe, supportive havens; establishing a means for connecting with other youths; and creating community infrastructure. In some sites, YO centers were a source of community pride and generated social capital in the form of community cohesion and unity. Even where the implementation was flawed, YO centers were a positive influence on other services.

In terms of human capital outcomes, the centers gave the projects a physical presence in the community and sufficient space to experiment with improvements in education. Without the availability of accessible space, YO projects would have been held captive by educational institutions that could not or would not alter programs to meet the needs of OSY. Instead, YO centers gave projects the option of making basic education and GED more accessible to youths and easier to supervise. Bringing these important services in-house was a trend that led to more effective education programs for OSY in many cases and improved educational attainments.

Value of Partnerships and Leveraging to the Model

The benefits of partnerships and leveraging were diluted by the availability of so much money. Benefits tended to flow out rather than in. YO grantees found it hard to argue for contributions from partners when they had the largest grant in town. Where financial incentives were used to leverage future resources as a condition of the partnership, this element worked to sustain the project as an ongoing addition to community resources for youths. That element increased resources to the betterment of human capital goals while institutionalizing changes in partner's efforts to serve youths at the end of the grant.

Conclusions

The process evaluation of the YO grant initiative documented that most projects were able to implement the model after a protracted period of trial and error learning. Some difficulties in implementation were due to the sheer size and scope of the grant and to a compressed start-up period that exacerbated weaknesses in grantee management and infrastructure. One conclusion is that projects of this size and complexity require a start-up period of at least a year and that proceeding slowly and carefully until all infrastructure is in place will lead to better results and

cost efficiencies. Another recommendation was to concentrate technical assistance resources during the start-up period. Technical assistance needs fell into two categories:

- information to guide management on the concepts and administrative requirements endemic to the grant

- skills needed by line staff to deliver services in a new way

Although information sharing of the first sort can be done at large group meetings, line staff skill development must be done onsite and with practitioner leadership. This suggests a 2-tiered approach to technical assistance.

The model does not address two major barriers to successful outcomes for OSY—the lack of financial resources to sustain youths during a long-term engagement and educational programs that address the learning deficits typical of high-school dropouts. Although some projects were able to implement innovative educational programs that addressed these challenges for OSY, most relied on existing community educational resources that were not up to the task

Overall, YO projects were generally successful in achieving acceptable penetration levels of the eligible population to achieve saturation goals. They provided substantive services to numerous at-risk youths, while also expanding organizational capacity and sensitivity to youths' needs. YO demonstrated new and better models of service delivery, and trained managers and line staff to function at a greatly improved level of skill and professionalism. In particular, the concept of centers—physical places that "belong" to community youths—gave youths a positive form of visibility. The centers were physical manifestations of the communities' concerns for their youths. In some communities, these benefits will continue as sustainable elements of the YO initiative.