

Systems Change Through the Youth Strategies Grant: Fiscal Years 2001 & 2002

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I. Executive Summary

Overview of Project

Maryland is promoting systems change to improve the way in which prevention and youth programs are strategically planned, funded, and delivered. Last year Maryland embarked upon two distinct but related efforts. The first was aimed at developing and implementing a statewide prevention strategy. The second, the Youth Strategies Consolidated Grant, combined multiple funding streams to empower communities to coordinate services and programs for children and youth into a research-based, data-driven continuum of care.

The Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention (GOCCP) contracted with the University of Maryland's Center for Substance Abuse Research (CESAR) and the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice to evaluate both of these efforts. CESAR was tasked with evaluating systems change at the state and local levels. The University's Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice was asked to conduct an outcome evaluation of programs supported by the Youth Strategies Consolidated Grant and to produce a manual of effective, prevention-related, research-based programs.

This report is the first in a series in which CESAR will present findings from its evaluation of systems change at the state and local levels. Descriptive baseline data from FY 2001 and more current data from FY 2002 are the focus of this report.

We begin by describing the State prevention strategy and the Youth Strategies Consolidated Grant. Within each effort we will describe CESAR's first year evaluation activities, followed by key findings and conclusions.

The State Prevention Strategy

The State prevention strategy is overseen by the Maryland Partnership and the State Advisory Board for Juvenile Justice. An Executive Order signed by the Governor re-constituted the State Advisory Board on Juvenile Justice and established four standing committees. The Community Based Prevention, Early Intervention and Family Support committee was charged with overseeing the development of a prevention plan. Thus far, meetings have been convened for the purpose of having key State agencies develop and implement an interagency statewide prevention strategy. The overall vision for this statewide initiative is ensuring that children are healthy and safe in their families and communities. The strategy addresses sixteen areas of prevention, as measured by the target indicators of Maryland's Results for Child Well-Being.

Two questions regarding the State's strategy were initially addressed in CESAR's year-one evaluation:

1. *Did the State produce a comprehensive, interagency, statewide strategic plan for prevention?*
2. *Did the State implement that plan?*

In order to begin to answer these questions, CESAR conducted baseline interviews with representatives of eight State agencies¹ regarding the State system of prevention that existed in Fiscal Year 2001, prior to the initiation of the State prevention strategy. Supporting documentation was reviewed. In addition, CESAR observed all 20 State-level prevention meetings since July 2001 (Fiscal Year 2002) and documented the progress that was made toward crafting a State prevention strategy.

Key Findings from the Evaluation of the State Prevention Strategy

- In FY 2001:
 - None of the eight State agencies could name an existing comprehensive statewide prevention strategy covering multiple areas of prevention.
 - State agencies emphasized a few similar elements regarding their theoretical frameworks toward prevention (e.g., five agencies mentioned research-based programming, using a collaborative approach, and meeting community needs and/or having community involvement), but the impression was that there was no unifying prevention theory or definition across State agencies.
 - A measurement of the average frequency of State agency collaborations showed that informal collaborations, such as information sharing, were much more common than were more formal collaborations, such as the integration of prevention services.
 - Five of the eight agencies reported that federal or State prevention funds were not coordinated at all or only to a minor extent.
- Recommendations were developed and approved by the State Advisory Board of Juvenile Justice and the Maryland Partnership in December 2001 for developing a statewide prevention strategy.
- An implementation plan was developed in January 2002 with 63 action items. The major objectives are:
 1. To foster State and local prevention planning;
 2. To improve linkages concerning coordinated strategies and programs; and
 3. To create mechanisms to provide technical assistance and training to support Maryland's prevention delivery system.
- To date, the following activities in the implementation plan have been completed: 1) the creation and distribution of an inventory form to be used by State agencies to gather information on prevention programs, funding, and training; 2) the statewide use of a DJJ substance abuse and mental health screening tool; 3) the creation of a Blueprints manual that identifies proven research-based prevention program models and strategies; and 4) the scheduling of trainings by region for local youth strategies grant partners.

¹ State agencies refer to State cabinet level agencies, the Governor's offices, and units of these agencies. For the sake of brevity, the term agencies will be used in the report instead of agencies and agency units.

- Prevention staff resources at the State level are very limited. Seven of the eight State agencies have an average of only 3.4 full time equivalent staff devoted to prevention.

Key Conclusions from the Evaluation of the State Prevention Strategy

- There are a number of existing strengths to build on in order to develop a statewide prevention strategy. State agencies seem to be committed to prevention. Their informal collaborations have laid a foundation upon which to build more formal and expansive collaborations. Individual State agency theories on prevention share many important elements. There seems to be widespread encouragement of research-based programs.
- Agencies still need to arrive at a consensus on definitions of key terms such as prevention and research-based programs and on the degree to which they wish to require research-based programs.
- The prevention implementation plan timetable should be extended by the participating parties.
- The prevention committees should take measures to ensure and sustain the fullest participation and commitment of State agencies and other responsible parties.
- In the interest of creating an integrated comprehensive prevention plan and system, the scope of the prevention strategy should remain broad but manageable and should be coordinated with other existing prevention committees.

The Youth Strategies Consolidated Grant

The Youth Strategies Consolidated Grant effort began in 2001. GOCCP consolidated eight grants covering substance abuse and juvenile delinquency prevention, early intervention, and intervention, and community-based interventions for youths in the juvenile justice system into one grant. The purpose of this effort was to build local capacity to coordinate fragmented services and programs for children and youth into a research-based, data-driven continuum of care. Funding and oversight for the Youth Strategies Consolidated Grant are provided by the State Advisory Board on Juvenile Justice through GOCCP.

To apply for a Youth Strategies Consolidated Grants, Local Management Boards were mandated to collaborate with five local partners from various local child- and youth-serving public agencies. The mandated partners are: Prevention Coordinators, Safe and Drug Free Schools Coordinators, HotSpot Lead Coordinators, Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) Representatives, and Local Law Enforcement Representatives. These team members were expected to work together to plan for, support, and provide oversight for the local implementation of the grant.

Two major questions regarding the Youth Strategies Consolidated Grant were initially addressed in CESAR's year-one evaluation:

1. What impact did the Youth Strategies Consolidated Grant have on systems change at the local level? More specifically:

- *Were collaborations among agency partners strengthened?*
- *Were community stakeholders involved?*
- *Were agency partners thinking in terms of a coordinated continuum of youth services?*
- *Were services community-focused?*
- *Were services research-based?*
- *Was there adequate capacity to sustain change?*

2. What factors and activities encouraged and discouraged the systems change that occurred?

To begin to answer these questions, CESAR staff reviewed available documents, including the Guidance and Application Kit for the Youth Strategies Consolidated Grant. CESAR staff interviewed the 24 Local Management Board (LMB) directors and 122 mandated partners of the local planning committees.² These interviews collected baseline information about roles, collaborations, and training for the period prior to the Youth Strategies Consolidated Grant, Fiscal Year 2001. Interviewers also asked these respondents about their experiences and opinions regarding the planning stage in the latter half of 2001 that led to the writing of grant applications for the Youth Strategies Consolidated Grant. The LMB directors were asked additional questions to examine their history and capacity for local coordination and collaboration.

Following are key findings from the first year of the Youth Strategies Consolidated Grant research, followed by conclusions based on these findings.

Key Findings from the Evaluation of the Youth Strategies Consolidated Grant

The consolidation of the eight grants was accomplished, giving planning teams the opportunity to strategically plan across domains and to create a continuum of prevention and intervention services regarding youth substance abuse, delinquency, and juvenile justice. The remaining findings are divided into three categories: 1) the role of the LMBs; 2) the structure and function of the planning committees; and 3) attitudes regarding the use of research-based programs.

The Role of the LMBs

- In the past, 83% of the LMBs conducted comprehensive needs assessments and developed strategic plans.
- In most cases, LMB directors were familiar with mandated partners and did not have to form new relationships for the Youth Strategies Consolidated Grant.

² In the report, the term planning committee members refers to the LMB directors and mandated partners (Prevention Coordinators, Law Enforcement Representatives, Juvenile Justice Representatives, Safe and Drug Free School Coordinators, and HotSpots Lead Coordinators).

- Except for three counties that have considerably more staff, the LMBs had seven or fewer staff in FY 2001.

The Structure and Function of the Planning Committees

- All youth strategies planning committees conducted needs assessments.
- Virtually all youth strategies planning committees conducted resource assessments. Committee members described a resource assessment process in which partners were involved and a wide range of programs were examined. The assessments were usually done to identify gaps in services and to learn about target populations and existing effective programs. However, 62% of planning committee members also felt the refunding of programs was a key reason for conducting the resource assessment.
- Most youth strategies planning committees had full or nearly full agency partner participation.³ When a planning committee clearly lacked a partner, it tended to be either a HotSpot Coordinator or a Law Enforcement Representative. HotSpot Coordinators were also much more likely than other partners not to see a role for themselves on youth strategies planning committees in the future.
- Eighty-six to 89% of planning committee members felt the committees were at least fairly effective in selecting new programs to meet community needs, and were satisfied or very satisfied with the decision making process of the committees.
- The five most frequently mentioned benefits of the youth strategies planning process (n=132) were:
 - a broad representation of local public agencies in community planning (77%);
 - more research-based programs than before (69%);
 - greater local authority to integrate programs that affect the community (68%);
 - more money for programs (67%); and
 - a larger continuum of programs being funded than before (64%).
- The five most frequently mentioned barriers to the youth strategies planning process were:
 - not enough time to properly plan (70%) (3 months of planning time was given);
 - not enough community participation (48%);
 - not enough staff or financial resources to properly plan (47%);
 - limited expertise for designing research-based services (29%); and
 - limited expertise for designing so many new services (24%).
- Committee members received training in their own fields in FY 2001, but not much in areas outside of their fields of expertise.

³ Excluding five committees where data were ambiguous due to inconsistencies among partners.

Attitudes Regarding the Use of Research-based Programs

- Nearly two-thirds of the planning committee members felt the right amount of emphasis was placed on research-based programs, but almost 25% felt there was too much emphasis.
- Planning committee members saw benefits and disadvantages to research-based programs. The most commonly cited advantages were that:
 - research-based programs are proven, effective, or reliable programs with known outcomes (54%);
 - pre-designed models save time and energy from having to develop your own programs and, therefore, are convenient to use (32%); and
 - research-based programs are more justifiable and credible and might lead to more funding (24%).

The most commonly cited concerns about research-based programs were:

- suitability (43%);
- limitations to innovation (23%)
- expense (23%); and
- rigid implementation (19%).

Key Conclusions from the Evaluation of the Youth Strategies Consolidated Grant

- Local Management Boards are a good choice for the role of lead entities in the Youth Strategies Consolidated Grant initiative at the local level, since they have the authority and experience to do local planning, oversight, and coordination.
- HotSpot Coordinators and Law Enforcement Representatives should be persuaded to continue or begin their participation on youth strategies planning committees during the implementation phase of the grant.
- Community stakeholder input should be encouraged.
- Future planning efforts should give applicants more time to properly plan (the next cycle will have a 6-month planning process), should involve more community participation, should have more staff or financial resources, and should develop greater expertise for designing research-based services.
- Since Prevention Coordinators are important members of the planning committees, they should be encouraged to continue to provide input and guidance in spite of their initial dissatisfaction with the process.
- Further training would be useful in the following areas: the implementation of research-based programs, substance abuse prevention, delinquency prevention, juvenile justice issues, outcome evaluations, program monitoring, and in how to ensure the long-term commitment of committee members.

- The LMB staff need more training in substance abuse prevention, since it is a relatively new program area for them.
 - HotSpot Coordinators need training in research-based programs, substance abuse prevention, delinquency prevention, and juvenile justice.
 - The DJJ Representatives need training in areas other than juvenile justice.
 - All but the DJJ Representatives need training in juvenile justice issues.
 - All committee members would benefit from extra training in delinquency prevention.
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- To save on training costs, GOCCP should continue scheduling and paying for training on research-based programs that is open to all interested communities.
 - Properly designed and implemented program evaluations should be done whenever affordable and practicable for the proven, promising, and innovative programs being implemented through the Youth Strategies Consolidated Grant.
 - Future meetings and trainings should highlight the success and lessons learned of planning committees in implementing their research-based programs.

Summary

CESAR has completed its first year evaluations of the State prevention strategy effort and the Youth Strategies Consolidated Grant. For its evaluation of the State prevention strategy, CESAR conducted baseline interviews with representatives of eight State agencies or agency units, reviewed supporting documentation, and observed all 20 State-level prevention meetings since July 2001. For its evaluation of the Youth Strategies Consolidated Grant, CESAR staff interviewed the 24 LMB directors and 122 mandated partners of the local planning committees, and reviewed the Guidance and Application Kit.

The evaluation has documented substantial activity resulting from the State's prevention strategy effort. In the first year, State-level prevention committees formed by GOCCP and OCYF produced a prevention recommendations document, a prevention implementation plan, and have completed four activities from the implementation plan that will contribute to systems change. These activities are: 1) the creation and distribution of an inventory form to gather state agency information on prevention programs, funding, and training; 2) the statewide use of the DJJ substance abuse and mental health screening tool; 3) the creation of a Blueprints manual that identifies proven research-based prevention program models and strategies; and 4) the scheduling of regional training for local youth strategies grant partners.

The State has set up three prevention committees: the planning committee, the training and technical assistance committee, and the linkages committee. These committees reflect the three major goals of the implementation plan. These committees have been meeting since February 2002. Agency representation on the planning committees has steadily increased. Many child- and youth-serving State agencies serve on one or more of the committees. The committees are just beginning their accomplishments, and it is expected that they will continue to attain many

more systems change objectives in the years ahead. CESAR is documenting their progress toward the creation and implementation of this state prevention strategy.

Our evaluation found a strong need for a unifying theory or guidelines for prevention and for a consensus on definitions of prevention and research-based programs. Also, there is a need for more formal, and more frequent, agency collaborations and linkages, and increased coordination of prevention funding. In this context, the development of a statewide prevention strategy is a laudable goal to create a more integrated system.

The first-year evaluation documented substantial activity resulting from the Youth Strategies Consolidated Grant. The Local Management Boards were a good choice as lead agencies, since they have the authority and experience to do local planning, oversight, and coordination. The planning committees, composed of five mandated partners and the LMB staff, appeared to have fulfilled the basic objectives of the grant application planning process by including mandated partners and assessing needs and program resources. This collaborative and data-driven process is considered essential for strategic planning for a local continuum of services for youth. Partners were generally satisfied with the process and with their perceived effectiveness at selecting programs to meet community needs.

The evaluation found that some areas should be addressed in future planning efforts, including giving more time to applicants and encouraging more community participation. In fact, committees will be given six months for their next cycle of planning. Also, it was clear that some planning committee members were not convinced of the merits of research-based programs, which were strongly encouraged in the grant's application kit. Partners' training tended to be limited to their own areas of expertise. To increase the capacity of the planning committees and to ensure future sustainment of the grant's goals, training in other areas of expertise, and in the implementation of research-based programs, would be very useful.

During the implementation stage of the Youth Strategies Consolidated Grant over the next four and half years, CESAR will continue to document the activities, perceptions, and collaborations of the committee members to determine success in meeting grant goals.