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**The National
Association of Service
and Conservation
Corps' Welfare to
Work Project:
Identifying Promising
Practices**

Report

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Executive Summary

Background

Service and conservation corps (corps) are community-based organizations that provide youth with educational support and the opportunity to participate in community service activities in which they learn work skills. Most participating youth (corpsmembers) are economically disadvantaged youth between ages 16 and 25. Corps aim to achieve two primary goals: (1) meet local communities' needs for essential services, and (2) help the youth who participate to develop academic, job, and life skills that enable them to become productive members of their communities.

The National Association of Conservation Corps (NASCC) was formed in 1985 to help corps operate more effectively and thereby to better serve youth and communities. NASCC supports corps by providing them with information about promising practices and by providing them with access to an on-line database of relevant articles. NASCC also provides corps with training and technical assistance on a variety of issues, ranging from member retention and development, to staff development, to organizational sustainability. In addition, NASCC advocates for corps' interests at a national policy level.

NASCC and the Welfare to Work Project

From 1999 through 2003, NASCC obtained a Round #3 Welfare-to-Work competitive grant of approximately \$3.8 million from the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). DOL's Welfare-to-Work grant program was designed to serve individuals who receive Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), non-custodial parents and others who have characteristics associated with long-term welfare dependence obtain jobs. Programs funded were required to use a "work-first" strategy and to engage participants in employment-based activities throughout their tenure in transitional programs.¹

NASCC used this funding to run the Welfare to Work (WtW) Project, a program in which it worked with nine corps to provide TANF-eligible youth with service learning experiences that were geared to help them transition out of poverty and into employment.²

When selecting corps with which to co-apply for this funding, NASCC chose programs that served economically disadvantaged youth and either were interested in expanding their services to include TANF-eligible youth or were likely already to serve TANF-eligible youth. NASCC also chose corps that were relatively high functioning, because it believed that those corps would be able to develop targeted services quickly and thereby get the WtW project established at their sites as soon as they were awarded funding. Also, NASCC believed that these corps would be able to collect the data required by DOL. Corps that participated in the WtW project were: New Jersey Youth Corps of

¹ <http://wtw.doleta.gov/competitive>.

² NASCC and the corps applied for funding for the Welfare to Work Project in April 1999. They were awarded funding in September to begin program operations in October of 1999. The grant was slated to last for 30 months. However, NASCC requested and got a no-cost extension so that they could conduct adequate follow-up with corpsmembers. Accordingly, most sites were funded through September 2003.

Camden; the Ohio Civilian Conservation Corps of Cleveland and Columbus; the Dallas Youth Services Corps; New Jersey Youth Corps of Newark/ International Youth Organization; the New Jersey Youth Corps of Paterson; the Rocky Mountain Youth Corps in Taos, New Mexico; and the New Jersey Youth Corps of Vineland.

Seven of these sites participated in the WtW Project through the entire funding period (approximately four years). For reasons unrelated to the WtW Project, the entire Dallas Corps ceased operations in November 2001 and, accordingly, stopped operating under the grant. The Rocky Mountain Youth Corps dropped out of the Project nine months after Project inception because it was unable to enroll the targeted number of TANF-eligible corpsmembers.

Participating corps received approximately 75 percent of the DOL funding so that they could develop enhanced services and supports for TANF-eligible corpsmembers. NASCC used the remainder of the grant to provide participating corps with a variety of supports and services. Specifically, NASCC provided corps with training and technical assistance in supporting, placing and providing employment follow-up services to TANF-eligible individuals. (Over the course of the grant, NASCC held three conferences for participating sites in which speakers from nationally recognized welfare-to-work programs met with corps to discuss strategies for helping low-income individuals obtain and retain employment.) NASCC also served as an intermediary between the DOL and the participating corps. In this capacity, NASCC interpreted DOL's guidelines for the grant for corps, helped corps fulfill DOL's reporting requirements and developed reports for DOL and ensured that participating corps complied with DOL requirements. NASCC also developed information management systems at NASCC so that it could track all of the WtW corpsmembers. Finally, NASCC used a significant proportion of its budget to fund an Abt Associates assessment of the project and to produce a Guide for Practitioners who implemented similar programs that was co-authored by NASCC and Abt Associates.

In its proposal to DOL, NASCC corps established concrete performance outcome targets. Through the WtW Project, NASCC planned to enroll 300 TANF-eligible youths in corps programs and place 220 of them in unsubsidized employment after they completed the program. Ultimately, NASCC exceeded these targets, enrolling 446 TANF-eligible youths and placing 246 of them (a little over 55 percent) in unsubsidized employment.³

While all of the participating corps enrolled economically disadvantaged youth prior to their participation in the WtW Project, none had previously formally targeted TANF-eligible youth. After receiving WtW funding, they targeted this population and expanded the services they offered to better meet these youths' needs for employment and life supports. Specifically, each corps hired a job developer and expanded case management services. Corps also used DOL funding to provide expanded support services to TANF-eligible corpsmembers.

Rationale for this Study

NASCC is conducting this study to learn how best to develop and implement community service programs that facilitate the employment and post-placement support of TANF-eligible and other low-

³ Note that these totals are higher than those reported in Appendix B. This is because the totals reported in Appendix B do not include results for the two corps that dropped out of the program: Taos and Dallas.

income young adults. This study is not a traditional evaluation in that it is more concerned with identifying promising practices than with assessing the performance of specific welfare-to-work programs. By identifying promising practices and sharing them with corps across the country, NASCC will be able more effectively to support corps staff as they develop programs for low-income youth and will make an important contribution to the youth employment and development field.

In November 2002, NASCC contracted with Abt Associates, a nationally recognized public policy research firm, to conduct this “promising practices assessment.” This study addresses these three research questions:

1. How was the WtW Project implemented?
2. What were key WtW Project outcomes?
3. What are promising practices in helping economically disadvantaged youth to obtain academic, life, and job skills and to transition into employment?

Methodology

To address these research questions, Abt Associates engaged in several tasks. First, we conducted in-depth case studies of all seven corps that both completed the WtW Project and remained in operation through January 2003.⁴ Conducting these case studies entailed interviewing program staff and program participants, touring project sites, and reviewing key project documents. Abt Associates also interviewed NASCC’s President and Director of the Welfare to Work Project and conducted a focus group with Corps Program Directors at the NASCC Annual Meeting in February 2003. In addition, we reviewed data that NASCC and DOL collected regarding individual corps’ performance in the Project. (Specifically, we assessed outcome data that illustrated corps’ success in enrolling and placing WtW corpsmembers and in helping them to remain employed for at least six months.) Finally, we conducted a literature review regarding effective strategies for helping TANF-eligible youth advance their education and transition out of poverty and into employment.

Key Findings

Our research provided us with answers to each of the three research questions. Those findings are summarized below.

How Was the WtW Project Implemented?

Participating corps offered a similar range of standard services that comprised the basic program, specifically training in job, life and work skills, and an employment preparation and community service program in which corpsmembers learn work skills by participating in stipended service projects. Despite these similarities, however, certain aspects of key corps components differed among the sites. The most notable differences among participating corps were in the kinds of community service experiences they offered corpsmembers and the extent and quality of the partnerships they had established with other local service providers.

⁴ It was not possible for us to conduct site visits to the Dallas Youth Services Corps because it had ceased to exist. It did not make sense for us to visit the Rocky Mountain Youth Corps in Taos because it dropped out of the WtW Project.

The way in which the WtW Project was implemented was fairly similar across the sites. In its proposal for DOL funding, NASCC stipulated that each corps would employ a job developer and either hire a case manager or reallocate staff time such that the current case manager had more time to provide WtW corpsmembers with individualized counseling.⁵ As a result, all WtW corps provided WtW corpsmembers with individualized counseling and provided all corpsmembers with expanded employability training and job development services.

After hiring the requisite staff, WtW Corps began the processes of (1) recruiting participants, (2) identifying existing corpsmembers who were eligible for WtW, and (3) enrolling new WtW participants. While in the corps, Welfare to Work corpsmembers were mainstreamed into standard program activities in such a way that no stigma resulted. All corpsmembers participated in an array of academic and employment training and in some paid off-site community service activities. In addition, all corpsmembers received a variety of life skills trainings, such as parenting, STD and drug awareness, and anger management.

Academic training, some employment training and stipended community service were standard elements of corps programs that corps continued as they participated in the WtW Project. Conversely, expanded job development activities, individualized counseling services and the provision of certain material supports to individual corpsmembers were program enhancements brought about through the WtW Project.

Like their peers who were not part of the WtW Project, most WtW corpsmembers remained in corps programs for between 6 and 12 months (though some WtW corpsmembers cycled in and out of the program and others rushed to full-time jobs because they were concerned that their TANF benefits were running out). Most WtW corpsmembers who participated received both their TANF payments and a small stipend of approximately \$5.00 to \$5.50 per hour for work in community service.⁶

After successfully completing the corps and being placed into unsubsidized employment, WtW corpsmembers received post-program support services geared to promote job retention and advancement as well as the pursuit of higher education. Corps staff remained in contact with WtW corpsmembers for a minimum of one year after corpsmembers were placed.

What Were Key WtW Project Outcomes?

Ultimately, NASCC enrolled 446 TANF-eligible youths and placed 246 of them (a little over 55 percent) in jobs.⁷ In addition, 47 percent of the corpsmembers who participated in one of the seven corps that completed the program remained employed for six months after placement.

The WtW Program also yielded some important and enduring benefits for participating corps. Many corps added employment training modules that were created as part of WtW to their standard

⁵ National Association of Conservation Corps et al., *Application for Federal Assistance*, April 30, 1999, p. 2.

⁶ WtW corpsmembers were paid different wages depending on (1) the corps in which they were enrolled and (2) their tenure in the corps.

⁷ Note that these totals are higher than those reported in Appendix B. This is because the totals reported in Appendix B do not include results for the two corps that dropped out of the program: Taos and Dallas.

curricula and continued to work with local employers and/or provide enhanced placement and job development services after the Project ended. Several corps also expanded the follow-up services that they provided all corpsmembers and developed new strategies for serving TANF-eligible youth. Finally, a number of corps developed new or more positive relationships with local service providers (such as departments of welfare and/or social services) and believed that those relationships would endure beyond the WtW Project.

What are Promising Practices in Helping Economically Disadvantaged Youth to Obtain Academic, Life, and Job Skills and to Transition into Employment?

Based on our review of program data, case studies, interviews with corps staff, and the literature, we have identified some particularly effective strategies that corps may use to help youth obtain academic, life, and job skills and transition into employment. We also have noted several tactics that NASCC may use to help corps achieve these goals, and highlighted those tactics that corps are likely to deem particularly beneficial.

Promising practices for helping economically disadvantaged youth to obtain academic, life and job skills and to transition into employment include:

- Hiring an effective job developer,
- Providing intensive support services,
- Helping participants to actuate *their* goals,
- Successfully partnering with outside providers,
- Using performance data to guide strategic planning and to assess staff performance,
- Maintaining an employment-focused approach in all aspects of the program,
- Marketing the program to employers and focusing on both participants' and employers' needs, and
- Targeting retention and following up with corpsmembers after placement.

Promising practices for NASCC to use when launching employment and training programs with corps include:

- Serving as an intermediary and connecting local corps with DOL or other government funding and providing both funders and participating corps with support,
- Providing flexible funding,
- Providing corps with sufficient pre-program planning time,
- Facilitating trainings in which other service providers share lessons learned, and
- Developing clear reporting requirements upfront.

Introduction

From 1999 through 2003, the National Association of Conservation Corps (NASCC) obtained a Round #3 Welfare-to-Work competitive grant of approximately \$3.8 million from the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). NASCC used this funding to run the Welfare to Work (WtW) Project, a program in which it worked with nine corps to provide TANF-eligible youth with service learning experiences that were geared to improve their academic skills and help them transition out of poverty and into employment.⁸ NASCC is a national organization that supports 118 youth corps programs (or “corps”).⁹

Overview of NASCC and the Corps Movement

What Do Corps Do and How Do They Operate?

Effective corps achieve two primary goals: (1) they meet local communities’ needs for essential services, and (2) they help the youth who participate to develop academic, job, and life skills that enable them to become productive members of their communities.

Corps participants (corpsmembers) are young adults between the ages of 16 and 25, and the vast majority of corpsmembers are economically disadvantaged. Most participants join corps both to improve their academic and job skills and to gain entry into the paid labor force. In the corps, participants receive training in academic, job, and other essential life skills. They also receive counseling and job-search assistance. In addition, when necessary, corps staff refer participants to support services outside of the corps, such as substance abuse counseling, emergency housing, and/or food assistance.

While in the corps, youth participate in a wide array of human service, conservation, and urban infrastructure improvement projects. Corpsmembers work in teams of eight to twelve and are supervised by adult crew leaders who not only provide technical training and support, but who also can serve as role models and mentors. In return for their labors, corpsmembers receive small stipends (based on the local minimum wage) and, in some instances, are eligible for post-service “education awards.” Corpsmembers may apply their education awards towards college tuition or other continued education.

Over the past few decades, politicians from across the political spectrum have come to recognize corps’ value both for communities served and for the youth who engage in service. This support has translated into increased funding and infrastructure support for corps programs, which in turn has resulted in increased numbers of programs and service participants. Currently, there are approximately 118 corps in 31 states and Washington, DC. On average, approximately 24,000

⁸ NASCC and the corps applied for funding for the Welfare to Work program in April 1999. They were awarded funded in September to begin program operations in October of 1999. Initially, the grant was slated to last for 30 months. However, sites requested and got a no-cost extension so that they could conduct adequate follow-up with corpsmembers. Accordingly, most sites were funded through March 31, 2003. As of July 2003, NASCC was in the process of obtaining a no-cost extension from DOL through December 31, 2003.

⁹ <http://www.nascc.org/introtonascc.htm>

corpsmembers in corps programs provide nearly 18 million hours of service to their communities per year.¹⁰

How Does NASCC Support Corps?

NASCC was formed in 1985 to help corps operate more effectively and thereby to better serve youth and communities. NASCC supports corps by providing them with information about promising practices and by providing them with access to an on-line database of relevant articles. NASCC also provides corps with training and technical assistance on a variety of issues, ranging from member retention and development, to staff development, to organizational sustainability. In addition, NASCC advocates for corps' interests at a national policy level. To date, NASCC has helped to secure the passage of two important pieces of national service legislation and has been an active participant in the development of environmental legislation related to corps.¹¹ NASCC also has been an active participant in the creation of workforce development legislation. NASCC provided input in both WIA and Youth Opportunity legislation.¹²

In recent years, NASCC has focused on assisting corps to help their corpsmembers achieve improved employment outcomes through two key initiatives: the foundation-funded Corps-to-Career Initiative and the federally funded Welfare to Work Project. In both of these efforts, NASCC is working with corps to develop a new program model that features expanded in-program career preparation services as well as new post-program placement, retention and support services.

In 1998, NASCC selected thirteen sites to pilot the Corps-to-Career Initiative. Each site was tasked with working with employers, educational institutions and other key providers to (1) improve both the educational and employment services they provide and the quality and quantity of post-program job and educational placements, (2) develop and deliver post-placement services, (3) improve retention, and (4) document their successes. NASCC's work with the Corps-to-Career sites served as a model for its work on the Welfare to Work Project. NASCC developed the Welfare to Work (WtW) Project based upon the principles of the Corps-to-Career Initiative. WtW corps were required to adhere to some of the program implementation guidelines developed through Corps-to-Career, specifically the Full Implementation Guidelines (included here as Appendix C).

The Welfare to Work Project

In 1999, NASCC launched the Welfare to Work (WtW) Project. Through the WtW Project, NASCC planned to work with nine corps to enroll 300 TANF-eligible young adults in corps programs and to provide those individuals with expanded counseling and career supports. NASCC aimed to place at least 220 of those youths in unsubsidized employment when they completed their tenure in corps programs. NASCC also aimed for the WtW Project to yield new insights regarding how best to develop and deliver academic and vocational training to low-income youth.

¹⁰ Communication from Sally Prouty, NASCC President, July 18, 2003.

¹¹ <http://www.nascc.org/introtonascc.htm>

¹² Communication from Sally Prouty, July 18, 2003.

In November 2002, NASCC contracted with Abt Associates to conduct a promising practices assessment of the Project. NASCC's primary goal for this assessment is for Abt Associates to develop a comprehensive report or guide that highlights effective strategies that corps can use to support low-income corpsmembers and help them transition into employment. NASCC aims for this guide to be useful to the full universe of corps, and especially to corps that participate in the Corps-to-Career Initiative.

Because Abt Associates' assessment was begun after the Welfare to Work Project was nearly completed, it is limited in several key respects. Essentially, this is a retrospective study; Abt Associates staff collected data from participants and corps staff after the Project was over. The Abt team only could assess a limited pool of data. It was not possible to collect baseline information regarding how corps functioned before the WtW Project and to compare post-program data to that baseline as a means to assess changes in services provided, corpsmember outcomes, etc. It also was not possible for Abt Associates staff to help structure data collection such that maximally informative results would be recorded.

Obtaining Funding

The Welfare to Work Project was funded through a Round #3 U.S. Department of Labor Welfare-to-Work competitive grant. The DOL's main goal for its Welfare-to-Work competitive grants was to support transitional assistance programs that moved TANF recipients and noncustodial parents who have characteristics associated with long-term welfare dependence into unsubsidized employment.¹³ Programs funded were required to use a "work-first" strategy and to engage participants in employment-based activities throughout their tenure in transitional programs.¹⁴

NASCC co-applied for this DOL funding with nine corps that it selected to serve as Welfare to Work Project implementation sites. Those sites were: the Greater Miami Service Corps; the New Jersey Youth Corps of Camden, Newark, Paterson, and Vineland; the Ohio Civilian Conservation Corps of Cleveland and Columbus; the Dallas Youth Services Corps; and the Rocky Mountain Youth Corps in Taos, New Mexico.¹⁵ In general, corps co-applied for this funding because they both were eager to expand the employment supports they provided economically disadvantaged corpsmembers and believed that the funding they would receive from DOL would help them to improve their programs.

NASCC targeted these corps because it believed that each site (1) was sufficiently well-run to develop the expanded placement and counseling services that NASCC had targeted as key components of the project as soon as it was awarded funding, (2) would be able to collect required data, and (3) served economically disadvantaged youth and either was interested in expanding its services to include TANF-eligible youths or was likely already to serve TANF-eligible youth. (While

¹³ <http://wtw.doleta.gov/competitive>.

¹⁴ <http://wtw.doleta.gov/competitive/round3/wtwsaga3.asp>.

¹⁵ Ultimately, both the Dallas Youth Services Corps and the Rocky Youth Service Corps in Taos, New Mexico dropped out of the program. The Rocky Mountain Youth Corps dropped out because it could not recruit sufficient numbers of program participants. (Targeted participants were exempted from welfare-to-work time limits, and thus did not have the same incentives to participate as potential participants in other locales.) The Dallas Youth Services Corps was a high-performing program, but dropped out because the entire corps shut down due to financial difficulties.

all of the corps selected to participate already enrolled economically disadvantaged youth in their service programs, none of them had ever before formally targeted TANF recipients.)

NASCC and the corps' application for DOL funding was successful. In September 1999, they received approximately \$3.8 million for the WtW Project. NASCC attributes its success in winning this grant to several key factors. First and foremost, the corps that planned to serve as implementation sites already had programs up and running with participants enrolled. While sites had not previously determined that they served significant percentages of youth who were eligible for welfare, because they served large numbers of extremely economically disadvantaged youth they believed that it was highly probable either that they already served TANF recipients or that they would not have difficulty recruiting this population. Accordingly, it seemed feasible that the sites would not have difficulty enrolling the targeted number of welfare recipients. In addition, corps already ran employment-focused programs that helped low-income youth obtain employment. It was therefore logical that these sites would be able to modify and enrich their services to place TANF-eligible youth. In addition, NASCC staff was careful to establish reasonable enrollment and placement goals for the sites, and this helped to ensure that NASCC and the sites were funded.¹⁶

NASCC's Support to and Requirements of Participating Corps

Most of the DOL funding (approximately 74 percent) was subgranted to participating corps so that they could develop enhanced services and supports for TANF-eligible corpsmembers. NASCC used the remainder of the grant (1) to provide participating corps with training and technical assistance in supporting, placing and providing employment follow-up services to TANF-eligible individuals and (2) to work as an intermediary by helping participating corps work effectively with DOL, developing data tracking systems that helped corps meet grant reporting requirements, etc.

Upon receiving the grant, NASCC convened lead staff from the participating corps for a series of technical assistance meetings with practitioners from agencies that operate nationally recognized welfare-to-work programs, including Wildcat, Strive, and the Welfare to Work Partnership. At these meetings, corps learned about strategies that they could use to improve the employment and training components of their programs and to target their services to meet the needs of corpsmembers who were TANF-eligible.

NASCC allowed participating corps a fair amount of autonomy in determining their plans for the WtW project. According to NASCC staff, NASCC's major roles were providing technical assistance, serving as a "pass-through" for the corps, and facilitating reporting and other DOL requirements.¹⁷

Even so, NASCC did stipulate several participation requirements for corps in its proposal to DOL. Each participating corps was encouraged to employ both a case manager and a job developer. While many corps already employed case managers, as part of the WtW Project case managers were tasked with providing increased levels of assistance to TANF-eligible corpsmembers, including counseling, referrals to necessary intensive support services, and intensive career counseling. Most corps had not previously employed job developers, and hired them as part of the WtW Project. Job developers were

¹⁶ Conversations with NASCC staff, November 22, 2002.

¹⁷ Conversation with NASCC staff, November 22, 2002.

tasked with improving job opportunities for all corpsmembers and with providing specific, targeted assistance to TANF-eligible corpsmembers.¹⁸

In addition to funding intensive case management and job development services, WtW grant monies were used to provide TANF-eligible corpsmembers with support services in emergency situations that would otherwise prevent these individuals from attending the program or work (such as childcare problems, transportation breakdowns, etc.). In addition, each WtW corpsmember was eligible to receive approximately \$1,000 worth of tools, uniforms, or other supports that were likely to be essential in helping him or her to obtain and retain a job.¹⁹

Implementing the WtW Project²⁰

Corps Overview²¹

Before assessing the WtW Project, it first is necessary to understand key similarities and differences that existed among the seven corps that completed in the program (WtW corps). These comparisons provide a possible rationale for differences in participant outcomes.

Background

WtW corps varied in size and structure. Their operating budgets ranged from slightly under \$500,000 to over \$2,000,000, and annually they served between 85 and 425 corpsmembers. Some corps were part of larger state agencies, others were part of local school systems, and others were independent nonprofits.²²

Despite these differences, the WtW corps share many key similarities. Most are located in low-income, urban settings and served large percentages of extremely economically disadvantaged youth even prior to their participation in the WtW Project. In addition, the vast majority of corpsmembers in all of the programs were African American and Latino. This was true among both the standard corpsmembers (corpsmembers who were not TANF-eligible and thus not a part of the WtW Project) and among the WtW corpsmembers. On average, approximately 76 percent of WtW corpsmembers were Black, 21 percent were Latino and 3 percent were White, similar to the demographics for standard corpsmembers.²³ In general, higher percentages of females participated in WtW than in the

¹⁸ National Association of Conservation Corps et al., *Application for Federal Assistance*, April 30, 1999.

¹⁹ National Association of Conservation Corps et al., *Application for Federal Assistance*, April 30, 1999.

²⁰ This section is a synopsis of the WtW Project sites. For more detailed information about individual sites, see the program profiles section of this report in Appendix A.

²¹ Unless otherwise noted, qualitative data reported here is drawn from site visits and telephone interviews conducted with the sites from December 2002 – February 2003.

²² National Association of Conservation Corps et al., *Application for Federal Assistance*, April 30, 1999. Also, program profiles provided to Abt Associates by NASCC in spring 2003. This data was not available for the Cleveland or Columbus sites.

²³ NASCC 2002 Corps Profiles.

regular corps. About 87 percent of the WtW corpsmembers were female; this is a significantly higher percentage than was true for the regular corps.²⁴

Youth serving in the corps grappled with a number of personal challenges that limited their ability both to succeed in school and to form successful attachments to the labor market. Specifically, many corpsmembers struggled with substance abuse, had unstable family lives, were young parents, had insecure housing situations, and/or had extremely low literacy. In addition, many corpsmembers did not have reliable transportation or childcare, and these logistical barriers prevented many of them from participating in corps programs consistently and made it difficult for them to obtain and retain jobs. Program staff noted that, while these barriers tended to be more pervasive among WtW corpsmembers than they were among standard corpsmembers, all of the youths served faced the same kinds of challenges.

Exhibit 1.1

Cross-Site Comparison of WtW Corps

Corps	Camden	Cleveland	Columbus	Miami	Newark	Paterson	Vineland
Key demographics^a							
Population	80,000	480,000	710,000	360,000 ^b	273,000	150,000	56,000
Percent living below poverty level	32.8	23	11	23.5	25.5	19	10
Percent unemployed	16	11	5	12	16	13	11
Standard program (prior to WtW)^c							
Number of CMs served per year	135	N/a	N/a	425	130	121	85
Program budget	\$973,671	\$447,504	\$535,379	\$1,574,624	\$1,561,322	\$569,095	\$284,700
Corps is what type of organization?	Nonprofit	State Agency (CCC)	State Agency (CCC)	Nonprofit	Nonprofit	Part of a school district	Part of a school district

a All population estimates are from the U.S. Census Bureau website, Census 2000 Summary File 3 (SF 3) – Sample Data, <http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet>.

b This figure is for Miami. The population of Miami-Dade County is 2.2 million.

c These data are from *NASCC 2002 Corps Profiles* and from *NASCC's Application for Federal Assistance*, April 30, 1999.

Standard Corps Program

The participating corps offered a similar range of standard services that comprised the basic corps program. (Services provided through the WtW Project were an addition to these services.) All corps required program participants to fill out applications and go through some preliminary orientation before enrollment. After enrollment, most corpsmembers had the opportunity to enroll in GED training, adult basic education, and/or ESL courses. Corps also trained participants in a variety of life

²⁴ NASCC 2002 Corps Profiles. In the most recent fiscal year, the percentage of females in the regular corps and WtW Program combined was 56 percent. We do not have data available for the percentage of females in the corps, excluding WtW Program corpsmembers.

and employment skills and provided them with the opportunity to participate in off-site community service projects. These team-based projects provided participants with the opportunity to gain hands-on job skills and experience. Corpsmembers in all programs were awarded a small stipend for their participation in the program.

Despite these similarities, certain aspects of core corps components differed among the WtW corps. For example, though all corps provided corpsmembers with academic training, the kind of training provided, duration of training, and location of training varied. Some corps required corpsmembers to attend academic classes for as many as 20 hours per week; others required only 8 hours of training per week. Some corps provided training on-site; others provided it off-site at community colleges. The range of academic training varied as well. Some sites provided corpsmembers with a wide array of academic classes from which to choose; others had more limited academic options. Unfortunately, the limited outcome data available for this study does not indicate that any one way of providing training appears more effective than others.

WtW Corps were similarly varied in the kinds of off-site service learning opportunities that they provided members. While most of the corps placed WtW corpsmembers in youth corps programs, the Ohio sites (Cleveland and Columbus) placed them in civilian conservation corps. Although these two types of corps programs were located in similarly urban areas and shared a focus on providing participants with employment and academic skills and with placing them in jobs, the service components of the Ohio programs were substantially different. In the Ohio programs, all corpsmembers participated in environmental projects in which they performed a range of manual labor. Conversely, in most of the youth corps projects, corpsmembers could choose among a variety of clerical, administrative, and manual opportunities in a variety of fields, including construction, education, healthcare and sanitation. All of these community service activities provided corpsmembers with both technical training and skills and with work experience that they could leverage as they looked for employment after the program.

Based on the comparative outcome data available for the sites, it appears that offering corpsmembers a variety of service experiences may result in an increased likelihood that corpsmembers remain in jobs after they are placed.

Another key difference among the WtW Corps was that some had well-established relationships with a network of service providers, including local One Stops,²⁵ Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs),²⁶ departments of social services, community colleges, high schools, and/or adult basic education centers, while other corps functioned more autonomously and were less connected to other providers of social services. Having well-established partnerships also appears to be associated with improved outcomes for corpsmembers (again, based on the comparative outcome data available for the WtW Project sites).

²⁵ One Stops are career and service centers at which individuals can get help obtaining employment. One Stops are so named because a number of services and supports are housed at one location. Though One Stops aim to serve individuals from all socio-economic classes, they tend to be used predominantly by low-income individuals.

²⁶ Workforce Investment Boards (or WIBs) are groups of business and community leaders who oversee the operations of OneStops.

On-Site WtW Project Implementation

Hiring Staff

Because NASCC had the same basic requirements for all participating corps, the way in which the WtW Project was implemented was fairly similar across the sites. After receiving DOL funding, each corps hired a job developer and either hired a case manager or reallocated staff time such that the current case manager had more time to provide WtW corpsmembers with individualized counseling.²⁷ As a result, all WtW corps provided WtW corpsmembers with individualized counseling and provided all corpsmembers with expanded employability training and job development services.

Recruiting, Certifying Eligibility and Enrolling Corpsmembers

After hiring the requisite staff, WtW corps began the processes of (1) recruiting participants, (2) determining which corpsmembers were eligible to be counted as part of WtW, and (3) enrolling participants. Corpsmembers targeted by the WtW Project were young adults receiving or eligible for TANF, non-custodial parents, and persons requiring substance abuse treatment, English proficiency skills, and public or assisted housing. Recruitment was ongoing for much of the project. Sites recruited participants by partnering with local One Stops, TANF agencies,²⁸ and other social service organizations, by publicizing the project and, often, by word of mouth. Many corps had waitlists for participants, and this also facilitated recruitment.

Though all corps met recruitment targets, it is important to note that some had difficulty working with TANF agencies to obtain referrals. Several had difficulty obtaining the requisite documentation regarding participants' eligibility for TANF; others had difficulty working with the agencies themselves.

After recruiting WtW corpsmembers, corps had to certify that the individuals they had signed on to participate could be counted as eligible and, if they were eligible, to categorize them as either "30-percenters" or "70-percenters." In addition to establishing targets for number of TANF-eligible corpsmembers served, NASCC and DOL had established targets for the numbers of 30- and 70-percenters that would be served. 70-percenters were corpsmembers who were receiving welfare at the time of enrollment and who had been receiving TANF for 30 months, were due to become ineligible for TANF within 12 months, or had reached their lifetime TANF limits. (According to some estimates, 70 percent of welfare recipients fit into this category.) 30-percenters were the other fraction of welfare recipients. In order to qualify as 30-percenters for the WtW Project, corpsmembers had to receive TANF and have characteristics associated with long-term welfare dependence, be individuals who had aged out of the foster care system, be custodial parents with income below the poverty level, or be TANF recipients who faced barriers to self sufficiency that were established by the local workforce investment board or private industry council.²⁹ WtW Corps

²⁷ Not all corps were able to retain staff hired for the WtW Project throughout the lifetime of the project. While this occurred in several of the programs, it is worth noting that, in the Columbus program, the WtW case manager became the corps camp manager when that position became vacant and assumed responsibility for both sets of duties after having made this transition (as per communication from Sally Prouty, July 18, 2003).

²⁸ Communication with Sally Prouty, July 18, 2003.

²⁹ These definitions for 30- and 70-percenters are from NASCC's *Documentation Checklist for Local TANF/Welfare Agency Using New Eligibility Requirements, Form A*.

worked with local departments of welfare and social services to determine if potential WtW corpsmembers were eligible to receive TANF and to determine whether they were 30- or 70-percenters.³⁰

Corps also had to determine whether or not enrollees were noncustodial parents, because initially NASCC had targeted this group of individuals for participation. The NASCC proposal to DOL had indicated that noncustodial parents would be a focus of the WtW Project (over 50 percent of WtW corpsmembers).³¹ Again, local departments of welfare and social services helped to make this determination.

WtW Corpsmembers' Activities

After WtW corpsmembers enrolled and were deemed eligible to participate as part of the WtW Project, they underwent the same basic screening processes as did other corpsmembers. In most of the WtW Corps, this entailed undergoing drug screening, providing proof of local residency, and participating in some sort of unpaid orientation. After orientation was completed, WtW corpsmembers began to participate in the corps.

While in the corps, WtW members were mainstreamed into standard program activities in such a way that no stigma as associated with their participation in the program. WtW corpsmembers engaged in community service projects side by side with other corpsmembers, and all corpsmembers participated in an array of academic and employment training and in some paid off-site community service activities. In addition, all corpsmembers received a variety of life skills trainings, such as parenting, STD and drug awareness and anger management.

Academic training, some employment training, and community service for which corpsmembers received small stipends were standard elements of corps programs that corps continued as they participated in the WtW Project. Conversely, expanded job development activities, individualized counseling services and the provision of certain material supports to individual corpsmembers were program enhancements brought about through the WtW Project.

Like their peers who were not part of the WtW project, most WtW corpsmembers remained in corps programs for between 6 and 12 months, (though some WtW corpsmembers cycled in and out of the program and others rushed to full-time work first because they were concerned that their benefits were running out). Most WtW corpsmembers who participated received both their TANF payments and a small stipend.³²

After successfully completing the corps and being placed into unsubsidized employment, WtW corpsmembers received post-program support services geared to promote job retention and advancement, as well as the pursuit of higher education. Corps staff remained in contact with WtW corpsmembers for a minimum of one year after corpsmembers were placed. Staff followed up with

³⁰ Note that some corpsmembers start out as 30-percenters but became 70-percenters during the program. NASCC reports reflected this change.

³¹ National Association of Conservation Corps et al., *Application for Federal Assistance*, April 30, 1999.

³² Initially, not all TANF program participants were eligible to continue to receive their TANF payments. This was a problematic disincentive to participation.

corpsmembers by calling them and, in some cases, visiting them to determine (1) if they were still employed and (2) if they needed additional support services to remain employed.

New Services Through the WtW Project

The WtW Project generated an array of new services and supports at participating corps. For example, through WtW case managers were given more time to work one-on-one with WtW corpsmembers, and case managers and job developers were able to expand the menu of program enrichments and material supports that they provided these individuals. Many programs used WtW dollars to help WtW corpsmembers get drivers' licenses (or get licenses reinstated) so that they could access jobs. Other programs provided WtW corpsmembers with clothing vouchers that they could use to purchase work-appropriate attire. These kinds of enrichments both facilitated WtW corpsmembers' employment and provided them with incentives to get jobs and remain employed. In addition, the WtW Project enabled corps to provide WtW corpsmembers with stabilization services that addressed short-term crises that might otherwise have resulted in their withdrawal from the program or their inability to continue working.

In addition, while they concentrated their efforts on WtW corpsmembers, many case managers found that the support that they got through the WtW Project enabled them to improve the services that they provided to all corpsmembers. The WtW Project gave case managers the ability to provide all corpsmembers with more individualized counseling and expanded life skills trainings.

The WtW Project also facilitated a wide array of job development services that served all corpsmembers. Job developers provided corpsmembers with a variety of employment trainings (such as interview and resume preparation, dressing for success, setting and achieving employment goals) and post-placement supports. They also engaged in a number of activities geared to increase the quality and quantity of post-program job placements. At every site, job developers met with corpsmembers to discuss their career goals and help them to develop career action plans and resumes. Job developers also conducted mock interviews and interview preparation workshops with program participants and conducted job searches for and with corpsmembers. Some job developers also conducted job fairs, taught corpsmembers how to search for jobs, and/or taught corpsmembers how to pursue career advancement opportunities. In addition, most job developers also networked with area employers as a means to facilitate placement. While some corps provided some job development services prior to their involvement in WtW, none had provided these services as systematically and thoroughly as they did as part of WtW.

Finally, after WtW corpsmembers were placed, job developers and/or case managers followed up with them for at least two years. While following up with corpsmembers was a standard component of many of the corps' activities, few corps had previously remained in as close contact with former corpsmembers for this length of time, and few remained in as formal and consistent contact as they did as part of WtW.

WtW Project Results

WtW Corpsmember Outcomes³³

Through the WtW Project, NASCC planned to enroll 300 TANF-eligible youths in corps programs and place 220 of them in unsubsidized employment after they completed the program. Ultimately, NASCC exceeded these targets, enrolling 446 TANF-eligible youth and placing 246 of them (a little over 55 percent) in jobs.³⁴ In addition, 122 of the corpsmembers who participated remained employed for six months after placement. This number represents 55 percent of the total number placed and 27 percent of the total number enrolled in the program.³⁵ (Because the Rocky Mountain Youth Corps in Taos, New Mexico dropped out of the program before reaching its goals, we are unable to report on placement retention outcomes for the youth who participated in that program.)

Continuing Practices at WtW Corps

Corps asserted that, in addition to helping them to develop improved services for WtW corpsmembers, participation in the WtW Project yielded some important and enduring benefits for their standard programs. Many corps asserted that as a result of WtW they are much more focused on providing corpsmembers with employment training. In addition, several corps added employment training modules that were created as part of WtW to their standard curricula, and continued to work with local employers and/or to provide enhanced placement and job development services after the WtW Project ended. One corps has continued to hire a job developer (even though it no longer receives funding from NASCC and DOL to support that position). Finally, several corps expanded the follow-up services that they provide all corpsmembers (and assert that they did so because the WtW experience proved the effectiveness of these services).

In addition to demonstrating the importance of focusing on placement and post-placement follow-up, the WtW Project helped staff to focus more intensely on the needs of a particularly disadvantaged population of corpsmembers: TANF-eligible youth. A number of corps asserted that the program helped them to develop new strategies for serving TANF-eligible youth (who, in many cases, have always been and will always be a significant population served by their programs). Finally, several corps developed new or more positive relationships with local service providers and believed that those relationships would endure beyond the WtW Project and thereby benefit future corpsmembers.

³³ This data is obtained from the *NASCC 2002 Corps Profiles*, the *12-31-02 NASCC Welfare-to-Work Quarterly Financial and Participant Status Reports*, and a 5-22-03 e-mail from Project Director, Martin O'Brien on retentions by site (as of 12-31-02).

³⁴ Note that these totals are higher than those reported in Appendix B. This is because the totals reported in Appendix B do not include results for the two corps that dropped out of the program: Taos and Dallas.

³⁵ In this context, DOL and NASCC define retention as being employed in a job (not necessarily the same job) for three consecutive quarters after placement in a period of six months. For a more expansive definition, see Appendix B.

Promising Practices in Developing Programs that Train and Employ Economically Disadvantaged Youth

NASCC’s primary goal for Abt Associates’ study of the WtW Project is to identify strategies that are effective for helping low-income corpsmembers (1) obtain academic, life, and job skills and (2) transition into employment.³⁶ After identifying these “promising practices,” NASCC intends to encourage corps to adopt proven strategies for achieving targeted corpsmember outcomes and thereby will help corps to secure better results for corpsmembers.

To help NASCC identify promising practices, Abt Associates engaged in three research tasks. First, we compared quantitative outcome data from the seven sites that completed the project and used that data to identify the corps that did a particularly effective job of recruiting, training, and/or placing WtW corpsmembers (high performing sites). We documented those strategies that high performing sites employed that appear likely to have been linked to their superior performance. Second, we interviewed program staff about those aspects of both the standard corps and the WtW Project that they felt were most effective. Third, we conducted a literature review in order to identify strategies that others have used both to run effective programs for youth and to train and place low-income individuals.

Promising Practices at the Corps: Outcome-Based Assessment

One of the most compelling methodologies for forming hypotheses regarding promising practices is to compare performance among similar but not identical programs and to assess which variances in program structure appear to be linked to superior performance. Accordingly, Abt Associates reviewed available data from the seven WtW project sites that completed the program and compared outcomes among the sites. We also compared key variances in the sites’ operational strategies for running the corps and the WtW Project so that we could identify which differences in strategies were likely to be associated with differences in outcomes.

Identifying Corps that Appear to be “High Performers”

We assessed sites’ performance in three areas: number of TANF-eligible corpsmember enrolled, percentage of TANF-eligible corpsmembers placed in jobs, and percentage of TANF-eligible corpsmembers placed in jobs who remained employed for at least six months. (See footnote below regarding the limitations of available data.)³⁷ In most of these arenas, most or all of the sites met or

³⁶ This component of our research addresses NASCC’s third research question: What are promising practices in providing economically disadvantaged youth with services experiences that prepare them for employment and in helping those youth to obtain and retain meaningful career opportunities?

³⁷ WtW corpsmember enrollment, placement and six-month retention were the only variables for which we had meaningful outcome data from all of the WtW corps that we could use to compare sites. Though we also had information regarding starting wages for corpsmembers, we did not include this information in our comparison because a variety of factors that do not reflect corps performance influence starting wages (local economies, etc.). Though only having these three data points prohibited us from assessing corps across a comprehensive array of workforce development variables, it is important to note that enrollment,

exceeded performance targets established by NASCC in its proposal to DOL for project funding. (NASCC established these targets based on its knowledge of the corps and the population that each served.)

In order to compare project sites, we developed a scale for each of these performance outcomes.³⁸ According to our calculations, the three corps that were the most effective performers overall for the WtW Project were Camden, Miami and Vineland. In addition, Miami and Newark were most effective at enrolling TANF-eligible youth; Camden, Columbus and Vineland were most effective at placing TANF-eligible youth in jobs; and Miami, Paterson and Vineland were most effective at helping TANF-eligible youth remain employed for at least six months.

Promising Practices—General

On average, the sites performed similarly well. Some excelled in enrollment and performed at average or below average levels in placement and/or retention; others excelled in placement or retention and performed at average or below average in enrollment. Of the seven sites that completed the program and were able to participate in this study, Vineland, Miami, and Camden had the highest overall results. These three corps share one key quality that may have accounted for their overall above-average performance: each site had an array of partnerships with local service providers, including local One Stops, government agencies and departments of welfare, schools and adult education centers, and organizations that provided substance abuse counseling. These partnerships enabled all three sites to connect WtW corpsmembers with the specific services that they needed and may have accounted for these sites' comparatively high retention outcomes.

Promising Practices—Enrolling WtW Corpsmembers

All seven sites exceeded the established enrollment targets and several sites exceeded these targets. The Newark and Miami sites were most effective at enrolling greater than targeted numbers of WtW corpsmembers. This may be attributed to several factors. Both corps serve extremely economically disadvantaged corpsmembers, and did so before they became involved in the WtW Project. In fact, staff from both programs asserted that it was likely that, even prior to the WtW Project, large numbers of individuals who participated in standard corps activities were eligible to receive welfare. In addition, the Newark and Miami corps are among the larger corps that participated in the WtW Project.³⁹ It appears probable that sites that serve comparatively large numbers of economically disadvantaged corpsmembers will serve comparatively large numbers of corpsmembers that are eligible to receive public assistance.

placement, and retention are the fundamental performance criteria by which most welfare-to-work programs are judged.

In addition, we did not have cross-site data about the performance of corpsmembers who did not participate in the WtW Project. We also did not have pre-WtW program performance data for any of the sites. This lack of information limited our ability both to perform baseline (pre-WtW Project) assessments of the corps and to assess and compare the way in which the WtW Project may have impacted corps' overall performance across sites.

³⁸ For more information about how we developed these scales, please see Appendix B.

³⁹ According to NASCC 2002 program profiles. (Data received from Martin O'Brien, spring 2003.)

Promising Practices—Placing WtW Corpsmembers

The Camden, Columbus and Vineland corps were especially successful in placing WtW corpsmembers in employment. These corps placed more than 70 percent of WtW Program participants in unsubsidized jobs. Many of the strategies that these corps adopted were similar to those that other WtW corps adopted (hiring a job developer, providing corpsmembers with increased assistance in preparing resumes, job searching, etc) and, like all of the participating corps, they defined success largely in terms of having positive corpsmember placement outcomes. Accordingly, it is challenging to isolate employment strategies that were unique to those corps that excelled at connecting WtW corpsmembers with employment opportunities. Instead, it appears that the Camden, Columbus and Vineland corps were particularly skilled at engaging in common strategies for placing corpsmembers. The only employment strategy that appears to be unique among at least some (two) of the corps that excelled at placement was having job developers network with employers who were part of the community service component of the program. The corps that used this strategy did it as a means to find career opportunities for corpsmembers.

In addition, it is important to note that two of the three sites that excelled at placement were below average performers in enrollment and, conversely, that the two sites that exceeded enrollment targets by the largest margins performed below average in placement. This suggests that it may be more effective to concentrate services on a fewer number of corpsmembers. It is feasible that serving larger numbers of corpsmembers resulted in less individualized attention to corpsmembers and that this resulted in lower than average placement numbers.

Promising Practices—Retaining WtW Corpsmembers

The corps that achieved the highest six-month retention outcomes (retaining 60 percent or higher of placed corpsmembers) were Miami, Paterson and Vineland.⁴⁰ These three corps were unique in that they provided all corpsmembers with a particularly wide variety of paid community service opportunities. Corpsmembers at these sites could choose among work experiences in at least five extremely different fields. In addition, corpsmembers had the opportunity to engage in a range of different kinds of activities within these fields. Some corpsmembers may have engaged in manual labor, others in clerical work, and others in one-to-one work with young children in education or childcare.⁴¹

Promising Practices at the Corps: Corps Staff Assessment

Because corps possess a nuanced understanding of the ways in which their programs work and the particular benefits and challenges of the WtW project, Abt Associates interviewed corps supervisors, WtW case managers, WtW job developers and WtW corpsmembers about their perception of those aspects of their corps in general, and of the WtW Project in particular, that appeared linked to positive

⁴⁰ In the context of the WtW Project, being retained for six months means remaining employed (though not necessarily in the same job) for six months.

⁴¹ The Paterson corps also provided corpsmembers with a range of paid community service activities. Like the Miami and Vineland sites, it also had comparatively high retention rates.

corpsmember outcomes.⁴² In this context, we defined positive outcomes as increased educational attainment (such as getting a GED or making substantial academic progress) and as placement and retention in employment. Because staff perceived WtW and standard corpsmembers as relatively similar, they did not differentiate between effective practices for the two groups of corpsmembers.

Promising Practices—Helping Corpsmembers Access and Retain Employment

Hiring a Job Developer

WtW corps staff believe that several aspects of the WtW Project generated positive outcomes for corpsmembers. Most corps feel that hiring a job developer benefited their entire corps, and that the job skills training, employer networking, and placement facilitation services that these individuals provided resulted in improved placement and retention outcomes for all corpsmembers. Though some of these responsibilities had been part of other staff members' responsibilities prior to the Project, corps asserted that having a specific individual tasked with employment training and job development made them much more "employment-focused" than they had been prior to WtW, and that this focus was essential for helping to ensure corpsmembers' ultimate success.

When hiring job developers, many corps felt that it was particularly helpful to employ individuals who had experience both working in the private sector and working with marginalized youth, as these individuals both understood corporate culture and could relate to corpsmembers. In addition, several corps suggested that hiring job developers to work flexible schedules and to be available after traditional working hours was a particularly effective strategy for facilitating retention, because by working these hours job developers were able to support corpsmembers when corpsmembers called for support (i.e., when they were not at work).

Engaging Employers

In order to facilitate placement, corps noted that it is particularly effective for job developers to cultivate networks with local employers. In addition, corps believed that job developers who emphasized ways in which hiring corpsmembers would benefit employers (such as tax and public relations benefits, as well as the benefit of hiring individuals who had the kinds of skills and experience that corpsmembers learned in the program) were particularly effective at marketing the program. Some corps also felt that involving employers in program planning was a good strategy for engaging employers, marketing graduates, and facilitating placement.

Creating a Culture of Work

Because many corpsmembers have extremely limited personal work experience and have not been exposed to the professional work world (especially corpsmembers who are second or third-generation welfare recipients), successful job developers focused not only on placement, but also on educating corpsmembers about the "culture of work." Corpsmembers benefited from training in dressing appropriately for work, the importance of attending work consistently, and appropriate workplace conflict resolution strategies.

⁴² Information in this section is derived both from interviews with program staff that were conducted as part of the winter 2003 case study component of this research and from a focus group conducted with WtW corps staff on February 12, 2003.

Providing Corpsmembers with Incentives to Participate in the Corps, and to Obtain and Retain Jobs

Most corps asserted that it was very difficult to incentivize corpsmembers to remain in the program because the stipend that they in the corps received was lower than what they would earn in jobs outside of the program. While ultimately corps aim to have youth leave the program and get employment, corpsmembers who leave before they have learned necessary hard and soft skills for work tend to lose their jobs and cycle either back into the program or onto welfare.

Accordingly, many corps asserted that it was effective to be able to provide WtW corpsmembers with clothing allowances and other small rewards for completing the program or getting jobs. Staff also asserted that the corps would be enriched if corps could provide corpsmembers with higher wages, because this, too, would encourage corpsmembers to remain in the program.

Placing Corpsmembers

Several corps asserted that, in order to increase positive placement and retention outcomes, the jobs in which corpsmembers are placed should be related to their service experiences in the corps. This practice can result in continuity between youths' corps and professional experiences and can help to ensure that corpsmembers use the skills that they develop through the program in their careers. It also can facilitate placement, as potential employers are familiar with the corps and the youth served and thus may be more willing to hire program graduates.

Many corps also believed that, when placing youth in jobs, it also was effective to place youth in jobs (1) in which there was potential for advancement, (2) that included a range of career opportunities on-site, and (3) that were located near major transportation routes as a means to ensure that corpsmembers could get to work easily. Several corps believed that placing corpsmembers in jobs that had these features was likely to lead to higher retention outcomes.

Post-Placement Follow-Up

Most corps agreed that following up with corpsmembers after placement was likely to increase retention. Several believed that corps should have formal schedules for post-placement follow up as a means to ensure that corps remained in touch with program graduates. Corps noted that post-placement follow-up appeared to be particularly effective when case managers and job developers (1) called and visited corpsmembers at home frequently after placement and (2) made efforts to discuss not only corpsmembers' personal problems (and potential barriers to success) but also their plans for advancement.

Promising Practices—Case Management and Service Coordination

Intensive and Extensive Case Management and Corpsmember Support

Corps believe that intensive and extensive case management is likely to result in improved corpsmember outcomes. They asserted that the enhanced case management services funded through the WtW Project gave case managers increased time to work one-on-one with corpsmembers and helped them to build trusting relationships with corpsmembers and to connect them to needed support services. Most case managers agreed that this practice was likely to increase the probability that corpsmembers successfully would complete the program, and WtW corpsmembers themselves often cited the one-to-one counseling that corps staff provided as essential to their success.

The fact that the corps that enrolled significantly greater than targeted numbers of WtW corpsmembers performed less well than other corps in the arena of placement strengthens our conviction that one-to-one, intensive and personalized case management services are essential to ensuring corpsmembers' success. The two corps where case manager to WtW corpsmember ratios were lowest were least able to keep corpsmembers in the program and place them in jobs.⁴³

Another advantage of providing intensive case management services is that case managers who are not overburdened have time to work with other corps staff and to coordinate services effectively. Many case managers asserted that, in the WtW Project, having additional time to focus on case management enabled them to work more effectively with their colleagues than they had prior to the project.

In general, corps assert that case managers are most effective when they are available consistently, are familiar with and enthusiastic about serving economically disadvantaged youth, and are committed to the corps' ideology and structure. Case managers who have these qualities help to build corpsmembers' trust both in the program and in program staff. When serving corpsmembers who are TANF-eligible, case managers also should be sure to have access to an extremely comprehensive array of support services. Because these corpsmembers' barriers to employment tend to be more extreme than those of other corpsmembers, serving them effectively requires access to a myriad of supports, including childcare, emergency housing and food, transportation, etc. While most low-income corpsmembers need some support services, TANF-eligible corpsmembers tend to need them more extensively and more often.⁴⁴

Many corps also asserted that severely economically disadvantaged corpsmembers tend to need more extensive case management and other support services than the corps are funded to provide (both in general and in the WtW Project). Corps staff assert that, in order to make lasting differences in the lives of corpsmembers, they should be funded such that severely economically disadvantaged corpsmembers have at least a year (rather than approximately six months) of case management, training and stipended community service. They argue that most youth whom they serve have spent their entire lives learning how to survive in the harsh reality of inner-city culture and that the norms and behaviors that they adopt to survive often conflict with what works in the workplace. Corps assert that a promising practice for supporting corpsmembers would be to fund not only more intensive case management, but more extensive, longer-term case management, as well.

Individualized Action Plans

Many corps believe that case managers and job developers should create an integrated, individualized career and education action plan for each corpsmember that reflects his or her goals and is realistic. Corps believe that this practice is particularly effective because it both validates corpsmembers' aspirations and helps corpsmembers to set reasonable short- and long-term goals. Ultimately, corps should strive to place corpsmembers in jobs that are in some way aligned with the long-term goals indicated on the career and education action plan.

⁴³ For more information about individual WtW corps performance, please see Appendix B.

⁴⁴ Communications with WtW case managers. Winter 2003.

Established Networks with Effective Outside Service Providers

Corps also indicated that having well-established relationships with other local service providers (including departments of social services and welfare departments, substance abuse counseling providers, etc.) facilitated case management and made it easier for them to enroll, place and support corpsmembers. Corps needed to have positive relationships with these agencies in order to verify that corpsmembers were eligible for the WtW Project and to determine whether individual corpsmembers could be counted as 30- or 70- percenters. Corps that did not have these kinds of networks reported difficulty in implementing the WtW Project and, more generally, in linking corpsmembers to needed support services. Having these kinds of networks was easier for some corps than for others. The degree to which corps could work effectively with local service partners depended both on the quality and quantity of local providers and on corps' networking efforts and skills.

In addition, the quality and capacity of local service providers affected corps' ability to meet WtW Project goals and to serve corpsmembers effectively. While some local welfare offices were able quickly and easily to provide the information corps required to determine whether certain individuals were able to participate in the WtW Project, others were not. Challenges in getting the right paperwork on individuals impeded some sites' progress.

Furthermore, corps that felt that they referred corpsmembers to high quality service providers believed that they served corpsmembers better than did corps that referred corpsmembers to lower quality service providers. Though corps' perceptions of local providers were based more on their relationships with service provider staff and the service providers' reputations than on objective criteria, corps believed that having access to providers that met these criteria helped them to be effective.

A Shared Understanding of Program Goals and Guidelines

Finally, several corps asserted that, when implementing a demonstration such as the WtW Project, it is important to specify program rules and guidelines carefully. Clearly documenting how funding can be used and what the performance requirements are helps to ensure that all staff understand exactly what is allowable under the guidelines and helps to facilitate smooth transitions when there is staff turnover (which, for most corps, is very high).

Promising Practices—Developing Enrichment Programs for and Working with Corps

Corps also identified several aspects of their work with NASCC that they felt enabled them to deliver services effectively and that they believed should be replicated in other, similar efforts. They also noted several aspects of the WtW Project that they felt could be improved upon, and made suggestions that they believed would strengthen future NASCC endeavors to develop enrichment programs for corps.

Serving as an Intermediary Between Corps and Funders

Corps believed that having an organization, such as NASCC, function as an intermediary (or, in this context, an organization that served as a liaison between them and their federal funder) was essential to their success. By answering their questions, conveying their concerns, and serving as a mediator between the organizations and DOL, NASCC ensured both that DOL's plans for the WtW Project were feasible given the contextual reality of the program at the corps and that participating corps structured their activities so they were aligned with DOL's goals. In addition, because NASCC funded multiple corps, it was able to meet DOL's overall requirements by combining the results

across programs. This was particularly beneficial because it made it feasible for both corps and NASCC to meet DOL's requirements for serving certain percentages of 30- and 70-percenters across the project.

Flexible Funding

Most corps agreed that having some flexible funding from NASCC enabled them to provide WtW corpsmembers with emergency services on an as-needed basis, and that this, in turn, increased WtW corpsmembers' trust in the corps and buy-in to the program. Corps felt that having funds available for post-placement assistance was similarly advantageous, and that this funding made it possible to provide many corpsmembers with supports (assistance in obtaining drivers' licenses, uniforms or clothing related to employment, etc.) that were not often funded, but were essential in helping them to retain jobs. Corps also asserted that this funding helped them both to stay connected to corpsmembers who had completed the program and to provide corpsmembers with incentives that increased the likelihood that they would remain employed.

Several corps felt that the WtW Project would have been more effective if corps had been given even more flexibility in terms of the kinds of supports and services that they could provide WtW corpsmembers. Many corps believed that the fact that they were not allowed to provide supports that could arguably yield monetary benefits to corpsmembers (such as down payments or security deposits for housing) was an unproductive limitation, and several corps were frustrated that they could not use WtW Project funding to pay for college or vocational training.

Providing Relevant Trainings

In general, corps reported that they enjoyed working with NASCC and felt that NASCC program staff provided them with a myriad of helpful trainings and ongoing supports that increased their ability (1) to serve corpsmembers and (2) to comply with DOL's program guidelines and reporting requirements. Corps felt that trainings that were given by practitioners who had experience connecting welfare populations to jobs were particularly effective. They also appreciated the fact that trainings were geared to serve staff at all levels of the corps (not just leadership staff).

Targeting TANF-Eligible Youth

In addition, corps felt that it was particularly effective for NASCC to target TANF-eligible youth because most of them already served this population and would continue to serve it after the WtW Project was over. Accordingly, they believed that it was useful for them to develop new strategies for working with this constituency.

Staff also agreed that an effective aspect of the program structure was that it delivered services targeted to serve TANF-eligible youth, but did not stigmatize them. Staff asserted that several WtW program components were structured to achieve this result. For example, many of the supports and services funded through the WtW Project served the entire corps (most of whom were extremely low-income, even if they were not eligible to receive welfare) and WtW corpsmembers were able to receive many of the same supports and services as standard corpsmembers.

While corps welcome the opportunity to serve TANF-eligible youth, they recommended that DOL structure future demonstration programs so that participation does not mean loss of TANF benefits and that the rules about eligibility for benefits are articulated clearly in advance of the demonstration. In the WtW Project, some TANF recipients initially were reluctant to enroll because they feared

losing benefits as a result of participating (even though the grant was structured so that very few, in actuality, did).

Corps also asserted that it was not effective to target particular subcategories of TANF-eligible youth and encouraged DOL not to make these distinctions in future efforts. (NASCC did not have control over this aspect of the program requirements.) Many corps found stipulations requiring various percentages of WtW corpsmembers to be either 70-percenters or 30-percenters frustrating because they believed that the entire population that they served was in dire need of services and “splitting hairs” over whether or not a particular corpsmember was a 30- or 70-percenter was both time-consuming (because individuals’ status had to be proven and documented) and illogical (because all WtW corpsmembers were extremely economically disadvantaged and because many corpsmembers transformed from 30-percenters to 70-percenters over the course of the grant). Similarly, several corps felt that it did not make sense for the program to target noncustodial parents, because those individuals’ wages post-program were likely to be garnished to pay for child support and this served as a tremendous disincentive to participation.

Providing Adequate Project Planning Time

Corps staff asserted that the WtW Project would have been strengthened by providing corps with more lead time for project planning. (Many corps felt that they were expected to have projects up and running as soon as they were funded.) Corps believed that providing more planning time would have enabled them more effectively to develop strategies for working with local service providers, to recruit and hire staff, and to create action plans for program implementation. In addition, most corps felt that effective partnerships with social service agencies, One Stops, and employers were essential to their ultimate success and that they needed more advance time to market the program to those individuals and organizations. Corps encouraged DOL to structure future, similar efforts to incorporate several months of pre-enrollment planning time. (For the WtW Project, DOL gave NASCC less than one week of time between when it announced it would award NASCC funding and when it expected NASCC to start operations.⁴⁵)

Simplifying Reporting Requirements and Facilitating Access to Data

Many corps were frustrated by changes in reporting requirements and reporting forms that DOL implemented over the course of the WtW Project. For the future, corps encouraged funders to develop a firm sense of the data that they require prior to the onset of any new initiative. In addition, because many sites had difficulty obtaining post-placement information about WtW corpsmembers, they felt that future programs would be more effective if DOL or other funders would provide sites with access to unemployment data or develop (and fund) new strategies for obtaining information from employers.

Devoting Sufficient Resources to Tracking and Retention

WtW corps found that corpsmembers are extremely mobile and therefore very hard to remain in touch with, especially after they have secured and retained jobs. In general, corps felt that following up with corpsmembers required greater staff time than was funded under the WtW Project, and that remaining in touch with corpsmembers necessitated greater funding for follow-up services, because the corpsmembers with whom they remained in contact often needed ongoing post-placement

⁴⁵ Communication from Sally Prouty, July 18, 2003.

supports and services. Corps encouraged NASCC and DOL to allocate greater resources for follow-up in future projects.

Promising Practices for Serving and Employing Low-Income Youth—Strategies Utilized Outside of the Corps

In order to provide a comprehensive description of promising practices that corps may implement to improve youths' educational and employment outcomes, Abt Associates conducted a literature review of research on strategies that organizations outside of the corps have utilized effectively to educate and employ economically disadvantaged individuals. While the fact that few quantitative impact analyses of youth services and employment and training programs have been conducted renders it impossible to generate a research-tested set of best practices, the formative assessments and theory of change studies we reviewed provide important initial documentation of potentially effective strategies for serving economically disadvantaged youth and for helping low-income individuals to obtain and retain employment.

The results of this literature review are summarized below. They are organized into two categories: (1) Promising Practices for Operating Youth Service Programs and (2) Promising Practices for Employing Welfare Recipients and Other Low-Income Individuals.

Promising Practices for Operating Youth Service Programs

Organizations that serve low-income youth use a variety of different strategies for recruiting program participants, encouraging individuals to remain in programs and promoting productive relationships between staff and youth. Several themes emerge as integral components of effective youth service programs.

Recruiting Low-Income Youth

Identifying, recruiting and enrolling low-income youth in youth service programs can be challenging because youth may not be interested in these programs and often believe that they can make more money by going directly into full-time employment. In order effectively to recruit participants, successful organizations market services in areas that youths frequent (schools, clinics, recreation centers, etc.) and cultivate relationships with entities that serve targeted youth (social service agencies, the criminal justice system, etc.).⁴⁶ Effective programs also may rely on former program participants to spread the word about the services they provide because participants often are recruited through word of mouth.⁴⁷

Employing a Strengths-Based Perspective

Effective youth service programs should employ an assets-focused model for delivering services (and, accordingly, focus on building on youths' strengths as opposed to their weaknesses).⁴⁸ Similarly, it is important for youth service programs to have high expectations for the youth that they serve and to

⁴⁶ National Youth Employment Coalition. *Examples of Effective Recruitment Strategies in Youth Programming*. <http://www.nyec.org/pepnet/reports/RecruitingStrategies02.doc>.

⁴⁷ Interviews with WtW Program Staff, Winter 2003.

⁴⁸ McDonough, Hugh, Catherine Dun Rappaport et al. *Mentoring, E-Mentoring and At-Risk Youth Literature Review*. (Cambridge: Abt Associates Inc., 2002).

provide youth with opportunities to develop new skills, lead and excel and thereby develop increased self-confidence.⁴⁹ Many underserved youth have not had these kinds of opportunities previously. Some well-regarded programs (such as YouthBuild) make a deliberate effort to engage low-income youth in significant decision-making regarding program policies as a means to create leadership opportunities for their clients.⁵⁰

Fostering Supportive Relationships

Successful youth service programs also cultivate supportive relationships for youth, including good social networks with adults. Some programs do this by featuring intensive one-to-one case management; others do it by fostering mentoring relationships between adults and youths.⁵¹

Program Infrastructure—Partnerships

In order to provide low-income youth with the array of supports that they need, effective programs form meaningful partnerships with service providers. Effective partnerships feature several elements that contribute to their success: (1) they are marked by ongoing, regular, and reciprocal communication; (2) the benefit of the partnership is clear to all parties involved; and (3) partners invest a significant amount of time in planning how they will work together, and their roles and responsibilities are defined clearly.⁵²

Program Infrastructure—Collecting and Using Data

Effective youth service programs use streamlined data management systems both to monitor staff performance and to conduct ongoing internal assessments of program accomplishments and challenges. They collect data that is relevant to them and reflects their strategic goals and missions. These programs set clear, outcome-based standards for success and hold staff accountable for meeting those standards. These programs judge staff performance not by looking at “means” but by looking at “ends,” client outcomes, as well.⁵³ They also review program data and develop strategic plans for program improvement based on the data they collect.⁵⁴ Further, effective programs conduct evaluations both to chronicle their efficacy and as a means to prove their value to potential supporters.

⁴⁹ Kazis, Richard. *Both Sides Now: New Directions in Promoting Work and Learning for Disadvantaged Youth: A Report to the Annie E. Casey Foundation*. (Boston: Jobs for the Future, 1997).

⁵⁰ Pines, Marion, Ed. *Making Connections: Youth Program Strategies for A Generation of Challenge* (Baltimore: Sar Levitan Center for Social Policy Studies, 1999), pp. 9-28.

⁵¹ McDonough, Hugh, Catherine Dun Rappaport et al. *Mentoring, E-Mentoring and At-Risk Youth Literature Review*. (Cambridge: Abt Associates Inc., 2002).

⁵² Sagwa, Shirley, Eli Segal and Rosabeth Moss Kanter. *Common Interest; Common Good. Creating Value through Business and Social Sector Partnerships*. (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2000).

⁵³ Proscio, Tony and Mark Elliott. *Getting in, Staying on, Moving up: A Practitioner's Approach to Employment Retention*. (Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 1999.)

Pines, Marion, Ed. *Making Connections: Youth Program Strategies for A Generation of Challenge* (Baltimore: Sar Levitan Center for Social Policy Studies, 1999), pp. 9-28.

⁵⁴ St. George, Anne. *Workforce Development Management Information Systems: An Analysis of Capacity and Use Across a Sample of Workforce Development Projects*. Abt Associates, 2001.

Pines, Marion, Ed. *Making Connections: Youth Program Strategies for A Generation of Challenge* (Baltimore: Sar Levitan Center for Social Policy Studies, 1999), pp. 29-60, 61- 71.

Program Infrastructure—Staffing

In addition, successful programs hire staff who have relevant professional credentials and, as important, a solid familiarity with the clientele served. Many programs find that staff who either have had personal experience living in poverty or who have worked in economically disadvantaged communities for long periods of time are able to gain clients' trust and to forge meaningful and productive relationships with them.⁵⁵ In addition, many effective programs engage in ongoing staff development to ensure that program staff are trained to address the challenges faced by youth they serve and to learn new skills and strategies for addressing those challenges.⁵⁶

Promising Practices in Employing Welfare Recipients and Other Low-Income Individuals

Research on programs geared to train, place and retain low-income individuals highlight a number of key strategies for ensuring program success. We have reported on those strategies that are applicable to corps-run workforce development programs, such as the WtW Project.

Maintaining a Consistent Employment Focus

The research we reviewed suggests that the employment and training programs that are most effective at recruiting and graduating disenfranchised individuals are those that maintain a clear employment focus throughout the program.⁵⁷ These programs provide a streamlined continuum of services in which trainers, case managers, job developers and other key staff (1) share a common vision of what constitutes clients' success (placement and retention) and (2) collaborate to make that vision a reality.

Programs that aim to improve clients' academic skills and employment prospects, such as the corps, find that it is particularly important to clearly and consistently link academic training to clients' ultimate employment opportunities. By making explicit connections between academic training and clients' career aspirations, these programs help youth to understand that academics are relevant and thereby secure their buy-in. In addition, by framing the academic components of their programs in this fashion, practitioners ensure that training doesn't "feel like" school, and many youth who enroll in employment and training programs associate school with failure.⁵⁸

Mimicking the Professional Work Environment

Effective programs often mimic real-life work situations as a means to prepare clients for the workforce.⁵⁹ For example, often participants work in teams, report to supervisors, and are required to

⁵⁵ Proscio, Tony and Mark Elliott. *Getting in, Staying on, Moving up: A Practitioner's Approach to Employment Retention*. (Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 1999.)

Hamilton, Gayle. *Moving People from Welfare to Work: Lessons from the National Evaluation of Welfare to Work Strategies*. (Washington, D.C.: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, 2002)

⁵⁶ <http://www.nyec.org/PEPNetCriteria.htm#Organization%20and%20Management>.

⁵⁷ Pepnet. *Criteria for Effective Practices: Workforce Development*. <http://www.nyec/PEPNetCriteria.htm>.

⁵⁸ American Youth Policy Forum. *A Summary of JOBSTART: Final Report on a Program for School Dropouts*. In *Some Things Do Make a Difference for Youth* (Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum, 1997), pp. 73- 76.

⁵⁹ *Working with Value: Industry Specific Approaches to Workforce Development*.

Houghton, Ted and Tony Proscio. *Hard Work on Soft Skills: Creating a Culture of Work in Workforce Development*. (New York: Public/Private Ventures, 2001).

dress professionally. Many successful employment preparation programs also simulate the work environment on-site. By exposing clients to “the look” of the workplace and familiarizing them with common workplace tools, such as computers, desks, and high-tech phones, these programs help clients adjust to work environments that might otherwise seem alien and unfamiliar.

It also can be helpful to provide clients with regular paychecks in exchange for their participation in employment programs, as well as incentive payments or “bonuses” for reaching key project milestones. Monetary rewards not only inspire clients to remain engaged in programs, they also familiarize clients with the “taste of the rewards and demands of earning.”⁶⁰

Focusing on Soft Skills

Because most employers are more concerned with potential employees’ soft skills than they are with their hard skills,⁶¹ effective employment and training programs integrate soft skills training into every aspect of their curricula. After introducing soft skill concepts (such as neatness, regular attendance, communication skills, conflict resolution, dressing for success, etc.), practitioners reinforce them throughout the academic, community service, employment, and other aspects of the program. Practitioners find that cultivating program participants’ interpersonal and behavioral soft skills is particularly important.⁶² Many of the skills that effective practitioners work to teach participants are interpersonal competencies identified by the Secretary of Labor’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS). Those skills include self-management, organizing oneself and allocating time appropriately, negotiating, and working with diverse groups of individuals.⁶³

Engaging Employers

Effective employment training programs engage employers in the development of programs. They work with employers to ensure that the training they provide is relevant to employers’ needs and that they are preparing participants for actual jobs.⁶⁴ This practice also facilitates placement, as employers are connected to and understand the value of training programs.

⁶⁰ Pines, Marion, Ed. *Making Connections: Youth Program Strategies for A Generation of Challenge* (Baltimore: Sar Levitan Center for Social Policy Studies, 1999), pp. 42-60.

Proscio, Tony and Mark Elliott. *Getting in, Staying on, Moving up: A Practitioner’s Approach to Employment Retention*. (Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 1999.)

Wavelett, Melissa. “Promoting Self Sufficiency: What We Know About Sustaining Employment and Increasing Income Among Welfare Recipients and the Working Poor,” in *FACES* (Volume 22, No. 1).

⁶¹ Moss, Philip. *Stories Employers Tell: Race, Skill, and Hiring in America*. Chapter 3: The Skills Employers Seek. (New York: The Russell Sage Foundation, 2001).

Osterman, Paul. “Employers in the Low-Wage/Low-Skill Labor Market,” in *Low Wage Workers in the New Economy* (Washington, D.C., The Urban Institute Press, 2001).

Owen, Greg. *Whose Job is It?: Employers’ Views on Welfare Reform*, a paper presented at the Rural Dimensions Welfare to Work Conference. (St. Paul, MN: Joint Center for Poverty Research, 2000.)

⁶² Proscio, Tony and Mark Elliott. *Getting in, Staying on, Moving up: A Practitioner’s Approach to Employment Retention*. (Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 1999.)

⁶³ Whetzel, Deborah. *The Secretary of Labor’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills*. (Washington, D.C.: ERIC Clearinghouse on Tests, Measurement and Evaluation, 1992).

⁶⁴ Pepnet. *Criteria for Effective Practices: Workforce Development*. <http://www.nyec/PEPNetCriteria.htm>.

In addition, forging close relationships with employers can facilitate post-placement conflict resolution and case management. Employers that have relationships with training providers appear likely to solicit their support in helping newly-placed employees adjust to challenges that they encounter in the workplace.⁶⁵ It is important to note, however, that employers do not want to take on case management responsibilities themselves and do not want to be burdened with having to provide labor-intensive employee supports to program clients.⁶⁶

When working with employers, practitioners should be sure to market their work in terms of employers' interests, as employers that participate in workforce development efforts do so primarily to meet business objectives.⁶⁷ Similarly, job developers who view both program clients and employers and as their primary customers are likely to be particularly effective.⁶⁸

Screening Potential Program Participants

Some successful employment training programs also find it particularly helpful to screen potential program participants. Most of the corps that participated in the WtW Project screened potential participants by having orientation periods in which corpsmembers were expected to attend the program, but were not paid. Other programs screen potential participants by conducting skills assessments, drug tests, and participant interviews. While some programs feel that this kind of screening goes against their mission, others have found that it enables them to target limited resources to individuals who are sufficiently skilled and motivated to complete training and obtain placement. These practitioners observe that, by screening, they are able to meet employers' needs for particular kinds of workers and to cultivate productive relationships with employers that increase the practitioners' ability to place workers.⁶⁹

Helping Clients to Progress Towards Their Employment Goals

Effective programs also find that it is particularly important to work with clients to understand their employment goals and to develop personalized plans for clients that are based on those goals. Programs find that serving clients effectively means customizing their approach to reflect clients'

⁶⁵ Rangarajan, Anu and Tim Novak. *The Struggle to Sustain Employment: The Effectiveness of the Post Employment Services Demonstration*. (Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research, 1999).

⁶⁶ Dun Rappaport, Catherine. *Focus Group with Employers, Service Providers, and Practitioners for TANF and Private Employers Contract*. Abt Associates Inc., May 2003.

⁶⁷ McGahey, Richard and Catherine Dun Rappaport. *Evaluations of Workforce Innovations Networks, Interim Report* (Cambridge, MA: Abt Associates Inc., 2003).

Schlefer, Jonathan. *Wildcat Service Corporation and the Private Industry Partnership*. www.jff.org.

Mills, Jack. *Business Participation in Welfare to Work: Lessons from the United States, Prepared for the Business Forum on Welfare-to-Work: Lessons from America 20-21 January 1999*. (Boston: Jobs for the Future, 1999).

⁶⁸ Proscio, Tony and Mark Elliott. *Getting in, Staying on, Moving up: A Practitioner's Approach to Employment Retention*. (Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 1999.)

⁶⁹ Proscio, Tony and Mark Elliott. *Getting in, Staying on, Moving up: A Practitioner's Approach to Employment Retention*. (Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 1999.)

interests and that both validating clients' goals and creating realistic action plans that will help them to achieve their goals.⁷⁰

Providing Comprehensive Services

Many programs that aim to help low-income individuals improve their career outcomes also find that, in order to serve clients effectively, they must provide them with a variety of comprehensive services.⁷¹ Merely placing clients in jobs is insufficient and ineffective when they possess numerous and diverse personal challenges that can impede their ability to remain employed for significant amounts of time. Programs that serve this population need to get to the root of their clients' problems and address those problems as part of their efforts to place and retain youth.⁷² In order to do this, employment programs must provide effective and personalized case management services and cultivate relationships between program staff and participants.⁷³

In addition, in order effectively to serve economically disadvantaged individuals who have multiple barriers to employment, programs need to provide intensive and long-term follow-up. Clients need help addressing short-term crises for many months after they are placed and often require assistance for at least a year after placement.⁷⁴

Focusing on Retention and Advancement

Effective programs need to focus not just on training and placing clients. Though a number of programs that are deemed effective succeed at placing relatively large percentages of low-income individuals, many of these programs do not help their clients to forge viable pathways out of poverty. Program participants who are placed in low-income, "dead-end" jobs progress from welfare to work, but they do not reap significant benefits from working, and may not, as a result, form secure attachments to the labor force.⁷⁵ Programs may be more effective if they help clients to connect to

⁷⁰ American Youth Policy Forum. *Strive's Results: Evaluating a Small Non-Profit Organization in East Harlem*. (Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum, 1997), pp. 88- 90.

⁷¹ Hebert, Scott, Anne St. George and Barbara Epstein. *Breaking Through: Overcoming Barriers to Family Sustaining Employment*. (Cambridge, MA: Abt Associates Inc., 2003).

Kazis, Richard. *Both Sides Now: New Directions in Promoting Work and Learning for Disadvantaged Youth: A Report to the Annie E. Casey Foundation*. (Boston: Jobs for the Future, 1997).

⁷² Houghton, Ted and Tony Proscio. *Hard Work on Soft Skills: Creating a Culture of Work in Workforce Development*. (New York: Public/Private Ventures, 2001).

⁷³ Proscio, Tony and Mark Elliott. *Getting in, Staying on, Moving up: A Practitioner's Approach to Employment Retention*. (Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 1999.)

⁷⁴ American Youth Policy Forum. *A Summary of JOBSTART: Final Report on a Program for School Dropouts in Some Things Do Make a Difference for Youth*. (Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum, 1997), pp. 73- 76.

_____. *Strive's Results: Evaluating a Small Nonprofit Organization in East Harlem*, pp. 88- 90.

Pepnet. Criteria for Effective Practices: Workforce Development. <http://www.nyec/PEPNetCriteria.htm>.

Rangarajan, Anu and Tim Novak. *The Struggle to Sustain Employment: The Effectiveness of the Post Employment Services Demonstration*. (Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research, 1999).

⁷⁵ Wood, Robert G. and Diane Paulsell. *Promoting Employment Retention Among TANF Recipients: Lessons from the GAPS Initiative*. (Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc, 2000.)

“good,” living-wage jobs (and not necessarily accepting the first jobs they get).⁷⁶ Perhaps a more realistic approach, given the current emphasis on work first, is to maintain contact with clients post-placement and help them to transition into progressively more lucrative positions.

When developing retention strategies, programs should conduct needs-assessments to determine how effectively current clients are retained in jobs, what kinds of retention services are necessary (and not provided by other, local providers), and whether or not they have the capacity to develop those services.⁷⁷ Many effective retention-focused programs share the following characteristics: (1) they provide clients with personalized case management, (2) they help clients to get needed support services (child care, Medicaid, etc.) and simplify the process of obtaining these services for clients, and (3) they employ creative and non-invasive strategies for maintaining personal contacts with placed clients (case managers are reachable at nonstandard hours, send clients birthday and holiday cards, etc.).⁷⁸

Conclusion: Summary of Promising Practices and Suggestions for Future Programs

Based on our review of program data, case studies and interviews with corps staff and literature review, we have identified a number of potentially effective strategies that corps may use to help youth obtain academic, life, and job skills and transition into employment. We also have noted several tactics that NASCC may use to help corps achieve these goals and highlighted those tactics that corps are likely to deem particularly beneficial. Following is a summary of those practices that Abt Associates believes may be most effective for NASCC and corps that seek to train and place TANF-eligible and other low-income youth. Our summary of promising practices highlights those strategies that appear most supported by the literature review and by qualitative and quantitative information collected from the corps. We also highlight those strategies that have proven effective in other workforce development and youth services programs that Abt Associates has assessed. Based upon our understanding of the challenges and successes of the NASCC WtW Project, we also make suggestions for future similar demonstration programs. While these suggestions are targeted to NASCC, other organizations that serve as intermediaries and/or launch workforce development projects also may use these suggestions to guide their work.

Promising Practices for Helping Economically Disadvantaged Youth Obtain Academic, Life and Job Skills and Transition into Employment

Hiring an Effective Job Developer

⁷⁶ Hamilton, Gayle. *Moving People from Welfare to Work: Lessons from the National Evaluation of Welfare to Work Strategies*. (Washington, D.C.: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, 2002).

⁷⁷ Rangarajan, Anu and Tim Novak. *The Struggle to Sustain Employment: The Effectiveness of the Post Employment Services Demonstration*. (Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research, 1999).

Jastrzab, JoAnn, John Bloomquist, et. al. *Youth Corps: Promising Strategies for Young People and their Communities*. Cambridge: Abt Associates, 1997.

⁷⁸ Hershey, Alan M. and LaDonna Pavetti. *Turning Job Finders into Job Keepers* in The Future of Children, Volume 7, No. 1., Spring 1997.

Having a job developer on staff ensures that corps treat connecting program participants to the labor force as a primary objective. Unlike case managers (who may be interested in improving corpsmembers' performance in the labor force, but who also may view corpsmembers' personal needs as a priority) and teachers (who concentrate on corpsmembers' academic achievement), job developers maintain a focus on employment and develop new strategies geared to place and retain corpsmembers. Having an individual on staff whose primary responsibility is ensuring positive participant employment and retention outcomes ensures that programs focus on employment.

While we do not have sufficient data from the WtW Corps to prove that this focus and these strategies resulted in higher placement and enrollment rates than existed prior to the program, there is some evidence to indicate that this is the case. Effective job developers have experience working both with corpsmembers (or similar populations) and with private sector employers.

Providing Intensive Support Services

Intensive and extensive case management and support services are likely to result in improved corpsmember outcomes. Most case managers agreed that this practice was likely to increase the probability that corpsmembers successfully would complete the program, and WtW corpsmembers themselves often cited the one-to-one counseling that corps staff provided as essential to their success. In addition, our review of effective programs outside of the corps suggests that programs that serve economically disadvantaged individuals (many of whom have multiple barriers to employment) must identify and ameliorate problems as part of their efforts to place and retain youth.

Helping Participants to Actuate Their Goals

Programs that focus on participants' assets and help them to build on those strengths to actuate career goals that participants themselves establish empower participants and build their self-esteem. Both corps staff and the literature reviewed for this project emphasize the importance of asset-based programming.

Successfully Partnering with Outside Providers

Our assessment of quantitative program data, conversations with corps staff and review of the literature indicate that an essential component of training and placement programs' success is their ability to forge meaningful partnerships with effective local service providers. Because few programs can provide the wide range of services that extremely low-income youth may need, it is essential for programs to work with a variety of outside service providers. In addition, for many programs, reporting requirements may necessitate partnering. (For example, in the WtW Project, corps had to partner with local departments of welfare to determine the numbers of 30- and 70- percenters served.) In general, effective partnerships are those in which all parties believe that they benefit from the relationship, partners' roles and relationships are clearly defined, and partners collaborate effectively. Creating effective partnerships may require significant investments of time and program resources.

Using Performance Data to Guide Strategic Planning and to Assess Staff Performance

Effective programs monitor their performance and make strategic decisions about how to change and improve their services based upon concrete outcome data. The importance of using data to guide performance is documented widely in literature about promising practices in implementing social service programs.

Maintaining an Employment-Focused Approach in All Aspects of the Program

Research on promising practices in engaging, placing and retaining individuals in training and employment programs indicates that maintaining an employment-focused approach in all aspects of programming helps to secure positive end results for participants. This focus on employment tends to increase participants' buy-in and ensures that all staff members have a shared understanding of the program's ultimate goals. Corps staff reported that hiring a job developer resulted in an increased employment focus, and the vast majority of them asserted that this was a positive development.

Part of maintaining this employment focus is emphasizing the development of participants' soft skills in all aspects of the program. Research demonstrates that employers are more concerned with hiring individuals who possess solid interpersonal skills than they are with hiring individuals who possess particular technical skills. Accordingly, it is particularly important to teach program participants how to adjust to workplace norms, deal with conflict in the workplace, show up on time, etc. One way in which many successful programs attempt to convey workplace norms and familiarize participants with the workplace environment is to simulate a professional environment at the program site. By requiring participants to dress for success and helping them get accustomed both to the look and feel of the workplace and to employers' expectations, effective programs ease participants' transition from the program into work.

Marketing the Program to Employers and Focusing on Both Participants' Assets and Employers' Needs

Another key component of effective training programs is their ability to market themselves to employers because, ultimately, if employers are unwilling to hire program graduates, the program cannot be successful. Marketing the program to employers, taking steps to ensure that the training provided meshes with local employers' workforce needs, and working with employers after individuals are placed can all be effective strategies for increasing employer involvement and thereby improving program participants' placement and retention outcomes.

Targeting Retention and Following up with Corpsmembers after Placement

It is essential to follow up with program participants after they are placed in jobs, because they are likely to encounter personal challenges that may impede their ability to remain employed. Effective programs stay in touch with and support program participants for at least a year after they are placed and connect individuals to support services when so doing is essential to their remaining employed. Helping program participants to retain jobs (or, better, to transition from low-paying jobs into higher-paying jobs) results in participants forming more secure attachments to the labor force and facilitates their transition out of poverty.

Promising Practices for NASCC in Launching Employment and Training Programs with Corps

Adopting an Intermediary Role

Corps assert that having NASCC serve as an intermediary between DOL and themselves was essential to their success. By translating DOL program requirements into language that corps could understand and by helping DOL to develop realistic expectations for program performance, NASCC helped both DOL and corps to implement a successful program and exceed WtW Project goals.

Providing Flexible Funding

In addition, by providing corps with somewhat flexible funding, DOL and NASCC gave corps the ability to provide WtW corpsmembers with a wide variety of essential services that helped them to

remain in the program and retain their jobs. Providing corps with flexible funding also enabled them to develop creative strategies for facilitating corpsmembers' program completion and placement (such as providing WtW corpsmembers with incentives for remaining in the program, helping corpsmembers to get their drivers' licenses, etc.).

Providing Corps with Sufficient Pre-Program Planning Time

Corps staff believe that providing programs with sufficient pre-implementation planning time can help corps to develop particularly effective strategies for achieving targeted objectives, and that failing to provide corps with this time can jeopardize project outcomes. Allowing several months for programs to "ramp up" before holding them responsible for actually implementing planned projects helps them to garner necessary resources, cultivate partnerships with relevant stakeholders and hire program staff. In the future, NASCC may wish to advocate for more planning time from outside funders, though obtaining this time may not always be possible.

Facilitating Trainings in which Other Service Providers Share Lessons Learned

Corps staff appreciated the opportunity to learn from outside practitioners who had experience training and placing TANF-eligible individuals. These NASCC-organized trainings helped corps to develop strategies for serving this population and to ground those strategies on lessons learned by more experienced individuals.

Developing Clear Reporting Requirements Upfront

In addition, developing clear and consistent reporting requirements at the outset of programs and not changing those requirements ensures that participating corps understand and comply with these requirements. In addition, collecting baseline information about pre-grant program performance makes it possible to obtain a preliminary understanding of the potential impact that grants have on corps. Not having this information constrains funders' and evaluators' ability to determine the impact of grants and program innovations significantly. NASCC may wish to ensure that all of the corps it funds for enrichment efforts have some sort of baseline data about program participants and to provide all corps with technical assistance in data collection because this information both can help programs to monitor their own performance and help funders to gauge likely impacts of program enrichments. DOL also would do well to consider the availability and importance of baseline data when implementing programs. DOL would be wise to fund organizations to collect both baseline and post-program data.

Strategies for Designing Future Similar Programs

Based on our assessment of the WtW project and promising practices, we encourage NASCC to continue to serve as an intermediary and to facilitate employment and training programs at corps. When developing and implementing these kinds of projects, NASCC should negotiate with funders to provide corps with reasonably flexible funding, adequate project planning time and relevant trainings, and develop clear reporting requirements prior to initiating program operations.

In addition, NASCC should structure programs so that they are likely to result in increased positive outcomes for program participants. This includes creating program guidelines that encourage corps to: focus on employment throughout the program, hire job developers, engage employers, create a culture of work within the program environment, develop corpsmembers' soft skills, help corpsmembers determine and actuate their own career goals, provide corpsmembers with intensive

and comprehensive support services, and provide extensive post-placement follow-up in which corps staff focus on helping corpsmembers to retain and advance in jobs.

Furthermore, if NASCC wishes to select programs that appear to be high functioning and that already employ practices likely to engender positive corpsmember outcomes, it should select corps that share the following characteristics: they have established effective partnerships with an array of local service providers; they provide corpsmembers with the opportunity to participate in a wide array of service opportunities; they have the capacity to collect program participant outcome data and do so to guide their own strategic planning; and they employ staff who have both relevant professional credentials and experience working with economically disadvantaged youth.

Finally, if NASCC is eager to learn from future demonstrations and to obtain a nuanced understanding of the kind of impacts it may have through these programs, it should devote substantial staff time and resources to determining what kinds of data it needs to collect not just to meet funders' requirements, but actually to document program results. If possible, NASCC should determine its own criteria for measuring program efficacy and then see whether or not that information is sufficient for funders and should resist (if possible) reporting requirements from outside funders that seem either overly burdensome or unlikely to yield meaningful insights into program performance.

NASCC and the corps community would have learned a great deal more from the Welfare to Work Project if NASCC (and not DOL) had determined what kind of data it and other corps would learn the most from and then collected that data in systematic fashion. It would have been particularly helpful for NASCC to have collected baseline performance data from each corps so that NASCC could better assess the impact of the WtW Project. Not having basic information about the ways in which individual corps performed in key areas such as placement and retention prior to WtW made it impossible to assess the effect of the WtW Project. As it stands, whether or not differences in results among corps were attributable to pre-existing characteristics or to differences in the way in which the WtW Project was implemented could not be determined. NASCC would do well to require certain baseline performance information from corps before awarding them funding.

Collecting better performance data from corps does not necessarily mean collecting more detailed data than NASCC collected for WtW, but, instead, determining what data will be most educational and collecting that data pre- and post-program and on a corps-by-corps basis. For the WtW Project, it might have been more advantageous DOL to focus on collecting more basic, but more meaningful data from the corps. For example, it appears likely that it would have been much more beneficial to have collected baseline and post-program data about enrollment, placement and three-, six-, and one-year retention from each of the sites than it was to collect information about numbers of 30- and 70-percenters served. Given the fact that NASCC's WtW efforts were part of the third pool of Welfare-to-Work competitive grants and that reporting requirements were dictated by Congress, it is unlikely that NASCC would have been able to change DOL's reporting requirements in this instance. In future efforts where reporting requirements are less rigid, however, it would be worthwhile for NASCC to consider what kinds of reporting makes sense for NASCC and its grantees and to encourage receptive funders adopt those measures.

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