

**The Workforce Investment Act and California Youth:  
Implementing Local Youth Councils and Youth Programs**

Fourth Interim Report  
Evaluation of California's Workforce Development System

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The authors also would like to acknowledge the contributions of UC Davis research team members Carole Hinkle, Jeanette Treiber, and Jeff Woled.

## Major Findings and Recommendations

Case studies of Youth Councils and youth programs in 10 of California's 50 local workforce investment areas provide evidence that **WIA has improved the quality of youth services, but has reduced their reach.**

In all 10 case study areas (see Appendix 1 for map listing the areas), we found that the youth programs are highly valued by Workforce Investment Boards, local area administrative staff, and contract service providers. Despite continually diminishing public dollars, youth programs are treated as a top priority in local areas, and benefit from the commitment of talented and dedicated system personnel.

Guided by WIA's 10 required program elements (see p. 22), local implementers provide many high-quality youth workforce services. We found that the most successful programs tended to include the following key elements:

- a holistic approach that combines employment preparation with social services and personal support;
- structures that group youth in cohorts where they work/learn together;
- a learning experience that combines work with the chance to build self-confidence and to learn what it takes to be a good employee; and
- caring adult supervision—of significant time duration—that combines discipline and support in appropriate measures.

This approach engages youth who are willing and able to make a long-term commitment to WIA programs, and among these youth success stories abound (see Appendix 2 for examples).

**WIA has improved the level of collaboration among local youth service providers.** Some WIA Youth Councils have become important venues for networking and information sharing, although WIA funding cuts threaten their community stature. Youth administrative staff, working closely with well-connected service providers, have developed innovative strategies for leveraging WIA dollars to increase youth access to comprehensive community services.

**Efforts to build upon these successes and to expand the *reach* of WIA youth programs face three key obstacles that would require changes to current policies and practices:**

1. Declining funding for WIA youth programs: Funding cuts have severely impacted essential youth services. By requiring greater intensity of service to each youth while reducing program funding, federal policy results in far fewer youth being served.
2. Program design and requirements: The holistic program design and the demands placed on enrollees, while very effective under some circumstances, are not appealing to some of the youth the system might otherwise hope to serve. For example, we found that many older youth want and desperately need immediate help in locating a job. These and other youth are often unwilling to comply with what they perceive as burdensome requirements accompanying WIA enrollment, such as detailed and intrusive eligibility paperwork,

testing to establish progress (which is the reason many dislike or fare poorly in public schools), as well as the required follow-up calls long after they complete the program.

3. Data management and reporting system: Although all our case study areas willingly accept the need to be held accountable for performance and expenditures, they are aligned in calling the current data management and reporting system (JTA) out-of-date and a major contributor to the overwhelming accountability/reporting burden that takes up an estimated 40% of all staff time (Campbell, Lemp, and Treiber, forthcoming). Cumbersome forms and duplicative reporting, complicated by frequent system glitches, exacerbate WIA's already taxing paperwork requirements.

## **Recommendations**

In the face of this evidence, we recommend that workforce leaders at all levels consider adopting or expanding upon the following actions:

1. Work to restore federal funding for youth programs lost during WIA budget cuts.
2. Advocate for renewed federal funding for a summer jobs program that provides short-term employment experience like that available during the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA).
3. Expand system funding by publicizing system success stories and aggressively pursuing partnerships with foundations that fund youth development.
4. Provide federal and state support so that local areas have designated staff that are up-to-date on grantsmanship skills and grant opportunities.
5. Convene workgroups of front-line personnel to work together with state and federal officials on simplifying program paperwork while retaining quality control and outcome accountability (see Appendix 3 for a discussion of some of the specific problem areas identified by our case studies). This work can build on existing strategies used successfully by local areas to streamline paperwork and free case managers from reporting obligations so that they can concentrate on their primary function: helping California youth develop skills that will allow them to lead productive, happy lives.
6. Seek federal funding to replace the outmoded JTA system with data management and reporting systems that meet current business standards and provide the state and local areas with better tools to assess and improve performance.
7. Establish California as a national leader in reducing the number of youth who are out of school and out of work by launching a statewide initiative. State workforce leaders could work with partners in the education, social service, and law enforcement systems to focus and extend current efforts, and put in place a continuous learning structure with a) timely dissemination of outcome data, broken down by local areas, and b) meetings convened to identify promising practices and needed federal or state-level support.

## **Detailed Summary of Findings**

This report describes and assesses implementation of Youth Councils (YCs) and youth programs by 10 local workforce areas in California under the requirements of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). This is the fourth interim report in a series by a UC Davis research team charged with evaluating how WIA is being implemented at the state and local levels in California. Drawing on the four interim reports, a final evaluation report summarizing key overall findings and recommendations will be issued later this year.

### **Research methods**

The purpose of the study was to investigate how WIA youth provisions are being implemented in local areas, generating evidence about what is working and what is not, and providing insight that might inform policy and program planning. We used a comparative case study approach, employing a mix of evaluative methods. Ten local area cases were selected to maximize variation in location, economic conditions, size, and administrative structure. Five of the 10 cases are in local areas in which we also conducted comprehensive case studies for our third interim report (L.A. City, NoRTEC consortium, Sonoma County, Tulare County, and Verdugo consortium); in the other five we limited our focus exclusively to WIA youth provisions and programs (Merced County, Orange County, San Joaquin County, City of Santa Ana, and Solano County).

- The research team conducted 104 interviews between March 2005 and May 2006.
- To supplement the interviews, we observed at least one YC meeting in 9 areas, explored web sites, reviewed documents, and developed comparative profiles of the local areas using data provided by local informants or available from official sources.
- To more fully engage youth voices in our work, we conducted 8 focus groups with youth who have participated in local WIA programs in addition to 6 interviews with youth members of YCs (see Appendix 4). The research team recruited and trained youth from 5 of the local areas to co-facilitate the focus groups with a member of the research team. These youth co-led 4 of the 8 focus groups.

### **The context for youth workforce development**

The WIA system supports young people facing serious obstacles that often block their path to a meaningful occupation or career.

- Joblessness and underemployment among young people in general and among low-income minority youth in particular is widely recognized as a serious problem.
- The real median weekly earnings of young men ages 16-24 who were employed full time in 2001 were 23% below the level reached by their peers in 1973 (Sum, 2003, p. 5).
- As of 2004, 67% of California youth ages 0-17 are from racial and ethnic minorities and 18% live in poverty.
- The youth workforce system serves only a tiny fraction of the estimated 638,000 California youth ages 16-24 who are out of school and out of work (Sum, 2003).

## Local Youth Councils

The primary role and value of YCs is to serve as networking bodies where connections are made, information is shared, problems are discussed, and resource leveraging opportunities are identified.

- Many local areas use RFP and contractor oversight processes to create networks linking WIA-funded service providers to each other and to other youth-serving organizations in the community. Local stakeholders report that the level of local service coordination is greater than during the Job Training Partnership Act era.
- Efforts to coordinate services and service providers primarily benefit the relatively small number of youth enrolled in WIA programs, a small fraction of those youth in need.
- Funding cuts, paperwork burdens, and local RFP requirements combine to limit the number of youth service providers who can afford the administrative overhead costs required to align their organization with the WIA system. In most areas, a few large organizations with diverse funding sources and long-term experience in the workforce system become the key service delivery partners.

## Mission and philosophy

- We observe that WIA's youth mission inspires particularly high levels of dedication and commitment at all levels of California's workforce system.
- WIA gives YCs some leeway to define their role in narrower or broader terms—simply as overseer of WIA-funded youth contractors or more ambitiously as builders of a comprehensive system of youth services. Many YCs initially embraced the broader vision, hoping to seize the opportunity to integrate a broader range of youth services and supported by the All Youth-One System (AYOS; discussed in detail on p. 20) vision of the statewide Youth Council Institute (YCi).
- At the same time, the full vision of a comprehensive youth service delivery system remains elusive. Local implementers experience a vexing tension between WIA's program regulations that restrict eligibility on the one hand, and the ideal of building a comprehensive youth services delivery system serving all youth on the other. These two features of WIA appear to work at cross purposes.
- YC members and staff in a number of our case study areas credited assistance from the Youth Council Institute (YCi), especially early in WIA implementation, with helping them organize and plan their YC goals and activities.

## Operations

- YCs often evolved from earlier community planning bodies, particularly school-to-career coalitions.
- While the WIB itself retains ultimate authority over youth programs, most WIBs grant YCs a high degree of autonomy.
- YC operations and outcomes are shaped by the local area size and location (e.g., urban/rural), configuration (county, city, or a consortium of counties or cities), the



density of youth-serving agencies in the community, and by the vision and leadership of YC chairs, members, and/or staff.

- YCs rely heavily on staff to handle the oversight of contractors and formal compliance with WIA mandates, and staff vision and leadership are key factors in local areas where system-building is more advanced.

### Membership

- Our 10 YCs range in size from 12 to 42 members (the latter area, L.A. City, has since cut the number to 27), and meet as often as once a month and as seldom as twice a year.
- Typically, YCs have diverse memberships. In addition to the members mandated by WIA legislation, community-based organizations and the education community tend to be well represented. Obtaining active involvement of the business community has been an ongoing problem in many areas.
- In many local areas, YC members have initiated projects and events and have supported them with funds from their own agencies or businesses.
- YCs struggle to recruit and engage their youth members, often succeeding best when they find productive roles for these youth outside of formal meetings.
- Service providers who receive WIA contracts have seats on the YCs in the majority of local areas. These local areas establish procedures ensuring that contractors do not take part in decisions about contractor selection and oversight. Despite the need for these conflict of interest precautions, local Youth Councils welcome contractors as members; they are uniquely qualified to inform and advise the YCs about the youth themselves, the experience of operating programs within the local youth-serving matrix, and the progress of their own programs.

### Contractor selection and oversight

- The nature of the YC's role in selecting the contract service providers varies. In some areas, administrative staff play a large part in managing the process; in others, dedicated YC work groups or subcommittees do their own background work, including consulting current contractors about their needs and educating themselves about pending changes in the law prior to crafting an RFP.
- YCs are kept apprised of the performance of contract service providers, typically through staff reports during regular YC meetings. YCs can request that contractors explain substandard performance and when warranted terminate contractors for unsatisfactory performance.

### Youth Council sponsored activities

Nearly all the YCs sponsor activities that either serve youth directly through events and projects or seek to understand them better by conducting needs assessments. For some areas that embraced the All Youth-One System credo of the Youth Council Institute, these projects were a way to reach out to the broader youth community and its needs.

- The most widespread types of events held by local areas in our study were youth conferences, forums, and job fairs.
- Projects that YCs in our study have implemented include work readiness certificates, youth-focused web sites, and needs assessments or resource mapping.
- To our knowledge, none of the case study areas that have pursued work readiness certificates have managed to roll out a working program. Impediments include philosophical differences (e.g., How academic should the standards be? Should the focus be on WIA-eligible youth or all youth?) and the practical difficulty of informing and enlisting a sufficient number of employers and youth to create a viable program. One local area reports extensive use of its web sites; others appear to be having trouble keeping the web site content up to date. The resource mapping and needs assessment work is credited with helping local system-building and program development.

### Momentum and future directions

- As WIA and other funding sources continue to make annual cuts, YCs in our study face reductions in staff support and membership. This makes it difficult to continue to carry YC projects forward and has forced YCs to abandon some of their original goals and activities.
- In 8 of our 10 cases, there is clear support among YC stakeholders to keep their YC operating whether it was required after reauthorization or not, and many respondents clearly expressed their strong emotional attachment to the council.
- Our final survey of executive directors was somewhat more ambiguous, with 21 of 40 indicating their YCs would continue even if not required, 6 saying they would not, and 13 indicating that they are not sure.

### **Youth programs**

Guided by the 10 required program elements, most youth programs are holistic and developmental. They vary in whether they build the program around structured group work experiences or more individualized work placements. The programs nominated by local areas as their most successful include the following key elements:

- a holistic approach that combines employment preparation with social services and personal support;
- structures that group youth in cohorts where they work/learn together;
- a learning experience that combines work with the chance to build self-confidence and to learn what it takes to be a good employee; and
- caring adult supervision—of significant time duration—that combines discipline and support in appropriate measures.

### Contractors

Both local areas and their established contractors report mostly positive working relationships. The ability of contractors to supplement WIA funds with other organizational resources,

including those from other funding sources, and their extensive community networks are critical factors supporting the quality of services that WIA-eligible youth receive.

Administrative staff and providers listed several advantages of working together over time:

- There are fewer surprises. Administrative staff and providers know what to expect from one another, and most differences in style and misunderstandings have been worked out and an acceptable level of trust has been reached.
- Contract service providers hone their skills in dealing with the target population, under stringent WIA regulations, over time.
- Some procedures can be streamlined and shortcuts established, such as ways of simplifying paperwork or the training needed to help providers comply with reporting requirements.
- Working with well-connected contractor providers enables local areas to extend services they can offer to program participants. WIA youth can often be enrolled in programs underwritten by other funders, in effect leveraging ever-diminishing WIA funds.

Our 10 areas contract with a total of 45 service providers, several of which have substantial networks of subcontractors. About two-thirds of contractors are nonprofit community-based organizations with extensive partner networks and other contacts that enhance programs.

#### Contracting process

- Nine of the 10 areas use a separate youth contractor RFP process to determine which providers will be chosen to deliver youth services under WIA. The exception is the NoRTEC Consortium, whose contractors respond to RFPs that combine both adult and youth services in the individual counties they serve.
- Most areas put contracts out for bid every 2-3 years. Providers prefer longer contract periods because it allows them to focus on delivering services rather than on trying to qualify for the next round of funding. Other observers agreed that longer contracts promote stability and that providers' time is better spent serving their clients.
- Most of the 10 areas expect contractors to do their own recruiting, assess eligibility, and provide all 10 of the WIA-required youth services elements, either themselves or through partnerships.
- Several areas divide their local area geographically and put one contractor in charge of providing services in that area.
- Recognizing the importance of program level networking, several areas make it a requirement in their RFPs, thus codifying the degree of networking in which most service providers are already engaged.

#### Funding youth programs

According to EDD data, youth formula funding across California declined by 10% over the 3-year period from July 2001 to June 2004. Our 10 youth case study areas collectively received larger than average reductions of close to 19%. Local area stakeholders reported that funding

cuts have caused them to restructure their services, eliminate some contractors, and reduce the number of youth enrolled and/or placed in paid work experience.

- Many local areas have turned leveraging into a fine art as WIA funds diminish, writing RFPs that make explicit demands on prospective contractors.
- More than half of the local areas in our study reported augmenting their WIA youth programs with funding from other sources, some from many other sources.

### Delivering youth programs

Most local areas face significant challenges in finding, enrolling, retaining, and serving youth. Among these challenges are cultural and ethnic considerations, transportation issues, availability of job opportunities, presence of gangs, prevalence of drugs, and number of school drop-outs. Other factors that influence how youth services are delivered include the age and circumstances of the participants, the approach and expertise of the contractor, and the scope of the contract.

- Some contractors concentrate on serving in-school youth, some work with out-of-school youth, and some offer programs for both.
- Our fieldwork confirms previous findings suggesting that WIA eligibility documentation and verification processes are resource intensive, and may contribute to excluding eligible youth from receiving services (Government Accounting Office, 2002). This is a highly technical process, requiring case managers to collect a great deal of information anchored by copies of personal records covering the youth and their families.
- Most areas have paid special attention to establishing facilities where young people can have ready access to them.
- Providing the opportunity for youth to move from one provider to another in a local area, or to co-enroll in complementary services, is vital to the youth development approach encouraged by WIA, and is a point of emphasis in many local areas.
- With the 10 required elements providing the common framework, we found that local programs take a holistic approach that blends aspects of a strong social service model with employment-oriented services.
- Most of the areas offer paid work experience to the youth in their programs, which is completely or partially underwritten with WIA funds.

### Barriers and obstacles

The most intractable and most often cited barrier to good youth service provision is the decrease in federal funding for youth programs. Respondents in every area expressed their sorrow and frustration at having to reduce the scope of their programs and the numbers of youth they can serve as funding is cut and then cut again. Practitioners also noted a number of issues inherent to the WIA program itself as impediments to serving youth, particularly the onerous paperwork involved, overly stringent eligibility requirements and performance measures, and the absence of a summer jobs program like that available under the Job Training Partnership Act (for a more extended discussion of these issues, see Appendix 3) . The difficulty of recruiting out-of-school youth is another widespread issue. Other issues mentioned include:

- Many youth primarily want jobs, not other services. Youth are eager to earn some money and are often impatient with the training and discussions that were part of the WIA package.
- Reliable transportation is hard to find, making it hard for youth to access services or work experiences.
- Employer reluctance to take a chance on youth reduces job placement opportunities.

### WIA reauthorization and Common Measures

No one we talked with denied that out-of-school youth constitute a population in desperate need of assistance if they are to take successful command of their lives. In fact, a number of contractors in several local areas are already working primarily or exclusively with out-of-school youth. However, many stakeholders expressed strong reservations about the expected new emphasis on serving out-of-school youth. One concern is over how many youth they could help in the face of ever-diminishing funding. They predicted from experience that a far greater percentage of WIA dollars will be diverted from youth programs into the effort to track down and work with out-of-school youth. In addition, stakeholders offered passionate arguments for working with youth while they are still in school in order to prevent problems later.

Far from hailing Common Measures as a positive step, youth service providers foresee troubling implications, especially in the area of skill attainment. The reactions we heard from respondents tended to range from unenthusiastic to resigned.

### **Conclusion**

WIA Youth Councils and youth programs are making important contributions toward meeting California's youth workforce development challenges. Like other educational endeavors, their work is labor- and resource-intensive. Youth workforce programs require determined and patient efforts if they are to succeed in helping youth build skills and confidence in the context of relationships that offer both support and challenge.

Regrettably, the system can serve only a small fraction of the youth who need services at current levels of funding, and there are few signs that the long trend of declining federal investment in these programs will soon be reversed. This makes it all the more imperative that workforce leaders and their private sector partners learn how to "work smarter" and to attract non-federal sources of funding.

The careful reflections and comments offered by state and local workforce stakeholders to drafts of this and earlier reports reinforce our observation that California has an abundance of committed and able leaders throughout its workforce development system. The challenge is to harness their commitment and expertise as effectively as possible and to build upon the renewed sense of state-local collaboration that is being created. It is toward those ends that we hope our descriptions, analysis, and recommendations have contributed.

## **The Workforce Investment Act and California Youth: Implementing Local Youth Councils and Youth Programs**

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) provides separate Title I formula funds to local workforce investment areas to serve at-risk youth between the ages of 14 and 21.<sup>1</sup> As the successor to the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), WIA introduced several new features to youth workforce programs, including a focus on more comprehensive year-round services emphasizing youth development, mandatory YCs, and a requirement for post-program follow-up (Harris, 2005).

In this report, we examine how 10 local areas<sup>2</sup>, selected as case studies to represent California's diversity, have implemented WIA YCs and youth programs. By paying attention to local dynamics, meanings, and perspectives, and by looking for patterns and common themes across the 10 cases, we provide a picture of WIA youth implementation on the ground to inform workforce policy development.

This interim report is the fourth in a series prepared by a UC Davis research team charged with preparing a systems analysis of how WIA is being implemented at the state and local levels in California. Previous reports have dealt with 1) implementation of WIA at the state level, 2) a survey of local area executive directors, and 3) a comparative analysis of local WIA implementation in 10 local areas (covering all aspects of implementation except youth provisions). A final report summarizing key findings from the four interim reports and offering recommendations for state and local workforce leaders will complete the evaluation.

This report on youth programs was designed to parallel and supplement the previous elements of the UC Davis evaluation. Initial fieldwork for the evaluation alerted the research team to the value of concentrating particular attention on the unique dynamics of the youth components of the overall workforce system. With an eye toward this objective, and after gaining acceptance of the idea from staff at the California Workforce Investment Board (CWIB), the UC Davis team and a group of UC Cooperative Extension 4-H Youth Development Advisors submitted a successful November 2004 proposal to a competitive grant process managed by the University's Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources. That grant was later matched by CWIB, enabling us to double the number of case studies.

### **Approach and Methods**

We use a comparative case study approach, featuring extensive local interviewing and a mix of other evaluative methods. Rather than evaluating local implementation against pre-set standards, our approach is to explore what is actually happening on the ground and to build a knowledge

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<sup>1</sup> The Bush Administration's FY 2006 budget proposed consolidating funding streams for adult and youth programs, while cutting the overall budget. If enacted, it is uncertain what effect this would have on the future of youth programs.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this report we will use the term "local areas" or simply "areas" synonymously with the more cumbersome term "local workforce investment area."

base that takes seriously the variety of local contexts, diverse perspectives on local activities, and the tensions and ambiguities that inevitably affect local implementation of federal policy.

The case studies constitute a “field network” study, which seeks to understand how state and local actors implement public policy after it is enacted (Lurie, 2001; Nathan, 2000). The approach is particularly appropriate for examining Workforce Investment Act programs, since WIA legislation grants local workforce areas considerable discretion to tailor programs to local needs and circumstances. Finding out how that discretion is exercised, and assessing the resulting strategies for their effectiveness, is a key to informing future policy and program decisions.

Consistent with the approved research design, we have concentrated on the following questions:

1. What is the operative mission of local Youth Councils and youth programs, and what mix of factors influences local mission choices?
2. What institutions, partnership arrangements, and collaborative dynamics are in place in local youth workforce networks, and what mix of factors influences these?
3. What is the nature of youth services contractors and their programs?
4. According to local stakeholders, what are the strengths and weaknesses of the Workforce Investment Act and of the youth workforce development system in California?

### **Sample selection**

We purposively selected 10 of California’s 50 workforce investment areas (see map in Appendix 1) as case studies. The local areas were selected to maximize variation in location, economic conditions, size, and administrative structure. Five of the 10 cases are in local areas in which we also conducted comprehensive case studies for our third interim report (L.A. City, NoRTEC, Sonoma County, Tulare County, and Verdugo); in the other five we limited our focus exclusively to WIA youth provisions and programs (Merced County, Orange County, San Joaquin County, City of Santa Ana, and Solano County). In three of the 10 cases—L.A. City, San Joaquin, and Sonoma County—the lead researcher was a UC Cooperative Extension 4-H Advisor with extensive knowledge of youth development principles, local youth, and youth programs.

### **Research methods**

The research team conducted 104 interviews between March 2005 and May 2006. To encourage frank communication, respondents were promised confidentiality. Research team members followed a common interview protocol, but were free to adapt questions in an open-ended fashion to learn as much as possible about unique individuals, situations, and perspectives. In each local area, we made an effort to speak with:

- the lead WIB staff person for youth;
- the chair of the YC;
- 2-3 members of the YC, including at least one youth (if one existed);
- a representative of at least two youth services contractors;
- other interviewees identified using snowball sampling techniques.

To supplement the interviews, we observed at least one YC meeting (in 9 of the 10 areas), explored web sites, reviewed documents—particularly YC minutes and agendas—and developed comparative profiles of the local areas using data provided by local informants or available from official sources.

To more fully engage youth voices in our work, we conducted 8 focus groups with youth who have participated in local WIA programs in addition to 6 interviews with youth members of YCs. The research team recruited and trained youth from 5 of the local areas to co-facilitate the focus groups with a member of the research team, and one or more youth were present to co-lead 4 of the 8 focus groups. A more complete description of the focus groups and their findings can be found in Appendix 4.

### **Organization of this report**

After a brief introduction to provide context on youth employment challenges, this report is organized into two main sections, one dealing with YCs and the other with youth programs. A final section summarizes local stakeholder reflections on what has worked well and not so well during implementation, WIA strengths and weaknesses, issues surrounding WIA reauthorization and Common Measures, and other policy suggestions.

By separating the sections on YCs and youth program we simplify the discussion of our findings, but readers should keep in mind that in practice the two are intricately connected. The administrative personnel who staff the YCs most often are also involved in providing day-to-day oversight for the youth programs. In addition, both the YCs and the youth service providers—nearly always contractors who are chosen by competitive RFP processes—are engaged in networking with local youth-serving entities. The YCs seek to have as many voices at the table as possible in order to facilitate coordination of local youth services, while the service providers work with partners to provide a full range of services to community youth. In all of our 10 cases, the same local organizations that provide contracted WIA services to youth are either members of the YCs or regularly attend YC meetings.



## **The Context for Youth Workforce Programs**

In this section we provide a brief overview of context in which WIA youth programs operate, including youth employment challenges identified in the literature, and the demographics of California's youth population.

### **What the literature says about youth workforce attachment**

The youth employment sector is highly sensitive to fluctuations in the economy as a whole. Joblessness and underemployment among young people in general and among low-income minority youth in particular is widely recognized as a serious problem (Blanchflower and Freeman, 2000; Gitter and Scheuer, 1997). The young adults most affected by economic downturns are from low-income families, live in the larger cities or in rural areas, are members of a minority group, and/or have no training beyond high school (Sum, 2003). The decline in manufacturing jobs, the movement of jobs away from inner cities, and the increasing skill demands for even entry-level jobs are especially significant barriers to youth. For less educated workers, not only has the number of jobs declined, but the real earnings of workers have also declined. "The real median weekly earnings of young men (ages 16-24) who were employed full time in 2001 were 23 percent below the level reached by their peers in 1973" (Sum, 2003, p. 5). Such a situation makes the "informal job market" of crime appear more attractive than the formal job market for many young men (Blanchflower and Freeman, 2004).

Besides the limited availability of jobs to young people just entering the workforce, the very nature of the U.S. labor system contributes to the difficulty American youth face in making a smooth transition into the workforce. Loose ties between education and business, difficult-to-identify career paths, and a highly permeable labor system add up to an unstable transition from school to work and a large percentage of young people who begin college never finish. Identifying a career track seems elusive to many young people, and is increasingly difficult even for adults in the new economy. Continued outsourcing of jobs requiring low-to-medium levels of skill and training may further erode the opportunities for entry-level jobs that might lead to meaningful and well-compensated careers. As a result, many young people move from job to job without real direction and purpose. This pattern continues into adulthood (Santrock, 1995).

The youth-serving arm of the WIA system exists to support and guide young people as they identify a path to a meaningful occupation or career. A clearer understanding of the WIA youth programs and how they can help this population gain needed skills and direction is vital to the future economic well-being of California's youth. No single program template can possibly serve the diverse youth of California and their employment related needs. However, past evaluations have identified a few program characteristics that are associated with successful outcomes. Magnum (2000, p. 320-21) identifies the following features that make youth workforce programs more likely to succeed:

- at least one year enrollment duration;
- integrated combinations of basic education, skills training, and OJT;
- visible connection to jobs of promise;
- mentoring by respected adults;
- opportunities for high profile community service;

- possibilities of further educational advancement upon demonstrated success; and
- youth share in decision-making responsibilities with the program, gaining a sense of empowerment that is greater than that available through anti-social activities.

As we will describe, the programs local areas nominated as their most successful incorporate many of these features.

## **Demographic challenges in California**

California provides a uniquely challenging setting in which to manage youth workforce development programs. In this section, we identify just a few of the most pressing concerns.

### Diversity, poverty, and resignation

Under WIA, eligible "youth" are defined as low-income individuals<sup>3</sup> between the ages of 14 and 21 who meet at least one of the following six barriers to employment<sup>4</sup>:

- deficient in basic literacy skills;
- high school dropout;
- homeless, runaway, or a foster child;
- pregnant or a parent;
- youth offender; or
- an individual who requires additional assistance to complete an educational program or to secure and maintain employment.

The sheer number and diversity of California youth meeting these criteria, including many recent immigrants, pose a tremendous challenge. California has a large population of youth who are not fluent in English, which is a significant obstacle to employment and educational success and creates unique staffing and program delivery demands for workforce programs.

As of 2004, 67% of California's youth come from racial and ethnic minority groups and 18% are in poverty (Ann E. Casey Foundation, 2006). In addition to the material disadvantages it poses, poverty often creates mindsets that work against positive attachment to work. For example, a 1997-98 study by University of California Cooperative Extension examined youth attitudes toward careers. It found that a significant number of youth, especially poor youth, appeared to have resigned themselves to not being able to achieve what they want to achieve (Madsen, et. al., 2002). Against this backdrop, youth service providers can experience significant difficulty in recruiting and motivating the type of youth participants targeted by WIA programs.

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<sup>3</sup> Ninety-five percent of youth enrolled must be low-income, meaning that they or their family: receive cash public assistance; have an income that does not exceed the poverty line or 70% of the lower living standard income level, whichever is higher; are eligible for food stamps; are homeless, a foster child, or are disabled and can meet either of the first two requirements even if their family doesn't.

<sup>4</sup> Some experts suggest that age 25 might be a better upper limit. As one report states, "The artificial barrier in many federal programs that arises at either 18 or 21 undermines the effectiveness of programs for this population (Bazelton Center for Mental Health Law, 2005).

## High numbers of young people are out of school and out of work

Our evidence is consistent with studies indicating that the youth workforce development effort reaches only a small fraction of those who are eligible for services. For example, a 2004 study reports that 638,000 California youth age 16-24 were out of school and out of work, with more than 93,000 of these in Los Angeles city (Fogg and Harrington, 2004, p. 45). Yet the L.A. City workforce system had sufficient funds to enroll only 2,232 youth in the 2005-06 program year.

A national study conducted by the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University found that the percentage of 16-24 year-olds who were out of school and out of work declined from 18.5% in 1992 to just over 14% in 2000, but began rising again in 2001 (Sum, et. al., 2002).

Table 1 below provides a demographic profile of the youth population in case study area counties. Large numbers of youth are out of school and out of work in all areas, and high percentages of students do not meet the UC or CSU entrance requirements. By comparison to levels of community need, WIA programs serve relatively small numbers of youth. Total new enrollments each year in most of our 10 local areas are in the 200-400 range.

**Table 1. Selected demographics of youth in case study areas\***

| AREA                   | TOTAL POP.<br>(1/1/05) | YOUTH AGE<br>0-17<br>(2005) | CHILD<br>POVERTY<br>RATE<br>(2002) | % OUT OF<br>SCHOOL,<br>OUT OF<br>WORK<br>AGES 16-19<br>(2000) | % MEETING<br>UC/CSU<br>ENTRANCE<br>REQ.<br>(2002-04 AVG) |
|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|---|--|
| L.A. *<br>County       | 10,166,417             | 2,779,941                   | 25.3%                              | 10.7%   | 36.3%  |
| Merced<br>County       | 241,464                | 77,825                      | 26.2%                              | 12.0%   | 22.0%  |
| NoRTEC**<br>Consortium | 606,555                | 110,818                     | 20.0%                              | 9.2%  | 27.9%  |
| Orange<br>County       | 3,047,054              | 800,650                     | 14.2%                              | 7.6%  | 36.0%  |
| San Joaquin<br>County  | 655,319                | 195,328                     | 19.6%                              | 11.7%   | 30.4%  |
| Solano<br>County       | 420,307                | 111,382                     | 10.2%                              | 7.9%  | 27.8%  |
| Sonoma<br>County       | 477,697                | 109,966                     | 9.7%                               | 7.9%  | 35.6%  |
| Tulare<br>County       | 411,701                | 131,883                     | 32.1%                              | 12.4%   | 23.8%  |

Total population figures from the State of California, Department of Finance, *E-1 Population Estimates for Cities, Counties and the State with Annual Percent Change — January 1, 2005 and 2006*. Sacramento, California, May 2006.

Remaining figures from the Children Now, *California County Data Book 2005* (Oakland, CA: Children Now).

\* Both the L.A. City and Verdugo local areas lie within L.A. County. The Santa Ana local area is in Orange County.

\*\* The figures represent the totals or average across the 9 NoRTEC counties—Del Norte, Lassen, Modoc, Plumas, Shasta, Siskiyou, Sutter, Tehama, and Trinity.

## **Local Youth Councils**

WIA requires that local areas establish Youth Councils (YCs) with two primary purposes: 1) to select and oversee service providers who receive WIA contracts; and 2) to support improved integration and coordination among a broad array of local youth serving organizations. To guide the achievement of these purposes, YCs develop the portions of the local WIB strategic plan that relate to youth programs.

As is the case with Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs), the legislation gives YCs some leeway to define their role in narrower or broader terms:

WIA's legislative language gives each YC a choice. It can follow the letter of the law and define its function narrowly: in this approach, the YC exists to help the local Workforce Board plan for and monitor the spending of youth funds available through the WIA system. But a local YC can also define its role more broadly: as a convenor, planner, coordinator, and broker of youth services across different funding streams and programs, for a broad range of people in the local service area. WIA opens the door for a YC to become the architect of a comprehensive local youth service delivery system (Callahan and Pines, 1999, p. 21).

Another report (Steinberg, et. al., 2003, p. 17) sums up the WIA mandate as follows:

WIA's youth provisions ask a field once characterized by discrete programs focused on short-term outcomes to move toward developing a comprehensive system that helps young people make effective transitions to higher education and living-wage careers.

By any measure, this task is difficult. No coherent federal, state, or local policy for youth development exists to guide efforts at systems integration, as one report states (Pittman, Irby, and Ferber, 2001):

The United States has a myriad of youth policies, but it lacks a coherent policy agenda for young people making the transition from childhood to adulthood. And it certainly does not have a policy agenda that has young people's development, as opposed to their detention, at its core.

### **Key findings related to Youth Councils**

The primary role and value of YCs is to serve as networking bodies where connections are made, information is shared, problems are discussed, and resource leveraging opportunities are identified. WIA gives YCs some leeway to define their role in narrower or broader terms— simply as overseer of WIA-funded youth contractors or more ambitiously as builders of a comprehensive system of youth services.

- Enthusiastic about the opportunity to integrate a broader range of youth services and supported by the All Youth-One System (AYOS) vision of the statewide YC Institute (YCi), many YCs initially embraced the broader vision.

- Many local areas use RFP and contractor oversight processes to create networks linking WIA-funded service providers to each other and to other youth-serving organizations in the community. Local stakeholders report that the level of local service coordination is greater than during the JTPA era.
- At the same time, the full vision of a comprehensive youth service delivery system remains elusive. Local implementers experience a vexing tension between WIA's program regulations that restrict eligibility, on the one hand, and the ideal of building a comprehensive youth services delivery system serving all youth, on the other. These two features of WIA appear to work at cross purposes.
- Efforts to coordinate services and service providers primarily benefit the relatively small number of youth enrolled in WIA programs, a small fraction of those youth in need.
- Funding cuts, paperwork burdens, and local RFP requirements combine to limit the number of youth service providers who can afford the administrative overhead costs required to align their organization with the WIA system. In most areas, a few large organizations with diverse funding sources and long-term experience in the workforce system become the key service delivery partners.

### **Interpreting the mission of the WIA youth system**

WIA's youth mission inspires particularly high levels of dedication and commitment at all levels of California's workforce system. For example, our 2006 survey of local area executive directors and One-Stop managers found that both groups put "youth" at the top of their list when asked what demographic groups should receive priority for WIA funds. Both YC and WIB members we interviewed, including employers, seem especially motivated to serve youth. As one simply remarked, "Youth inspire us." The most frequently expressed objective of the WIA system is to help young people develop their full potential as self-sufficient, productive members of the community. Somewhat more concretely, YC members and observers see their mission as helping local youth gain leadership skills, develop good work skills, and learn more about career opportunities that match their abilities and interests. Representative comments included:

In a nutshell, it is to assist youth to develop to their full potential. It's not to help youth get wealthy, it's not to help youth just finish high school. It's to help them develop their full potential and that potential is physical, educational, healthwise; to have the ability to support a family; their creative and innovative abilities.

...to focus on youth, get them a good start...I think that is the main theme here. They are our community leaders in the future.

### Comprehensive approach to youth development

Although the look, feel, and culture of local area youth programs can vary significantly, basic interpretations of the WIA youth mission are not radically different from area to area. A key reason is that WIA mandates a comprehensive approach to youth development, with 10 required program elements to which all areas must conform.

As one guide to the legislation states, WIA reflected the belief of congress that the “trend of providing short term programs for youth is unacceptable” (Brustein and Knight, 1998, p. 26). A key California planning guide defined the youth development approach as follows (YCi Guidebook, 2003, p. 79):

A youth development approach views each young person globally, as an aggregate of needs to be addressed, assets to be preserved and potential to be nourished, rather than as problems to be solved. Moving beyond standards of employability (emphasized under JTPA), youth program planners must also account for young people’s needs for structure, belonging, self-esteem, autonomy, competence, and healthy relationships. Youth development highlights the promotion of positive behavior over the treatment of negative behavior or conditions and the fostering of resilience in the face of difficulties and setbacks; it envisions youth as partners in progress, rather than simply recipients of services. Projects and programs using a youth development approach enable youth to build skills, exercise leadership, meet high expectations, form relationships with concerned adults, and improve their communities.

The commitment to youth development is made specific in the WIA requirement that local areas make a detailed set of 10 program elements available to all youth participants:

1. tutoring, study skills training, and instruction leading to secondary school completion;
2. alternative secondary school offerings;
3. summer employment opportunities directly linked to academic and occupational learning;
4. paid and unpaid work experiences including internships and job shadowing;
5. occupational skill training;
6. leadership development opportunities;
7. supportive services;
8. adult mentoring;
9. follow-up services; and
10. comprehensive guidance

As we describe in our section on youth programs, the new youth development emphasis poses a tradeoff between the depth of services given to individual participants and the ability to reach more youth. Local stakeholders value the depth of individual attention and time they can give to enrolled youth, but bemoan that they can no longer provide more youth with services such as the summer jobs program that was in place during JTPA.

#### The Youth Council Institute and the All Youth-One System approach

In 2001, the California Workforce Investment Board contracted with the nonprofit organization New Ways to Work to establish the California Youth Council Institute (YCi). From 2001-2005 YCi was the official provider of technical assistance and support for local YCs and youth

programs.<sup>5</sup> Together with the California Workforce Association, they offer a well-attended yearly conference focused on youth workforce issues. They also provided one-on-one assistance to as many as 40 local areas, helping them create a structured approach to comprehensive youth services within a community. YC members and staff in a number of our case study areas credited assistance from New Ways to Work, especially early in WIA, with helping them organize and plan their YC goals and activities. As one stated:

We use their charts a lot. We use their assessment tools...actually we do a self-assessment of the YC every year using those tools to find out if our priorities have shifted. It allows you to take that information and it can let you drop it into a work plan. We found that really valuable. Until those tools [were available] we didn't have a concrete work plan or assessment. We actually used the Elements of a Comprehensive Youth System and some of the other pieces and said, 'You know what? This is our committee structure right here.'

A key way in which YCi influenced local mission was by promoting the All Youth-One System (AYOS) approach that had been developed and promoted by New Ways to Work even before the YCi was created. AYOS encourages local areas to take a comprehensive systems approach to conceiving of youth programs and services. In particular, it encourages local planners to move beyond the traditional two-system approach to youth services: one for "young people that are in comprehensive schools and doing OK and another system for those that aren't," as a staff member of New Ways to Work expressed it. Instead, it posited the ideal of a single youth serving system or network that reached out to all youth in the community.

Changing this traditional categorical approach seemed hopeless within existing bureaucracies, and the new YCs seemed to offer an opportunity to incorporate the principles of "a comprehensive youth-serving system." At least half of the areas had enthusiastically embraced the idea early in WIA implementation. However, while AYOS may still provide overarching principles to guide their thinking, or specific planning tools, local areas report that they have gradually abandoned the effort to bring the AYOS concept to full fruition.

The primary reason given by local stakeholders revolves around the fundamental tension between AYOS and WIA regulations restricting the provision of contracted services to youth that meet eligibility restrictions. As one respondent said, a major stumbling block is, "How do you serve a targeted population with WIA money and still create a system for all youth?" Despite sincere efforts in many areas, the problem of how to offer services even to a significant portion of WIA-eligible youth, let alone to all the youth in a given community, has proven to be overwhelming:

...a while ago we adopted this All Youth-One System sort of ideology, where we said, 'Hey, we really don't care if you're WIA-eligible or not. When you go to the provider, we

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<sup>5</sup> In 2005 the California Workforce Board decided not to renew the YCi contract, citing a desire to rethink direction guided by its newly created Lifelong Learning Committee. However, New Ways to Work continues to support and interact with interested YCs, and is a key partner in the yearly CWA-organized youth conference.

want anybody to be able to get some service.’ And that's a great thing to say, but the fact of the matter is that the money flows [based] on the regulations.

Citing the reality of limited funds, personnel, and time, another supporter says, “But then, when it comes to trying to implement things...I say, ‘Oh god, it's really- *challenging*.’”

One area that invested considerable time and effort in AYOS was Orange County, and their experience has yielded some hard-earned lessons related to the sequence of steps that are needed to support implementation. The YC brought in New Ways to Work to train them, but as council members left, the implementation capacity has diminished. The shift to AYOS was particularly labor intensive and challenging for contractors who were asked to spend time with youth who weren't eligible for WIA, with no extra funds and often no clear idea of how to proceed. One contractor commented that it might have been easier for contractors if had the YC had developed partnerships at the countywide-level first, (as they are doing now), rather than simply delegating responsibility to the contractors.

Although YCs who began with strong commitments to the AYOS model may have found it difficult to implement in the present economic and political climate, they—and other YCs in our study—remain aware of the great need for services among local youth who may not fit WIA's strict eligibility criteria. We encountered many efforts to extend services to all youth, sometimes through such events as conferences and career fairs, and sometimes through linkages with other funding sources.

For example, as the home base for New Ways to Work, Sonoma County's YC has aligned itself with AYOS since its earliest days. With the encouragement of its WIB and the financial support of its own members, the YC embarked upon a set of highly visible and well publicized activities intended for all Sonoma County youth. These included an annual Youth Symposium, an annual Lego-Robotics Science Fair, a web site created by youth for youth, and a work readiness certificate. More recently, the YC chair has focused the council's efforts on oversight of contractors and establishing better connections with local employers on behalf of WIA youth. As a result, the all-youth projects have been spun off to other entities where they continue in slightly different forms. Another AYOS-inspired legacy is the result of the strong embrace of the concept by the superintendent of schools, a WIB/YC member and dedicated supporter of the AYOS concept. He has incorporated the AYOS structure into the school system itself: “...we have frankly reorganized the county office to kind of reflect those elements, and the 3 core elements are academic support, youth development, and youth leadership...”

### **Youth Council roles in local workforce networks**

The main functions and tasks that YCs in these 10 local areas perform include 1) facilitating networking among local youth-serving entities, 2) selecting and overseeing youth contractors, and 3) initiating their own youth events or activities. Of these three, the networking function is the one that appears to be most consistently appreciated by YC members and other local stakeholders. The following sections describe each of these roles.



## Youth Council networking

When we asked what is the most valuable role of their YC, stakeholders frequently begin by discussing the networking that takes place in and around YC meetings. YCs are valued as a forum for communication, collaboration, and coordination for youth-serving organizations. While the council's role in procuring and managing contracts may have more formal status, the development of social capital and institutional connections is deemed equally or more important, as a YC member notes:

I think in the back of their minds they know that [procurement] is part of what they do, but I really think they're there for the camaraderie, and getting to meet and see people, and learn about what's going on in the community.

YCs in our study often include people who have known one another and have been working together for years. Most of them, especially those representing public agencies and community-based organizations, have watched funding diminish while the need and numbers of individuals to be served in their communities continues to rise. As a result, they value opportunities to work together to cope with the effects of disinvestment.

WIA brings structure to this kind of collaboration by providing a time and place for regular meetings and by requiring that an extra effort must be made to bring a particular set of players to the table. In so doing, it adds a dimension of breadth and formality that tends to systematize interactions among regular partners and to introduce new ones. As a staff member from the Verdugo Consortium told us:

So right now and for several years, this has been the only place where anybody in the Verdugo region who works with youth services that relate to workforce gets together and says, 'What the heck are you doing?' and 'This is what we're doing.' And it's valuable just for that.

Promoting interaction among youth providers is a primary purpose of the Santa Ana YC as well. A Santa Ana stakeholder explained:

I think the reaching out and the interaction with all the outside providers, just bringing people in. People – board members – will just show up with other people and say, 'Oh, I thought you'd like to meet so-and-so.' It's showing us, too, how much more is out there than we even realized.

As detailed in the following sections, local respondents mentioned a number of specific benefits that flowed from YC networking, including better coordination of youth services, information sharing, and problem-solving.

### *Coordinating youth services*

With regard to the YC role in coordinating services, respondents emphasize the importance of having a place to convene key stakeholders, discuss ideas, and find ways to work together:

...the YC is a way for professionals from a lot of different areas to get together and air ideas, and cooperate on projects that probably extend well beyond WIB boundaries. [I]t gets people from different areas together, and enables them to cross-pollinate, as it were.

To coordinate youth services, bringing together youth, education, workforce practitioners, employers, and others to create a system so that young people can succeed in and—ideally—live in Sonoma County...be prepared for whatever their future holds. The vision is be prepared and the mission is work together to achieve that.

A good example is the county-wide coordination of services being promoted by the Orange County YC. WIA-funded contractors do not sit on the YC; instead, the council contracts with 2-3 service providers in each of the four geographic areas of the county. These contractors are required to network with other, non-WIA-funded youth service providers. Through monthly meetings, the service providers build their own local networks—sharing information, giving each other advice on handling tough cases, and referring youth to each other's services. WIA contractors described dense networks that have formed, and many said the monthly meetings are invaluable. In some cases, the youth staff work to connect contractors with county government agencies such as probation and social services so they can coordinate their services. One veteran contractor talked about how helpful it was for her and her staff to meet with county social services agency staff:

Just for me personally, understanding how all the stuff worked with social services was worth a million dollars. I had no idea that there was this kind of a social worker and that kind of social worker and this person was in charge of this person and this person oversees the group homes. I had no idea how the communications system worked.

When local areas have the benefit of significant ongoing activity and organizational experience related to youth, the YC does not necessarily have to assume the primary or sole leadership role. For example, Verdugo staff made a strategic choice to work with four important youth initiatives that were already underway at the time WIA was implemented.

#### *Benefits of sharing information*

YC members in some areas said they like serving because it keeps them in the loop and gives them ideas about potential resources and strategies. For example, a member of Solano County's YC said:

I enjoy coming because it keeps me informed of other things that are going on in the county. I'm not involved with [another district], but they have different grants and educational information that is often shared at our committee meetings. Amendments, proposal bills, all that is shared here and I think for most of the members it's rewarding to attend.

A contract service provider for the Verdugo Consortium likes being able to save time with a quick across-the-table exchange of possibilities:

More than anything, it's a meeting time that we're able to see what's going on in each other's agency...let's say I have this great idea, but right there, we'll know if it can happen or not. It can't be allowed because of the school district? OK, so we can just cross that [off] and go to the next thing.

A long-time staff member now contracting with the Verdugo Consortium values the opportunity to learn about non-WIA youth services:

You can lose track very quickly of details related to services going on in your community . . . if you're not talking to each other. And I think that's what happens here. I think it's been especially helpful where there were organizations that did not receive any of the Workforce Investment Act money who were doing services for youth that went beyond recreation. For example, they have an after-school homework lab at the Y. Well, who knew? I mean, you have to know it. How do you know it? How do they promote it? Well, this is a place where you find that out.

Another Verdugo Consortium stakeholder commented how YC networking prevents duplication of effort:

Part of what we're doing here is to be sure that we all know what's going on in the different sectors. It's a clearinghouse for information so that nobody's going to be out there inventing the wheel all by themselves.

Given its unique multi-county territory, the NoRTEC Consortium depends little upon the 2-3 YC meetings per year for information exchange. Instead, contractors are linked to NoRTEC administration and to each other by a sophisticated internet-based communication system. NoRTEC contractors face such diverse geographic, cultural, and economic conditions that their youth programs are typically adapted to the special needs of their own counties with little overlap either in content or in partnerships.

### *Problem-solving*

Local observers said that YC meetings are a good place to solve problems. Since so many stakeholders are at the table, they can often get feedback and make collective decisions on the spot. For example, stakeholders in the Verdugo Consortium used the forum of the YC when they found out resources had diminished among partners that they had traditionally relied upon to help them put on an annual job fair. EDD had lost funds, and the schools no longer had career counselors helping with projects like this. Up until this time, Glendale Community College had held its own separate job fair each year on its campus. A stakeholder described how they went from not knowing if they were going to have a job fair to having one that was better, by discussing the problem at a YC meeting:

We were at a meeting and said – 'OK, we still want to do a job fair, what are our options?' To make a long story short, we ended up co-partnering with Glendale College, who was having a vocational fair... My point being that by getting the college at the

table, by getting the school district at the table...together we were able to come up with a much better program, because more kids were involved. They got to learn more than just going to a job fair and getting a job; they also got to learn about junior college, they got to learn about the college system.

In Merced County, a local housing authority stepped in to help a contractor recruit out-of-school youth, according to a local observer:

The Housing Authority came to the YC and said, 'We'll give you an office, a computer, a phone, and our records. You can contact anybody in the housing you want to in order to find those kids.' People don't usually open their records, but they did.

### Youth Council involvement with contractor selection and oversight

Most of the YCs in our study play some role in selecting the contract service providers who deliver youth services in their local areas, which is one of their assigned roles under WIA. The nature of the YC's role in this endeavor varies from one local area to another, as does the role of the administrative staff. In some areas, administrative staff typically play a large part in managing the process; in others, dedicated YC work groups or subcommittees do their own background work, including consulting current contractors about their needs and educating themselves about pending changes in the law, prior to crafting an RFP that incorporates the YC's input. As a Sonoma County YC member serving on the RFP subcommittee said:

I guess...the actual county organization has the legal responsibility, in that the RFP is written between the providers and the County of Sonoma, but the content of the RFP, what we want the providers to do for us, is developed by the YC. So, the legal administration, I think, happens at the county, but the actual practical administration, if you will, the development of the scope and the input into how it's going, comes from the YC.

A Solano stakeholder appreciated the fact that the YC deliberated over its options in a transparent process:

What I really respect was it went to the YC first, and all the programs that submitted a proposal attended, and were able to hear the discussion. At that point, we knew the recommendations, and we could talk about it if you had any concerns that you weren't getting funded, or less funding, or whatever. It was made very clear: there's a list of the proposal rankings, and what the scores were. There were no secrets.

In most cases where contractors serve on YCs, they are welcome participants in the RFP development process since they have the greatest amount of hands-on experience in working with the target population, although they abstain from voting on contract awards. This effort to avoid conflict-of-interest issues, though essential, can have unintended consequences. One YC assigned a subset of members—none of whom were WIA contractors—to review and evaluate proposals and to award the contracts. This left a relatively inexperienced group with the task and led to a poor outcome, as a YC member noted:

They were seduced by this attractive grant proposal without really understanding, ‘OK, what is their track record?’ That’s true of anybody like that. Sometimes the most knowledgeable people don’t make the decisions.

Some contractors reportedly look positively upon YC involvement in the procurement process:

These are all community-based folks who made the final decision. It wasn’t just a staff recommendation based upon the leaders. I know they listened to us.

In a different local area where the YC plays a minor role in the procurement procedures, two contractors expressed dissatisfaction with the level of control over the process vested in administrative staff. Comments included frustration over their inability to contribute to RFP provisions, the impact of the procurement process on current programs, and a sense that their independence as YC members was eroded by a perceived need to submit to staff preferences on unrelated topics lest they should jeopardize their ability to win future contracts.

YCs are kept apprised of the performance of contract service providers, typically through staff reports during regular YC meetings. YCs can—and occasionally do—request contractors to explain substandard performance and in some cases have recommended to their WIBs that unsatisfactory contractors be terminated.

#### Youth Council-sponsored activities

Nearly all the YCs in our study have expanded their role to include sponsoring a variety of activities that either serve youth directly through events and projects or seek to understand them better by conducting needs assessments or youth forums. For areas that embraced the AYOS credo, these projects were a tangible way for them to reach out to the broader youth community.

#### *Youth Council events*

The most widespread types of events held by local areas in our study were large ones: youth conferences, forums, job fairs, and the like. Some of these are slanted toward WIA-eligible youth, specific ethnic populations, and particular age groups. Some are intended to interest all youth in the community.

An example of a youth conference targeted toward a particular ethnic group is San Joaquin County YC’s collaborative effort with the County Office of Education, a nonprofit called Legally United Latin American Citizens, San Joaquin Delta College, and other groups together put on a conference targeted toward Hispanic youth. A YC member described the conference:

...they put on a youth conference that is attended by more than 1,000. Even further, they made a collaborative effort with superintendents to ensure that students will have transportation. The conference starts around 9 AM in this area, transportation is busing kids to bring them to Stockton. The conference is directed to Hispanic youth to empower them and to educate them. It’s a combination career fair, college awareness fair, and they

have a keynote speaker. They always have been able to get some really dynamic keynote speakers. Plus the president and another representative of Delta are Hispanic, the director of the WIB is Hispanic, and the Chief of Police.

In Tulare County, the YC and several partners hold an annual “Cool Night” for middle-school youth in each of its two largest cities, a sort of early career fair followed by a dance. A YC member described it:

...there's an activity called Cool Night...where they bring together many of the colleges, and some employers...Employers to teach kids some of the things that they look for...[like] how to count the cash. So the kids had to do quick calculations, and they'd get little prizes, and so forth...this was an evening activity, accompanied by teachers, on a chaperoned bus trip, or by their parents. So the parents could be taught about colleges, too.

Several YCs sponsor or are partners in annual events that involve all interested youth in their communities. Santa Ana's well-attended annual youth forums are intended to give youth a voice and beyond that to promote a dialogue and community involvement. Organizers hope information generated at the forum will shape youth-serving programs. The YC invites city council members, directors of various programs, and police.

And so we really say, ‘You know, guys, you're a resource, give back to your community, and these are ways you can give back. You can participate in your local YC, you can participate in the Youth Commission, you can volunteer through the Volunteer Center of Orange County.’ So we give them ideas of how they can give back to the community. But we take whatever we learn from this, and we report back to our YC. And really, on our YC, you have a bunch of directors of youth programs, and hopefully, they take this information and say, ‘Oh my gosh, I didn't realize that this is an issue, so I'll bring it up to my staff, and maybe we can address it within our programs.’ So our goal is also to influence programs, but I think it's an empowerment experience, and obviously educational, because they're learning something.

Sonoma County has held annual Youth Symposia for several years—youth panel discussions around specific themes such as “Involving Youth in Planning and Decision Making” and “Youth and the Global Economy.” They also support an on-going local event called “Youth Convergence” that fulfills a similar function.

L. A. City's YC has held its annual Crossroads conference for “people from different sectors – youth organizations, as well as colleges, institutions, and as well as providers and employers” for the last four years. The focus is on topics such as the juvenile justice system, youth emancipating from foster care, and the fact that one in five Los Angeles youth between 16 and 24 is neither in school nor working. The chair of the L.A. City YC considers the Crossroads conference its most important accomplishment, because it is “really focusing the attention on youth in poverty, and youth with so many great needs. I think that's been a real service that we played.”

## *Youth Council Projects*

Projects that YCs in our study have taken on include several forms of youth certification of employability, youth-focused websites, and needs assessments or resource mapping. To our knowledge, none of the three case study areas (Merced, Sonoma, Verdugo) that have pursued work readiness certificates have to date managed to roll out a working program. At least one of the web sites, in Sonoma County, reports frequent use with 57,773 hits in the last 12 months. Other web sites appear to have had difficulty staying up to date. On the other hand, the resource mapping and needs assessment work is credited with helping local network development.

*Work-/job-ready certificates.* The Sonoma County YC identified the need for a work-ready certificate to demonstrate the employability of local youth to area employers and made this the purpose of a powerful subcommittee for several years. The project went through several phases, beginning with a research phase funded by the Sonoma County Department of Education and headed by the ROP director, “What we decided is that we need to ask employers for an actual and accountable opinion about what young people should have and we did that.” With the assistance of the county Superintendent of Schools, the project went through development and into testing before a YC reevaluation of its priorities concluded that it could no longer underwrite an effort of this magnitude. The county Department of Education officially adopted the work-ready certificate late in 2005 and continues to pursue the project with endorsements from the Workforce Investment Board and the YC.

A concern voiced in Sonoma County was that such certificates might not benefit WIA-eligible youth. A Sonoma County provider doubted that the youth in WIA programs would ever be able to qualify for the work-ready certificate given the severity of the barriers they have to overcome. Another Sonoma County observer proposed an alternative that might be more appropriate to the level of accomplishment WIA-eligible youth in her program could demonstrate:

...the idea of a portfolio system which will be sort of an alternative to the work ready certificate, so that our youth in the WIA program will be able to have some things put together, in a portfolio fashion, that they can present to providers. And they do that now, I mean, they work on applications, and resumes, and career research, and interest inventories, and those kinds of things, with youth. I think that's going to prove to be as helpful as the very daunting work ready certificate. I think the work ready certificate really came out of a truly academic focus.

The Verdugo Consortium is attempting to re-energize a job-ready certificate developed earlier by Verdugo School-to-Career. Most of these credentials are implemented at the high school level, but they are thinking of trying something different by introducing it at the elementary schools and have it follow the students up through the grade levels. They report needing more business involvement.

Mention was also made of an employability card under discussion by the Merced County YC. It received a brief write-up in the *YCi Guidelines* (2003, p. 24), which says that such a card could

...be issued to qualifying Merced County youth...they invited the principals of Merced County high schools to a YC meeting to discuss how the employability skills of youth would be measured. The WIB approved implementation of a county-wide program supported by a \$13,000 marketing budget. The Merced County Office of Education has agreed to support the card and local businesses are thrilled with the concept.

*Youth web sites.* In at least two local areas, youth have taken an active part in YC subcommittees charged with developing web sites designed to attract this computer-literate population and offer them a mixture of fun and employment-related information. The Sonoma County YC placed their youth member on the subcommittee to help design the site and got members of the Santa Rosa Junior College to build it. The youth member was very enthusiastic about the project:

I was on a committee that was working on putting together a really big web site for youths in Sonoma County, and it was going to have links to help sites, counseling, counseling organizations, and it was going to have a calendar of events, that would be interesting. I was really excited about it, I thought it would be a really cool thing if it got up and going, but it didn't seem like the adults were as enthusiastic about it.

The Sonoma County youth coordinator regularly updates and maintains the youth web site. The YC recently partnered with the county Health Department to add new health-related links to the web site, which is expected to increase use beyond the already high levels:

...and now we're connecting with the Health Dept., to actually have people, and they're working with students, to put on more connections, especially to health-related issues. So it's actually being expanded even though it's not a current subcommittee.

The Tulare County YC also obtained youth input on putting their youth-oriented web site together, as the Senior Analyst told us:

Like we have a youth web site that was a project through one of our committees and the kids designed it. We now have a workgroup started that's going to develop training for trainers for youth on workplace ethics and the kids are going to design it. We act—'we' meaning the adults—as sort of mentors and resources to them, but we really let them drive it and give us their input.

Staff support for the Tulare County web site is in short supply. The site is not kept current with regard to special youth events, though the links are well designed and accessible.

*Needs assessments/resource mapping.* The 3 YCs within Orange County (Santa Ana, Anaheim, and Orange County) collaborated with the Orange County Department of Education and a children's hospital on a resource-mapping exercise in 2001 and repeated it a year later. They collected information on the scope and range of services for youth ages 14 to 21 in Orange County, as well as the levels of participation. Data was collected from more than 3,000 youth and 84 of the 414 youth-serving organizations in the county. Some of the findings from both studies:



- Both the organizations and youth surveyed identified drug, alcohol, and substance abuse as the number one issue facing Orange County youth, yet only 102 youth of the 3,000 surveyed (3.4%) reporting receiving substance abuse services.
- Older youth (19-21 years of age) were being served at a much lower rate than younger youth across all service categories.
- About 46 % of the county's youth were receiving some service, though this percentage would be lower if adjusted for multiple services provided to an individual.
- Youth identified training, internships, and employment preparation classes/programs as the most important services they would like to receive to help them prepare for the future, and the YC adjusted its programs accordingly.
- The mapping also showed a need to coordinate services better among organizations.

The Merced County YC has developed successive editions of a resource directory to collect and disseminate information on all the youth-serving entities in the county. It is in great demand, as the administrative staff member explained:

I have people all over the county, calling...And we produce 3,000 of them and they're gone just like that. That came as an idea out of one committee. We took the Family Resource Directory that's produced here in the county, and sat there for hours at night, saying, 'Yeah, I know that place, and this does this, and this'll feed a kid.' And every church, and everything we could find...And it was unbelievably labor-intensive. But it was the YC members that were sitting in there for hours, doing that.

#### Funding for Youth Council activities

Since WIA does not make any direct provisions for funding YC events and activities, YC members and administrative staff must use their ingenuity in devising ways to obtain and leverage financial and in-kind support from a variety of directions. A Sonoma County YC member said:

...there is no dedicated revenue stream that comes into counties by way of the WIB, or the Board of Supervisors, for YC. So YCs, even though they're mandated by federal law, there's no funding stream that is dedicated to that, so all that has to be done with local funds. Our office contributes some, the local paper, the Chamber contributes some funding...And then, a few of the WIB members, through their organizations, will actually make contributions.

The Tulare County YC holds an annual Community Recognition event where youth serve as grateful Masters of Ceremony and thank local contributors of everything from funds to job opportunities.

WIB staff—some funded with youth funds and some not—typically set up meetings, arrange and distribute agendas and correspondence as required, and act as the central clearinghouse of information for the YC and its subcommittees. YC members tend to be keenly aware and appreciative of the work the staff do, sometimes providing in-kind assistance from their own

organizations during special events. WIB staff typically have responsibilities beyond their YC work.

Both Sonoma and Tulare Counties have benefited from the generous contributions of YC members. In Sonoma County, YC members representing the county school system have poured thousands of dollars into ambitious projects for Sonoma County youth. A key member of the Tulare County YC has contributed dollars, leadership, and in-kind resources to youth conferences and other public events over the years. In these same two local areas, YCs have appealed to the WIB to contribute to specific functions—to provide enough money for radio advertisements of upcoming job fairs in Sonoma County, for example, or to support a training seminar and provide funds for attending conferences in Tulare County. WIBs can also extend the use of administrative staff to set up and help at conferences or other special youth events.

Some YC members spoke of applying for grants that would help underwrite YC projects, but reported that such grants are difficult to locate.

### **Developing Youth Councils as local institutions**

As new community institutions, YCs are still in their formative stages, and they vary significantly in their track record and local importance. In this section, we consider aspects of their institutional development including their antecedents, leadership, ability to engage key stakeholders, size and meeting frequency, and forward momentum.

#### Antecedents

The paths that present-day YCs follow and the ways they visualize their missions owe a great deal to their history. Many YCs have their antecedents in community coalitions designed to link youth-serving entities prior to WIA, particularly the federally-funded School-to-Career initiative.<sup>6</sup> One such YC is in Tulare County, which traces its connection to School-to-Career back to the time it served as one of 10 pilot programs nationwide.

The Verdugo Consortium merged its School-to-Career and the Glendale Youth Workforce Council to form its YC since the two bodies overlapped and “...had the same people on them and were talking about the same things.”

Other local areas drew on existing alliances dating from Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). At least one of the local areas we studied—NoRTEC—created a YC simply because it was required by WIA, even though it is not considered practical given the vast geographical area and 9 (now 10) very different counties spanned by the NoRTEC consortium.

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<sup>6</sup> From YCi Guidelines (2003, 78): “The youth components of WIA were aligned with the framework set forth in the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 (STWOA)...School-to-Work [School-to-Career in California] has now expired as a federally-funded initiative, but many of the local alliances developed to carry out its work have been important building blocks of WIA. It is important to note that WIA specifically prohibits the use of WIA dollars to support School-to-Work, however, the philosophy and key elements of STWOA at the local level are wholly consistent with the activities and approaches called for [in WIA].”

## Leadership

In agreement with what we found in our 2004 survey of local area executive directors (Lemp and Campbell, 2005), most respondents for this study said that their YC is largely autonomous, and that the WIB generally accepts its advice and approves its proposals without making any changes. In the exceptions where direction from the WIB is forthcoming, it is not always viewed positively. As a YC member said:

I guess the concept [of having a YC] is a good one, and it should work just fabulous, if all these people are getting together, and voicing the needs, but, unfortunately, it's driven by a lot of local WIB influence, so, consequently, not much gets done. So, it's real unfortunate. And people get disenchanted by it...

YC chairs and WIB staff each play major roles in leadership, with the exact mix of influence varying a good deal from area to area. Many respondents described how much YC chairs had accomplished. For example, an innovative Solano County chair who stepped down in 2005 led an effort to develop soft skills workshops and deliver them in county high schools. In all, YC members, administrative staff, and collaborating partners presented 22 of these workshops to local youth. The same chair came up with the concept of “youth corners” at county One-Stops where youth would feel comfortable and find materials that would appeal to them.

Even the strongest chairs freely acknowledge that their ability to accomplish their goals depends in large part on staff support—someone to make the phone calls, gather the data, explain procedures, set up events, and so on. In a few cases, it appears that staff exert strong control over the council. For example, a contractor in one area mentioned that the YC did pretty much as the staff dictated:

The council itself—I'm just going to be frank—all the policies involved are a recommendation of the WIB staff. The WIB staff drafts them up. They're brought to the table at the YC. Per the recommendation of the WIB staff, the YC can either vote for it or not vote for it, and for the most part they trust what the WIB staff are doing. For the most part, all the policies that are presented are pushed through.

## Ability to engage key stakeholders

According to WIA legislation, WIBs appoint YC members “in cooperation with the chief elected official for the local area,” although it appears that most elected officials keep their distance and delegate full appointment responsibility to the WIB. As defined by WIA, YC membership “shall include:”

- members of the local WIB with special interest or expertise in youth policy;
- representatives of youth service agencies, including juvenile justice and local law enforcement agencies;
- representatives of public housing authorities;
- parents of eligible youth seeking assistance from WIA programs;
- individuals, including former participants, and representatives of organizations that have experience relating to youth activities;

- representatives of the Job Corps, as appropriate; and
- “may include” such other individuals as the WIB chair or “chief elected official” select.

All of the YCs in our 10 cases included at least one WIB member, typically as the chair.

Although all 10 of the YCs in our study talked about trying hard to identify and incorporate WIA-mandated members, most have had difficulty keeping one or more categories filled over the years. As detailed below, most YCs have recruited youth members, but not without difficulty. Attracting and retaining parents—especially parents of WIA-eligible youth—has been a particularly difficult challenge, due in part to the fact that most YCs meet during work hours. The San Joaquin YC—one of only 2 of our 10 that had parent representatives—is pleased with the result: “...one particular parent has been part of the committee since it first started. It didn’t matter that the child had moved on. At least we have the parent.”

All of the local areas we studied had added representatives of local youth-serving organizations and members of the educational community. For example, Employment Development Department representatives sat on at least half of the YCs we looked at, despite funding cutbacks that severely limited their ability to offer services to youth.

#### *Selective targeting of key individuals*

By selective targeting of key individuals, some areas have been particularly successful in drawing together functional, high-powered councils. For example, where YC members serve on other boards, there is a greater density of connections. For example, one Solano Youth Advisory Committee member, who happens to be a WIA contractor, is also on a countywide child abuse prevention council, and another council focused on children. A Verdugo Youth Workforce Council member runs the YMCA, which is a major youth-serving organization in Glendale, though it is not a WIA contractor. He is also the former chair of the Character and Ethics Commission, which holds seminars and workshops for youth. He has connected the Character and Ethics Commission to the vocational schools, where they offer workshops in how do deal with ethical questions in the workplace, like a co-worker stealing from a retail store where you have just been hired.

A former Sonoma County YC member said:

Sonoma County has been progressive in adding seats to the YC. From the get-go we had education seats on our YC. We have the Superintendent of County Schools. We have good representation from the County Office of Education and they are not a provider in this community, not a WIA program. We have good representation from a couple of the executive directors from youth programs who carry a lot of weight and will speak for their peers even though they compete with each other. We have good representatives from probation, a retired judge, and a couple of business people that are very good and active.

An Orange County contractor expressed his strong sense that powerful people who can make things happen need to have a place on the YC:

There is no way I would have found that out without [this particular high-level person]. He opened the door and was there to help out because he's on the YC. It's getting the right person to be on the YC. If you get somebody that really can't affect those kind of system changes or even have access to the knowledge you get stopped. But if you have somebody like [this member], who can say this is really how it works, then that makes a difference.

One of the most interesting examples of useful intervention by an influential YC member occurred in Orange County. Orange County's social services agency, which has in its charge several thousand foster youth, helped open the confidential records of those youth to the local area's administrative staff to make it easier for WIA-funded programs to enroll foster youth, who are automatically eligible because of that status. It took the ruling of the judge who presides over the county's juvenile court system to make this possible, and he made it very clear that he expects WIA-funded case managers to uphold the privacy that surrounds the youth records. But by allowing WIA-funded caseworkers to make use of records, officials expect to save money, diminish the paperwork foster youth have to fill out, and give WIA programs a ready source of eligible youth. "Those providers that didn't have enough referrals are getting flooded with them now," noted one observer.

Other areas are not so fortunate; one YC member noted that his YC might have nearly all the mandated members but, because some aren't at the decision-making level, the YC's impact on local policy is minimal. In one case, we were told that community members have been invited and had declined because the YC wasn't seen as particularly effective:

...the YC was to have employers, youth, other community entities that help the community. And, for the most part, those have chosen not to be part of it, because they see that it's going to be wasted. I mean, we go to those meetings and we're there all morning. What for?

Two of the important players in most local areas' youth-serving network, the educational community and the private sector, are described in more detail in the next two sections.

### *Building links to the education system*

Although educators are not specifically included in the list of required YC constituents, K-12 education is well represented on most councils. For example, education is represented by no fewer than 6 members on the Tulare County YC and 8 members on the Sonoma County YC.

In the Verdugo Consortium, the superintendents of both local school districts are on the YC, as well as members of each school board and school district staff. Major local stakeholders in San Joaquin include two community college deans, and the superintendent of the County Office of Education, which is a primary contractor for WIA youth services.

In Orange County, the county Department of Education has been a key partner in major projects, such as the mapping of youth-serving resources. In the Los Angeles City area, the YC chair sees

a problem in figuring out how to use their small resources most effectively in conjunction with other major players, primarily the school district:

We are a small group in this city; we have a small amount of money, we're a decimal point to L.A. Unified. And what we do best, is that we're a catalytic agent, and how we can be a better catalytic agent, or a more successful catalytic agent with L.A. Unified...is, I think, our bigger challenge.

In Merced County, most K-12 leaders have eschewed the YC while casting their lot with a new P-16 Council headed by the WIB chair, and connected to an initiative started by the state superintendent of schools to integrate the K-12 system with higher education. Its members are drawn from the private sector, nonprofits, and education, including the superintendents of local school districts, as well as representatives of Merced Community College and UC Merced. The P-16 Council has received funds from the WIB, Head Start, and United Way. Some think that it might actually eclipse the WIB because of its energy and its roots in schools, the private sector, and the community. One observer said that P-16 owes its success to the fact that it is based in the schools and private sector – in the community – rather than centered on a particular program, like the WIB and YC.

Our observations suggest that alignment of the WIA system with K-12 education has a long way to go, although the connections being built on YCs are a hopeful start.

### *Engaging employers*

Recruiting and retaining active representation from local business and industry has been an on-going issue in most local areas. On the other hand, the employers serving on YCs that we interviewed express a strong interest in youth and in wanting to make a difference in their lives.

The chair of the L.A. City YC describes the effort made to draw the YC's membership from a cross-section of the community, "...with, a good portion represented by business, between 30-40%..." Another L.A. City member felt that there should be more private sector representation. They do, however, have solid Chamber of Commerce representation, as one member was glad to say, "We're very fortunate that we have the full involvement of the L.A. Chamber of Commerce, which helps out tremendously."

Sonoma County YC has four private sector members, one of whom is this year's chair, and has recently dedicated one of its subcommittees to building connections with local businesses on behalf of youth seeking employment. The chair described this endeavor:

...the subcommittee is open to members outside of the membership, and there are some providers that are providing some support to that. To basically develop and formulate an action plan: What can we do as a YC and as a WIB to leverage relationships, to build coalitions and cohesiveness, with the end goal in mind being that we make it easier for our providers to find places where they can place youth, especially at-risk youth, to have some success, some gainful employment, anything from job shadowing to a job...where a

young person can get some confidence and understanding of what the work world really looks like, instead of what they've maybe fantasized.

In Orange County, the YC chair comes from the private sector and uses his considerable influence to reach out to other members of the Orange County Business Council. One local observer said how important this connection is:

It's key because being private sector, he has the sensibilities of businesses in mind too, and he sits on the WIB and he sits on the Executive Committee so he is the voice of our YC.

NoRTEC's strong focus on serving the private sector influences the direction its YC takes in considering youth employment opportunities in the consortium's individual counties. In addition, it receives the unsolicited participation and expressed views of the business members of the WIB and Governing Board because it convenes just an hour before the WIB quarterly meetings are held.

### *Youth on Youth Councils*

Some local areas have been more successful than others in finding representative youth willing to join their YCs and participate in the meetings. At the time of our interviews, Orange County boasted having four youth members, drawn from current youth programs and from regional Youth Advisory Committees, and gives them full voting rights. The Merced County YC has always been able find at least one youth to serve on the YC, in part because they decided to have a youth co-chair. Solano County's YC has two youth seats, neither of which is filled at present.

Sonoma County has an active young woman who has served on the YC for two years and has taken part in several YC projects. Although her interest and forthright manner have been very helpful to the YC, she represents Sonoma County's more affluent youth rather than the WIA-eligible youth who could better acquaint the YC with issues facing that population. This point concerns a member of the L.A. City YC also:

I think it is really important to have more low-income youth, and I know that is a criteria to be in the program, but I think that if they had more youth who were definitely low-income more involved with the YC, in terms of the program design and the program requirements. Because you might have a high functioning youth who might not have all the same challenges and the same barriers as the youth that we are dealing with who are in public housing.

The Tulare County YC youth member has participated in a WIA-funded program. He is proud to use his credibility with similar youth to recruit them for a variety of youth conferences and other activities and to present their point of view on the Youth Council subcommittees on which he serves.

*Barriers to youth participation.* One of the realities in seating youth on the YCs is that they grow up and move on, so the position by its very nature requires continual recruiting. Other problems cited include the time of day that meetings are held, and transportation to meeting sites.

In Merced and Solano Counties, the YC scheduled its meetings for later in the day so that there was no conflict with school, but the Solano County youth who served on the YC still needed a round-trip ride to the meeting.<sup>7</sup> Orange County has shifted its meetings from 1:30 to 4:00 and moves them around the county, but transportation remains an issue since public transportation isn't a viable option for traveling between cities. San Joaquin County has offered transportation to potential youth members but finds that they have other priorities—one being that some have found jobs, a hard excuse to fault. Tulare County's YC meetings are scheduled for the convenience of the adult members of the council and the lead staff member sees no likelihood that this will change: "The YC just doesn't want to do that and I understand because these are very busy people that we have on our YC. They are all running programs with the whole county."

The greatest barrier to youth participation tends to be the YC meetings themselves, as one staff member explained:

We have had four youth over a couple years that were on the YC. They just kind of faded away as youth will do when they're not entirely engaged. That's my perception anyway. I believe that's what happened. They just went on about the business of doing the things that youth do, like staying in school, finishing school, going to college, playing sports, and things like that. Because of this big system approach that we talk about a lot, and the way that we look at those things, that's not engaging for kids, for most of them. They like, 'Here's a project! We're going to build this thing and do this work and we want you to design it, help us implement, and help us do all of this!' Now, *that* they can get behind. But it has to be real, it has to be concrete, and it has to be something so they can learn from it and do stuff. It has to be much like work-based learning. Sitting there listening to people, although they might go, 'Wow, they are really smart,' or they go, 'What are they talking about?' They just kind of faded away.

*Successful approaches.* A few general strategies for engaging youth in YCs emerged from our discussions: (1) give young members an engaging hands-on job to do, something with short-term goals and the potential to make a difference in the youth community; (2) treat them as expert consultants, as ambassadors from a foreign land, and listen to what they have to say about local youth and about issues before the YC; (3) pair them with an adult mentor, someone they can admire, emulate, and be themselves with; (4) review the YC agenda with youth members before the meeting, so they know what is coming and can more fully engage; and (5) give them alternatives to attending the full YC meetings, such as serving on an active subcommittee with finite, tangible goals.

In addition, YCs can consider other ways to obtain youth input. Several YCs made special efforts to obtain additional information about local youth by holding youth forums and conferences,

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<sup>7</sup> Due to insurance concerns, staff are typically prohibited from driving youth to meetings.



conducting surveys and needs assessments, and otherwise attempting to meet large numbers of youth at schools, at service provision sites, in malls, and in convention halls.

### *Contractors on the YC*

Service providers who receive WIA contracts are seated on the YCs of no fewer than 7 of our 10 study areas. Selected as contractors for their experience and expertise in working with local youth, they are uniquely qualified to perform the duties spelled out in WIA legislation for YC members. They can inform and advise the YCs about the youth themselves, the experience of operating within the local youth-serving matrix, and the progress of their own programs. Most are so well networked in the community that they provide linkages beyond the YC's membership. At the same time, however, having contractors as members presents the YC with a conundrum in performing two of its WIA-mandated duties: selecting contractors and overseeing their activities (see the discussion under "YC involvement with contractor selection and oversight" on pp. 28-29).

In local areas that do not seat contractors on the YC, the reaction of service providers to their YCs is mixed. In Sonoma County, contractors have recently been invited to give their input for the first time, as the YC chair explained:

I've been on the YC for about 4 years, and it was interesting to me that the providers would come to the meetings, and while they're not official participants, they sit in the audience, they listen to what's going on, they would provide very little feedback, and listen to what we had to say. Sometimes I'd see eye-rolling, and stuff like that... And I said to myself, 'You know what? As a YC, if we're really trying to oversee what's going on with our youth providers, we don't really even know what their problems are, because we've not really talked to them.' So we hosted a meeting to have the youth providers come in, and I challenged them to tell me how the initiatives that we were, at that time, working on, were impacting their ability to provide their services to their clients. And I think what we soon realized is that there was really no direct connection...

Sonoma County contract service providers were ecstatic about this new YC attitude and lost no time in advising them, as one contractor said:

So the providers met with the YC, and had a number of conversations, and they were very, very open to listening to us. We said, 'This is what we need. If the YC is going to be supporting and assisting the providers, then we would really like your focus to shift more toward business partners, establishing partnerships, helping us to make connections in the business community, because that's where you are, in the business community.' And so, that's kind of the direction that they're going...

Not all contractors are so fortunate. In one local area, contractors indicated that their YCs virtually ignore them, not even inviting them to attend YC meetings as observers. As one said:

If there were more involvement from some of the subcontractors, they would see a different direction. I sometimes see the YC as being obstructive rather than

proactive...But we are not at the table when major decisions are made for us and so [the staff] are the ones that have to advocate with the YC to try to keep things in our favor and it doesn't always happen...They set our performance standards higher than what the state requires and we really have no say in the negotiations.

Council size and meeting frequency

At the outset of our study, YCs ranged in size from 13 members in San Joaquin County to 42 members in L.A. City. A few have shrunk dramatically. For example, Merced County's YC has gone from 40 to 24 members, and L.A. City recently cut back to 27 members. Even when the YC membership has remained fixed, it is sometimes hard to maintain a full table as people move on to other responsibilities.

**Table 2. Number of members on the YCs/frequency of meetings**

| AREA              | L.A. City  | Merced Co.  | Orange Co.        | NoRTEC       | San Joaquin Co.      | Santa Ana   | Solano Co         | Sonoma Co         | Tulare Co   | Verdugo           |
|-------------------|------------|-------------|-------------------|--------------|----------------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------|-------------------|
| No. of YC members | 27         | 25          | 16                | 20           | 13                   | 15          | 12                | 27                | 20          | 12                |
| Meet how often?   | 4 times/yr | every month | 4-5 times/yr + 1* | 2-3 times/yr | 4 times/yr as needed | every month | A couple times/yr | every other month | every month | every other month |

\*1 strategic planning meeting

We were told that if a YC is too small, it risks failing to represent all of the youth-serving entities who should be involved in making decisions. While this may be true, at least one smaller YC—Santa Ana, with its 15 members—is known as a particularly dedicated and dynamic group that has never lacked a quorum and maintains a practical interest in the youth being served with WIA funds. By contrast, if a YC is too large, reflecting a laudable effort to include as many voices for youth as possible, obtaining a quorum may become an obstacle to meeting regularly.

YCs in our study meet as often as once a month and as seldom as twice a year. Many of them meet as a full YC every other month, with subcommittees and/or work groups—including the Executive Committee, if there is one—meeting on the alternate month.

Typically, subcommittees with specific tasks to accomplish meet as often as necessary over relatively short periods of time. Planning events such as youth conferences, particularly when there are complicated in-kind staffing and funding arrangements to be made, can absorb a great deal of staff and member time as the event draws near. Depending upon how much of the contracting function a local area's YC takes on (see below), subcommittees may meet several times a month while preparing the RFP and again to evaluate proposals.

Several local areas noted that it's one thing to get people to agree to serve on the YC and quite another to get them to show up. At least 4 YCs in our study have, at some time during their

tenure, taken a firm hand with members who consistently fail to appear for regularly scheduled meetings. For example, Tulare County's YC lost patience with no-shows early on, even if they were WIA-mandated, and politely kicked them off the council. The senior staff member said:

If they're not going to be active, if they're not going to attend, if they're just putting it on their résumé they don't need to be there. So they need to attend meetings or have a really good reason why they didn't.

### Forward momentum

At the outset of WIA, most YCs are described as having been filled with enthusiasm and excitement, made up of volunteers from among the youth-serving organizations in their communities who brought with them solid expertise and prestige. It took about a year for most YCs to educate themselves about their duties and choose a direction. Five years later, many YCs are still going strong, while several have visibly lost momentum. The latter meet less frequently, have fewer members, and/or have reduced their activities.

### *Effects of funding reductions on YCs*

As WIA and other funding sources make annual cuts, YCs in our study face reductions in staff support, program funding, and even membership. This makes it difficult to continue to support YC projects and has forced YCs to abandon some of their original goals and activities. Although YCs themselves have no WIA funds to lose, they depend heavily upon local area administrative staff to assist in supporting the efforts of work groups and subcommittees, and staffing support by local areas has been reduced as they attempt to stretch fewer staff members over more duties.

At the same time, most publicly-funded organizations are experiencing similar cuts and nonprofits are encountering greater competition for smaller, more tightly-defined pots of government and foundation grant money. This reduces in-kind contributions to YC efforts as well as dollars. Even the most dedicated representatives from CBOs and public agencies are struggling to maintain their own programs and sometimes have difficulty participating in YC meetings and functions.

YCs have responded in a variety of ways: spinning off some projects to other entities, working more closely with YC partners, drawing in new players, considering potential funding sources (one YC member doesn't rule out holding bake sales), and in many cases, reluctantly reducing their aspirations.

A more subtle effect of the lack of funds has been a kind of accelerated burnout among YC members. It is disheartening to watch cherished projects limp along or drag to a halt for lack of support, and it is difficult for an active, dynamic council to sustain any momentum when so many doors are closing at once. It is particularly hard to engage private sector representatives under these circumstances.

Somewhat unexpectedly, several respondents told us that the continuing trend in cutting funds has had a positive effect on the level of networking among youth-serving organizations within

some, though not all, local areas. A shared recognition of a deep need spurs organizations and individual stakeholders to collaborate. As one Merced County stakeholder said:

I've found, even in the adult world, youth programs aside, the time when you can really make change in the system is when everyone's broke. When everyone has plenty of money, they don't want to talk. They're happy. But when resources are scarce, people really are open to new things, to try to get done what they need to get done, but with some help from someone else.

A Verdugo stakeholder noted that though there was always collaboration in the Glendale area, there has been more collaboration in the last five years in the midst of funding cuts for WIA and other programs:

Well, less money to do more requires people come together...you just have to. Nobody wanted to see the youth not served.

#### *Potential changes with WIA reauthorization*

In 8 of our 10 cases, YC stakeholders said they wanted to keep their YC operating whether it was required after reauthorization or not, and many respondents clearly expressed their strong emotional attachment to the council. Our final survey of executive directors was somewhat more ambiguous, with 21 of 40 indicating their YCs would continue even if not required, 6 saying they would not, and 13 not sure.

In one local area, administrative staff and YC members disagree about the future of their YC. Staff commented that the YC was a net drain and preferred that it retire. Yet YC members who work for youth-serving organizations find that the meetings are valuable for them and that their input in the RFP process is especially important. A YC member who is also a youth contractor in this area said the vantage point of a community-based board is different from that of a staff member of a local government agency:

I would hate to see us without a YC. It gives me, as a provider, a little more reassurance that it's not just WIB staff making decisions. It's people who are interested and it's their community and they're interested in what providers have to say.

## **WIA Youth Programs**

By legislative design, formal WIA-funded youth programs in local areas are delivered by one or more contract service providers, that provide participating youth with access to the 10 required service elements (see previous section on “Comprehensive approach to youth development,” p. 21). They are typically overseen by administrative staff whose primary responsibilities include ensuring that the programs run in compliance with WIA and YC guidelines, that performance measures are met, and that problems are resolved as quickly as possible.

In this section, we will consider the nature of the contract providers in the 10 case study areas, the processes by which the contractors are selected and managed, and the nature of the programs contractors deliver. We pay attention both to exemplary programs and processes, and to common barriers or obstacles to the successful delivery of youth programs.

### **Key findings related to youth programs**

Guided by the 10 required program elements, most youth programs are holistic and developmental. They vary in whether they build the program around structured group work experiences or more individualized work placements. In either case, the programs nominated by local areas as their most successful include the following key elements:

- a holistic approach that combines employment preparation with social services and personal support;
- structures that group youth in cohorts where they work/learn together;
- a learning experience that combines work with the chance to build self-confidence and to learn what it takes to be a good employee; and
- caring adult supervision—of significant time duration—that combines discipline and support in appropriate measures.

Both local areas and their established contractors report mostly positive working relationships. The ability of contractors to supplement WIA funds with other organizational resources, including those from other funding sources, and their extensive community networks are critical factors supporting the quality of services that WIA-eligible youth receive.

Administrative staff and contract providers listed several advantages of working together over time:

- There are fewer surprises. Administrative staff and providers know what to expect from one another, and most differences in style and misunderstandings have been worked out and an acceptable level of trust has been reached.
- Contract service providers hone their skills in dealing with the target population, under stringent WIA regulations, over time.
- Some procedures can be streamlined and shortcuts established, such as ways of co-enrolling clients that simplify otherwise daunting paperwork.
- Ever-decreasing WIA funds can be leveraged by referring program participants to other providers with whom they have built connections. The network of partners enables them to extend additional services to WIA-eligible youth at no additional cost of WIA funds.

### Contract service providers

Our 10 study areas contract directly with a total of 45 service providers, and some of these manage subcontracts with other entities. For example, L.A. City is working with 8 contract service providers (in addition to running its own in-house program), but these providers are contractually linked to nearly 20 other youth serving organizations who help deliver programs. Merced County works with a single primary contractor, which in turn subcontracts outreach and case management services to three other entities.

Most of the 10 areas expect contractors to do their own recruiting, assess eligibility, and provide all 10 of the WIA-required youth services elements, either themselves or through partnerships. In a couple of cases, WIB staff handle eligibility assessment and intake, and then assign youth to contractors for programs.

**Table 3. Number of primary contracted youth service providers in each area**

| AREA               | L.A. City | Merced Co. | Orange Co. | NoRTEC | San Joaquin Co. | Santa Ana | Solano Co. | Sonoma Co. | Tulare Co. | Verdugo |
|--------------------|-----------|------------|------------|--------|-----------------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|---------|
| No. of contractors | 8         | 1          | 6          | 7      | 2               | 7         | 4          | 5          | 3          | 2       |
| Any serve on YC?   | NA        | yes        | no         | yes    | yes             | yes       | yes        | yes        | yes        | yes     |

### Contractor networking and geographically-based contracting arrangements

Several areas divide their local area geographically and put one contractor in charge of providing services in that area. For example, Sonoma County has 5 contractors who manage their operations in 6 portions of the county, each adapted to overcoming the barriers associated with the youth of those geographic sections and to taking advantage of nearby employment opportunities. Orange County has 6 contractors delivering youth services in designated parts of the county. The NoRTEC Consortium’s contractors follow the natural division of the area into counties, with one contractor taking on 3 counties. One of the advantages of splitting up an area into geographical sections, we were told by several respondents, is that contractors are spared the unpleasantness of competing with one another and can instead treat each other as helpful colleagues.

### *RFP requirements to promote contractor networking and enhanced services*

We encountered two examples of this type of requirement. First, many local areas now require that contractors bring their own resources to the table as a condition of receiving a WIA contract. Second, recognizing the importance of program level networking, several areas make it a requirement in their RFPs. For example, Orange County requires aspiring contractors to demonstrate that they can bring together a matrix of organizational partners to collaborate in providing services. Service providers found the requirement somewhat daunting, but also appreciate why the process is beneficial:

When they put this new matrix together I thought, ‘Oh my gosh, this is going to take us forever to do.’ But once you put it on paper and look at it, it really makes a lot of sense. It took a lot of time to do it, but it’s a little more understandable how all of these WIA components are met then in terms of what the activity is and the duration of it and the partners who are involved and the funding sources. And again there is no way we could do half of what we do unless we partnered with all of these people and funding sources. No way.

Orange County also requires its contractors to host regular meetings of service providers in each of four geographical service areas. Contractors convene monthly or quarterly meetings of youth-service providers from their area to create sustained, ongoing relationships that help leverage resources and promote better service for local youth. For example, in one area, these regional meetings draw a mix of partner organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club, the local school district, youth shelters, the county health care agency, a domestic violence shelter, the Childrens’ Hospital of Orange County which has a number of community programs, and the Grace Family Resource Center, a grassroots organization. One contractor holds monthly meetings at the site of a different organization each time so that potential partners can tour the facilities, meet the staff, hear about the services, and leave with an idea of where they would be sending their youth if they referred them.

Sonoma County’s RFP requests information about partnering from organizations submitting proposals. One contractor explained:

...collaboration is a big part of the RFP; there is one question that you answer that says, ‘Show us how you can leverage the funds with other agencies, how you work with other agencies, to improve services’—something of that nature—so the fact that we already have a collaborative organization is real helpful.

#### *The daisy-wheel approach adopted in Santa Ana*

Santa Ana has a tightly-linked network of contracted providers, the result of a 2001 YC decision to adopt a “daisy-wheel” framework, known locally as the Youth Service Provider Network. This network is comprised of six WIA-funded youth-serving organizations. Hallmarks of this close-knit system are that contractors are chosen carefully to enhance the network, and that it is the performance of the network as a whole the YC looks at, not of individual providers. For example, youth commonly co-enroll in multiple WIA-funded services to meet their various needs and contractors are expected to pitch in and help each other meet performance measures. The focus on network performance, local observers say, recognizes the fact that some contractors provide services that garner lower performance measures than others. For example, low numbers turned in by the contractor which serves youth with substance abuse issues can be balanced against the higher numbers that the school district is able to turn in when most of its enrolled high school seniors, despite certain challenges, graduate and go on to college. In addition, providers don’t have to provide all 10 elements, though some do. The system as a whole fulfills the 10 elements.

In Santa Ana, day-to-day oversight and administration is contracted to a city staff member who works for the Economic Development Department at the Santa Ana WORK (Work, Opportunity, Resources, Knowledge) Center. This staff member is known as the “navigator” for the system of WIA youth contractors and is monitored by administrative staff. The navigator provides technical support for meeting WIA performance measures, tracks each contractor’s performance, assists in resolving problems with paperwork, and monitors the goals they must accomplish with each enrollee.

An administrative staff member discussed the reasons for choosing this form of contract management:

One of the things that we know about WIA is its paperwork is very burdensome, as far as requirements, documentation, and files that you need to keep. And one of our concerns was, for the youth providers, we want them to do the best in what they do, and that's serving the clients. So, in order for them to continue to do that, concentrate on direct services, we would have someone who would take the responsibility of being more of a technical advisor, a technical supervisor, in charge of all the technicalities that they don't need to worry about. So the navigator at the Work Center, they're controlling our numbers in a sense: Have we met enrollment goals? Have we met our outcome goals? How healthy is our system? Where in our system is there a deficit? They take the lead on the training, on the technical support.

#### The nature of contractor service providers

Of the 45 primary contractors in our 10 areas, about two-thirds are nonprofit community-based organizations. These CBOs are typically larger, experienced, and well established within the local area they serve with extensive networks of partners and other contacts that enhance programs. The local WIB is not their only source of funds; in most cases, they receive public monies from a variety of other contracts and foundation funds, often to provide specific services to similar at-risk populations.

City and state agencies are the next largest category of service providers. For example, in the western part of Orange County, the City of Garden Grove operates a One-Stop for youth—the Youth Café. It is staffed by city employees, but services and the cost of leasing the facility come from WIA funds. La Habra, another Orange County city, has run youth programs for more than 10 years and serves the northern part of the county. The “navigator” who coordinates Santa Ana’s contractors is herself on contract at the City of Santa Ana’s WORK Center where she is part of the city’s economic development department.

In L.A. City, the Community Development Department runs 3 centers itself, making it the only WIA administrative entity in our 10 areas which is operating its own youth centers. An administrative staff member explained:

We have an internal MOU between the general manager of our department (CDD) and the director of our division (Workforce Development Division) to operate the three sites. The staff are a portion of the at-will exempt city employees who were originally hired to



run the Youth Opportunity Grant program. We're hoping to maintain the sites (together called the Youth Opportunity Movement) through a combination of funds; they specialize in serving 100% out-of-school, out-of-work youth...They are included in performance evaluations and the contract renewal process for the sake of fairness and healthy competition, but the Youth Opportunity Movement is an in-house program.

The Employment Development Department previously held a contract for delivering youth services in the Santa Ana area and is a subcontractor in Merced County.

The educational community also acts as a contract service provider in several areas. Schools are well placed to recruit and work with in-school youth, and in Merced County the Office of Education has the contract for serving out-of-school youth as well. Orange County has contracted with both a school district and a community college.

#### *The lone example of a faith-related organization serving as a WIA contractor*

The only faith-related organization to receive a WIA contract in our 10 case study areas is Taller San Jose in Santa Ana. The Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange founded Taller San Jose in 1995 to help undereducated and unskilled young people of central Orange County, ages 18 – 28. Many are first or second generation immigrants grappling with their place and identity between two cultures. Often the youth served face considerable obstacles to employment: drug addictions, juvenile and adult criminal records, gang violence, or dropping out of school. Many have young children of their own, or obligations to help support their siblings and parents, but no jobs, skills, or a high school education.

Taller San Jose offers a comprehensive program including focused training in medical careers, computer technology, and residential construction – three skill areas in demand in Orange County's robust economy. Youth are paid \$7 per hour attend 15-16 weeks of training in construction and computer skills. Each youth has a mentor, and can consult in-house counselors for family, relationship, and other issues, attend drug and alcohol support groups, and get help with transportation. Taller serves about 300 youth a year, and taps its extensive network of local employers to place them when they graduate. Benchmarks toward this goal include gaining a diploma through Taller's in-house program, registering to vote, living crime and drug free, and attaining work that pays above the minimum wage.

As is the case with most of the community and faith-related organizations that provide WIA-funded services, Taller San Jose also draws financial and organizational support from many community sources. This gives the organization enough flexible funding to augment WIA funds.

#### Historical working relationships: pro and con

In many of the cases we studied, local areas have long-standing relationships with their contract service providers, often predating WIA and sometimes going back as far as CETA. YC staff and provider staff listed several advantages of working together over time. (1) There are fewer surprises: administrative staff and providers know what to expect from one another, and most differences in style and misunderstandings have been worked out and an acceptable level of trust

has been reached. (2) Contract service providers hone their skills in dealing with the target population, under stringent WIA regulations, over time. (3) Some procedures can be streamlined and shortcuts established, such as ways of co-enrolling clients that simplify otherwise daunting paperwork. (4) Ever-decreasing WIA funds can be leveraged through the service providers' connections. Most contractors have collaborative arrangements—also forged over time—with a network of partners that enable them to extend additional services to WIA-eligible youth at no additional cost of WIA funds.

At least one respondent warned that doing things the same old way with the same old people can stifle originality and keep valuable players on the sidelines. A Housing Authority representative spoke for several others when he observed:

I think a lot of creativity gets lost because there always seems to be a core group of individuals and a core group of agencies that have run things and have always run things, and are always listened to when considering policy. I think you lose that creativity and you lose that continuous quality improvement because you still are going to the same people and it's just the same agencies over and over and over and over. I think they need to mix it up a little bit, not to negate people that have a vested interest and can really serve communities, but maybe instead of giving them all \$1million, maybe give them \$700 thousand and give someone new \$300 thousand and see what else works. There has to be a certain level of change and a certain level of experimentation.

A number of factors make it difficult for new players to become part of the established WIA network in local areas. Many small organizations lack the capacity to absorb the routine administrative costs associated with managing a WIA contract. WIB or YCs are understandably reluctant to take a chance on new players, especially if they are being well served by existing contractors who are acclimated to WIA requirements and have the resources and experiences to knit together the type of partnerships that improve youth services.

It appears that the best opportunity for small organizations to become significant players is as subcontractors who can pursue their particular specialization within the supportive umbrella provided by a larger WIA contractor.

## **Processes for selecting and overseeing youth contractors**

### Selection of program providers

Nine of the 10 areas use a separate youth contractor RFP process to determine which providers will be chosen to deliver youth services under WIA. The exception is the NoRTEC Consortium, whose contractors respond to RFPs that combine both adult and youth services in the individual counties they serve.

The degree to which RFP processes are competitive varies from area to area. Most areas put contracts out for bid every 2-3 years. Administrative staff retain the option of extending contracts if the contractor's performance warrants it. Providers prefer longer contract periods because it allows them to focus on delivering services rather than on trying to qualify for the next round of

funding. Other observers agreed that longer contracts promote stability and that providers' time is better spent serving their clients. An example of how well this works is the well-integrated group of contractors in the NoRTEC Consortium, which—because of a special dispensation granted by the state—are able to act as sole sources for their respective counties. They haven't had to respond to an RFP since the dawn of WIA.

On the other hand, a few local areas decided to terminate or not to renew contracts with providers whose work was not satisfactory. This sends a clear message that continuing selection as a contractor is not guaranteed.

As we observed the RFP process in Sonoma County and Tulare County during the spring of 2006, there seem to be three primary factors impacting the decision-making processes of YCs and administrative staff: historical relationships, current performance, and proposals in response to the RFP for future programs. As this played out in Tulare County, the following appeared to be important:

- A history of working successfully with the Tulare County WIB and the Workforce Investment Department (WID) over a period years, establishing a track record of providing effective programs, and being a good team player.
- Maintaining top performance numbers, since Tulare County WIB/WID uses its high ranking in the state to attract new grants and obtain incentive awards from the state.
- The nature of the proposal turned in by the contractors. The significance of this factor is underscored by the fact that none of the three service providers—despite their successful completion of the last 3 contract years—felt entirely confident that they would be selected for another three years. During our interviews, we noted that all three were working hard to position themselves positively through the services they proposed for the amounts of funding allowed.

Over time, local areas have learned the importance of specific language in crafting successful RFPs. In Santa Ana, for example, the YC and administrative staff fortified their RFP when they realized that unless they did, compliance with certain preferences, such as attendance at the monthly meetings of providers and administrators, might not occur.

### Oversight of contractors

Typically, local area administrative staff are involved on a day-to-day basis with service providers and meet with them as a group monthly to review performance, share experiences, and solve problems. Staff work under the broad oversight of their YCs, and the nature of this three-way relationship varies widely, depending on the size of the local area, the number of contractors, the role and composition of the YC, and other dynamics.

**Table 4. Number of staff working with Youth Councils (YC) and administering youth programs (YP), with the percentage of their time spent on each**

| AREA                | L.A. City                         | Merced Co.           | Orange Co. | NoRTEC             | San Joaquin Co. | Santa Ana           | Solano Co.           | Sonoma Co.              | Tulare Co.      | Verdugo                   |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------|------------|--------------------|-----------------|---------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|
| No. of Admin. Staff | 10                                | 2                    | *          | 1                  | 2               | 1                   | 4                    | 2                       | 2               | 6                         |
| % time on YC/YP     | 1 YC@ 50%, 1 YC@ 100%; 8 YP@ 100% | both: 5% YP & 15% YC | *          | 25-30% on YP & YC  | 90 % & 20%      | 80%                 | 2 YC@5%; 2 YP@25/35% | 1-100 % YP & 1-100 % YC | 25% YP & 75% YC | All work @ 100% on the YP |
| Admin. entity       | City: community dev.              | County               | County     | Central WIB Admin. | County          | City: economic dev. | Nonprofit            | County: human services  | County          | City of Glendale          |

\*=data not provided by local area

Large urban areas have a more complex structure than smaller or rural ones. A L.A. City stakeholder described their two-tiered structure this way:

We came up with 7 areas. There was a general contractor selected for each area to serve as the coordinator of services for that area and was responsible for partnering with other agencies. The Community Development Dept. gave these lead agencies a little more authority...The city's expectation was that the general contractor would be given more responsibilities and authority so providers are expected to work with the general contractor. It allowed for the city to have less people to deal with. Instead of having 20 organizations, now they just have 7.

In the Verdugo Consortium, the City of Glendale is the administrative agency for the 3-city consortium, within which the Verdugo Workforce Administration manages contractors. The primary contractor is the Glendale Youth Alliance, a nonprofit that is housed at the One-Stop center and staffed by city employees.

The more rural counties tend to have smaller administrative operations. In NoRTEC a small administrative staff manages the 7 contractors, making use of the internet to remain in close contact with contractors. In Merced County, the administrative staff member who oversees youth services works in close partnership with the area's sole contractor, the Merced County Office of Education (MCOE). In Sonoma County, the Sonoma County Human Services Department One-Stop manager oversees the Youth Services Supervisor, who works very closely with the 5 contractors. In San Joaquin, a workforce analyst in county administration oversees contractors. The Tulare County Workforce Investment Department houses the youth services administration, where a staff of two maintain a close relationship with the 3 contract service providers. The Senior Analyst oversees youth programs and staffs the YC as well, with the help of her assistant in both areas.

### *Monthly meetings with contractors*

In addition to the day-to-day interactions between administrative and provider staff, many areas also bring all their contractors together once a month to discuss issues of common interest, try to resolve problems, share tips and successes, learn about new WIA requirements, and otherwise maintain mutual interaction. In most cases, these meetings are regarded as productive times of information sharing and checking in. Some contractor/staff meetings are relatively informal exchanges and others are more structured. In Tulare County, contractors take turns hosting the meetings and preparing the agenda with input from administrative staff. Often a speaker addresses a topic of common interest. Some meetings serve as opportunities for technical in-service training.

According to the Santa Ana navigator, the service provider meeting for contractors lasts about an hour:

Everybody talks about their events, and what they're doing that benefits their kids. It's nitty-gritty: 'OK, paperwork has changed for MIS, we need to be aware of these items, and so forth.' But it's a place where we can all get together and kind of either burn off some steam, with regard to our workload, or issues with regards to our caseloads, any issues we're having with eligibility, performance, kids, case management, whatever the case may be, that's the place where we can help each other out.

In Solano County, contractors use the monthly meeting with WIB staff as a time to co-case-manage about 25 youth. A contractor explained it this way:

And then each of us report on our particular clients, if they're showing up, if they're getting tutoring, if they're going into leadership, if they're going into mentoring, what we've assessed; we talk about what is called the pre-testing, because we need to pre-test some of these clients, especially for tutoring, and things that we can measure, to see success. So we talk about who pre-tested, what was the pre-test method, who's going to post-test; what children have fallen out, and why; how can we collect some of the fall-outs and get them back into the program, what their parents' interaction have been, where their support is, and how we can tweak our own programs to meet the needs of the kids.

At one of the Solano County meetings, a contractor brought up some of the problems his agency was having with the administration's referral forms and the staff addressed a number of the issues on the spot (e.g., some of the forms required youth to fill out three or four pages of information; another posed a question that some youth could not have answered correctly).

### *Difficulties in contractor/administrative staff relationships*

When speaking confidentially about issues that arose between them, contractors were more likely to have complaints than were the staff members. It was difficult to find a common thread among objections to staff procedures and behavior, however. In one local area, contractors complained that WIB staff set too many stipulations on whom they serve, that their monthly meetings last too long, and that WIB staff members demand too much attention from them

between meetings, for example, by sending urgent e-mails. This objection was echoed by one contractor in another local area, but others in that same area said how much they valued the close contact with their administrative staff and appreciated their accessibility.

In another area, a contractor was seriously hampered in trying to serve clients during the RFP period and felt that administrative staff disregarded both the issues raised and the welfare of the target population. Contractors in another area felt distanced from their YC, which sets performance standards above state requirements without consulting them. They counted on the administrative staff to carry their objections forward, which placed the staff in a somewhat difficult position.

YC members in another area described the relationship between administrative staff and the single large contract service provider as generally collaborative, but one stakeholder said that there has been a bit of a tug-of-war between the YC/administrative staff and the contractor over who knows best.

We encountered only one instance where both staff and contractors expressed frustration and resentment about functioning within the existing structure. One local area seemed to be at odds over recruiting youth participants, with the administrative staff and contractors each expecting the other to produce WIA-eligible youth. In this area, the contract stipulates that service providers cannot actively recruit youth for their programs—that, and determining eligibility, is the staff’s responsibility—although contractors can *refer* youth to the staff. What sometimes happens in this local area is that too few youth flow to the service providers to allow them to meet their contracted numbers. One contractor was surprised that he did not get any referrals for several months and discovered that, due to illness and leave, no staff members were working in his area. That issue was subsequently addressed but some of the tensions remained.

## **Funding youth programs**

Local areas reported that yearly cuts in funding since 2000 that have caused them to restructure their services and reduce the number of youth with which they could work. The cuts have also limited the number of youth they are able to compensate for working in jobs designed to complement mentoring and other services and prepare them for productive lives. One WIB executive director used the term “devastated” when describing what had happened to the youth programs in his area, and most of our respondents would agree with him. Table 5 presents a snapshot of the funding for youth programs across our 10 cases, together with the number of youth served over the same period.

### The effect of funding cuts on youth programs

While the specific numbers vary, the impact of the cuts is quite similar across the 10 local areas in our sample. L.A. City has had to restructure the system, reduce the number of lead agencies and subcontractors, and reduce the number of One Source centers. Cutbacks are also forcing them to consider aligning youth services more closely with adult services, potentially closing many of the current youth-only One-Stop sites. Funding reductions have also heightened competition among contractors. A YC member explained:

... for the last few years the amount of money that's coming in has been decreasing, so that makes less money available to youth providers. At times what happens is that the youth providers are also trying to fight for funding. It becomes competitive and you can lose sight of what the real outcome is when you are in a situation where you have less funding coming in so there is less money to go around. That was what took place last year.

**Table 5. Comparative picture of youth funding/service for 10 case study areas**

| AREA                      | WIA FORMULA FUNDS              |                                |                                |            | OTHER FUNDING               |                        |                        | NUMBER OF YOUTH ENROLLED         |                      |                     |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
|                           | 2003-04                        | 2004-05                        | 2005-06                        | 2006-07*   | 2003-04                     | 2004-05                | 2005-06                | 2003-04                          | 2004-05              | 2005-06             |
| <b>L. A. City</b>         | 15,758,150                     | 15,123,500                     | 15,174,119                     | 14,735,482 | 3,700,000 <sup>1</sup>      | 4,000,000 <sup>1</sup> | 4,207,000 <sup>1</sup> | 1943 ISY**<br>728 OSY            | 1235 ISY<br>1499 OSY | 975 ISY<br>1257 OSY |
| <b>Merced County</b>      | 2,017,580                      | 1,909,873                      | 1,805,052                      | 1,407,379  | (total for 3 years) 166,417 |                        |                        | 369 ISY<br>140 OSY               | 417 ISY<br>157 OSY   | 88 ISY<br>156 OSY   |
| <b>NoRTEC Consortium</b>  | 2,630,770                      | 2,454,557                      | 2,627,914                      | 2,143,631  | 0                           | 70,000                 | 0                      | 596 (both)                       | 480 (both)           | 361 (both)          |
| <b>Orange County</b>      | 2,366,219                      | 2,400,556                      | 2,129,798                      | 2,463,154  | 0                           | 0                      | 0                      | 204 ISY<br>175 OSY               | 180 ISY<br>234 OSY   | 170 ISY<br>219 OSY  |
| <b>San Joaquin County</b> | 3,531,419                      | 3,304,931                      | 3,514,157                      | 2,668,641  | 0                           | 0                      | 0                      | 294 ISY<br>319 OSY               | 194 ISY<br>291 OSY   | 222 ISY<br>216 OSY  |
| <b>Santa Ana</b>          | 1,171,870                      | 1,012,069                      | 980,234                        | 1,019,729  | 0 <sup>2</sup>              | 0 <sup>2</sup>         | 0 <sup>2</sup>         | 244 (both)                       | 112 (both)           | 94 (both)           |
| <b>Solano County</b>      | \$832,815                      | \$910,672                      | \$926,386                      | 735,280    | (total for 3 years) 261,250 |                        |                        | (Over 3 years) ISY 242<br>OSY 38 |                      |                     |
| <b>Sonoma County</b>      | 475,904<br>96,000 <sup>3</sup> | 697,573<br>68,000 <sup>3</sup> | 670,885<br>75,000 <sup>3</sup> | 659,418    | 95,000                      | 0                      | 0                      | 229 ISY<br>41 OSY                | 169 ISY<br>38 OSY    | 149 ISY<br>26 OSY   |
| <b>Tulare County</b>      | 4,535,819                      | 4,262,663                      | 3,769,696                      | 3,041,110  | 0                           | 0                      | 50,000                 | 464 ISY<br>152 OSY               | 624 ISY<br>375 OSY   | 364 ISY<br>85 OSY   |
| <b>Verdugo Consortium</b> | 563,010                        | 533,732                        | 677,680                        | 528,525    | 1,288,478                   | 1,105,025              | 1,390,387              | 43 ISY<br>12 OSY                 | 72 ISY<br>12 OSY     | 87 ISY<br>49 OSY    |

<sup>1</sup>A combination of City General funds and CalWORKS funds through L.A. County used to provide summer and off-track vacation jobs and enrichment programs for youth 14-19.

<sup>2</sup>Santa Ana's Navigator oversees youth programs supported by WIA and other funders, some operated by the same organizations that receive WIA contracts from the local area. WIA youth may thus benefit from non-WIA funding.

<sup>3</sup>WIA carryover from previous year.

\* 2006-07 figures are planning estimates from EDD WIA Information Bulletin Number WIAB05-95, dated May 23, 2006.

\*\* ISY=In-school youth; OSY=Out-of-school youth



The Merced County Office of Education (MCOE) has been forced to decrease the in-school youth program by 75% compared to 2000 spending levels, and the entire 2005-06 program budget for in-school youth is less than they spent on youth wages alone in the previous program year. A MCOE staff member said startup costs might have dropped since the initial year, but not hard costs like wages for youth.

I think we're lean as far as... staffing, and things like that. I mean, if you think about it, I have 6 case managers to serve 300 kids. And only 2 of those are full-time. The others are 50%...that's the equivalent of 4 people to serve 300, so that's 1:75.

MCOE's out-of-school youth program, Empower, saw its 2004-05 budget of \$875,000 drop to \$564,000 in 2005-06. MCOE asked its subcontractors—ROP, the Adult School, EDD, and Merced College—who mentor and case-manage out-of-school youth at other sites, to reduce their programs by 40%. Orientations for new Empower participants have been reduced from monthly to every other month because of the cutbacks.

Funding cutbacks in Santa Ana have reduced contract service providers' ability to offer childcare and transportation to participating youth. These supportive services are shown by past experience to lead to higher success rates. A YC member noted that the area's ability to innovate as they develop their tightly-linked system of WIA-funded services has been severely impacted by funding cuts:

...there's been less money, which has made what we could do bare-bones and very much boilerplate... We've gone to the groups that have been successful in the past, and re-funded them. We haven't been able to encourage anybody to be innovative, and we haven't really been able to add to the players that we usually depend upon.

An administrative staff member in Solano County said that funding cuts over a 6-year period have reduced the number of youth they serve from 650 to 150 and forced the area to cut its staff almost in half, from 69 to 34.

The first big cut in youth allocations that Sonoma County experienced occurred during the JTPA/WIA transition (PY 1999-2000: \$1,022,965; PY 2000-2001: \$443,236). The area was able to offset steady funding cuts in the early years of WIA by backfilling with relatively flexible TANF performance incentives. When these dried up, the impact of WIA cuts became more severe.

In Tulare County, funding cuts have required layoffs of both administrative and service provider staff. As an administrative staff member described it:

...our funding has been cut every year for the last four years [from \$6,226,098 in PY 2002-03 to \$3,769,696 in PY 2005-06]... So as the money shrank, even though our ability to leverage funds was growing, still we had to make some

adjustments. And about...two and a half years ago we had some big layoffs and our service providers took a lot of layoffs.

A Tulare County contractor tried to express his sense of frustration with the impact funding cuts have made on youth programs:

That's the biggest issue, the resources... it's been just survival mode for us...and that's the fight, throughout the year, every year. Because we're working to just put things back, we don't have time to do a lot more other creative things.

The steadily diminishing funding climate leaves many local programs missing the only thing they need to thrive. In Verdugo, The Glendale Youth Alliance (GYA) has more private sector, nonprofit and government employers offering work sites than it had funds for youth wages. Sonoma County has lost so much WIA youth funding in recent years that it can no longer afford to pay wages for youth to try out jobs, as its executive director explained:

One of the things about youth programs that was really good was the ability to pay wages for kids to try out jobs, and we hardly do that at all anymore. We can't afford it. We're really doing some very basic core services with the kids.

#### Efforts to increase funding

Every local area leverages resources in the process of allocating its WIA funds. In addition, about half of the local areas fund raise, some more vigorously than others.

#### *Leveraging non-WIA resources*

Many local areas have turned leveraging into a fine art as WIA funds diminish. As already noted, many areas write RFPs that make explicit demands on prospective contractors. They expect more youth services than WIA dollars—typically among the least flexible that contractors receive—are able to support and routinely require bidders to demonstrate how they intend to add value to their WIA contracts with their own resources, with resources provided by other funders, and with in-kind arrangements with partners. An L. A. City stakeholder explained the reality of the situation:

[W]hen you are in charge of overseeing, or advising, on Workforce Investment Act funds, which are limited and will probably get more limited, you need to institute some assurances that the funds are being leveraged. And that you should not allow anybody to be funded unless they can bring to the table that leveraging. Not collaboration, not cooperation, but leveraging....

The Merced County Office of Education (MCOE) is a case in point. MCOE finds a number of ways to contribute significant resources to WIA programs, in part because its budget is relatively large and flexible. For instance, WIA covers only about 15 % of the

program administrator's salary, despite the fact that she spent nearly all her time building the program during the first contract year.

Tulare County requires its service providers to leverage WIA funds by way of their non-WIA grants. Describing how this works, an administrative staff member said:

Our contractors are very large. They have years and years of expertise in youth and have tons of other kinds of funding. Our funded service providers are required, as a condition of funding, to leverage other non-WIA funds (or funding that is not 85% formula) against the TCWIB contract award. I really don't know the amounts as these funds are received by our partners (i.e., leadership activities, construction industry training, YouthBuild, other HUD funds primarily for housing for homeless youth, Community Service Block grants, Farmwork WIA funding, foster youth funding from the Independent Living Program, workability funding for youth with disabilities, etc.).

The YC chair in Sonoma County explained how they leverage resources through the RFP process:

The funds are leveraged via the providers, so in the RFP process we're asking them, 'We're going to give you this X amount of dollars, and how are you going to make the dollar holler, so to speak? What kind of internal efficiencies are we going to get for this money, because you already have the infrastructure in place?' So, from that standpoint, we are trying to get the most leverage that we can off of it.

Leveraging has its limitations, however. Some contractors report funding cuts themselves, as a Housing Authority staff member in L. A. City told us:

As a department, we once had an operating budget of \$16-18 million. Right now we are down to \$4 million. Three of that is youth and adult workforce development. We have a real concern to make sure that we just sustain our operations.

### *Other funding sources*

More than half of the local areas in our study reported augmenting their WIA youth programs with funding from other sources, some from many other sources. For example, the Verdugo Consortium receives only about one-third of the money it spends on youth programs from WIA. The Glendale Youth Alliance (GYA), the Consortium's primary contractor, reported that all but \$250,000 of its \$1.7 million budget comes from non-WIA sources. For the 2005-06 fiscal year, GYA received \$72,000 in City of Glendale General Funds and a projected \$780,272 in wages paid by local government, nonprofit, and private sector employers of youth enrolled in GYA programs, Community Development Block Grant funds, CalWORKs, private funds raised by the GYA board of directors and

staff, and funds from the Los Angeles County Regional Parks and Open Space District for brush clearing done by the GYA summer crews.

Burbank, one of the other two cities that with Glendale makes up the Verdugo Consortium, also draws funds from a number of sources to pay for youth programs but it chooses not to use WIA funds. Instead, it supports two city staff, and summer and year-round youth programs with General Funds, CalWORKS funding, funds from the Los Angeles County Regional Parks and Open Space District for maintenance of parks and open space, other grants, and private donations from businesses and others. Burbank also covers the workers compensation and payroll tax for youth program participants who are placed with area employers for work experience.

Both Glendale and Burbank leverage private money for wages for youth work experience. Some donors give \$5,000. Burbank city staff make presentations to community groups including the local chamber of commerce, hold promotional events, and volunteer each year at golf tournaments. A Burbank staff member says the youth employment programs receive a lot of support from city council members and administrators, some of whom were involved in starting the youth programs. "It's very much a high profile program that we run through here and I think as a result of that we've always received funding." The Glendale Youth Alliance also raises funds through annual events and private donations.

L.A. City makes wide-reaching efforts to mobilize local and state funding sources including:

- General funds through the summer employment component;
- CalWORKS funds for summer employment;
- CDBG funds;
- Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act (CPA), or, Schiff-Cardenas, for programs including drug treatment, gang intervention, mental health, and probation.

In addition, the Community Development Department is very active in writing proposals for federal and state funding and is beginning to apply for foundation grants as well.

When asked whether the Tulare County seeks grants to help augment funding for youth programs, the staff indicated that they tend to identify funding opportunities and pass them along to their partners, sometimes signing on if that would increase the likelihood of winning the grant:

The TCWIB does not apply for all the grants that come down the pike. We send them to our most appropriate partners. Frequently we sign on to the grant through a support letter or build a connection with our WIA formula funds into the grant. It increases the likelihood of funding when the TCWIB is a player in the grant. If awarded the funding goes to our providers and we leverage our WIA funds against the award to increase or expand services to our youth/adult programs.

In Solano County, staff seek funding opportunities as long as they're not competing with local nonprofit organizations for foundation grants. They obtained funds from the governor's discretionary WIA account for a project involving the county probation department and social services agency. Solano County uses TANF funds to provide work experience and mentoring for dependents of welfare recipients.

Several contractors in the NoRTEC Consortium seek additional funding for their youth programs from a variety of sources, based on the opportunities available in the constituent counties. Table 6 gives a glimpse of their efforts.

**Table 6. Comparative picture of NoRTEC youth funding**

| COUNTY  | WIA FORMULA FUNDS |         |         | FUNDING FROM NON-WIA SOURCES                 |   |   |
|---|-------------------|---------|---------|--|---|---|
|   | 2003-04           | 2004-05 | 2005-06 | 2003-04                                      | 2004-05                                     | 2005-06                                   |
| <b>Butte</b>  | 1,188,583         | 809,245 | 887,014 | 153,000 <sup>1</sup><br>140,000 <sup>2</sup> | 200,000 <sup>2</sup><br>[7,875]*            | 200,000 <sup>2</sup>                      |
| <b>Del Norte</b>  | 138,501           | 104,165 | 104,908 | 50,000<br>(15%<br>discretionary<br>funds)    | [7,875]*                                    | 11,500<br>(15%<br>discretionary<br>funds) |
| <b>Alliance for<br/>WFD, Inc.:<br/>Lassen/Modoc/<br/>Plumas</b> | 329,328           | 290,026 | 319,686 | -  | 23,625*<br>[i.e., 7,875<br>x 3<br>counties] | -   |
| <b>Shasta</b>   | 859,343           | 820,419 | 854,017 | 112,000 <sup>3</sup>                         | 112,000 <sup>3</sup><br>7,875*              | 112,000 <sup>3</sup>                      |
| <b>Siskiyou</b>   | 299,618           | 257,977 | 249,095 | -  | 7,051<br>(US Forest<br>Service)<br>7,875*   | 11,000<br>(ROP work<br>experience)        |
| <b>Tehama</b>   | 222,363           | 216,800 | 203,202 | 10,000<br>(LEGACI<br>grant)                  | 7,875*                                      | -   |
| <b>Trinity</b>  | 110,182           | 95,367  | 92,786  | -  | 7,875*                                      | -   |

\* The \$7,875 received in 2004-05 represents each county's share of the High Concentration of Eligible Youth supplemental dollars received from the state and distributed by NoRTEC administration.

<sup>1</sup> City [Oroville] funds of \$153,000 came over a two period in PY2004 to PY2005," per Butte County's program director.

<sup>2</sup> Revenue generated by the Checkers restaurant, per the program director, is about \$200,000 per year for the last two years. Prior to that it was about \$100 - 140,000.

<sup>3</sup> In the third and final year of a \$560,000 5-year grant (\$112,000 a year) through the California Workforce Investment Board for Improving Transition Outcomes for Youth with Disabilities.

### *Developing social enterprises*

An innovation that addresses the funding issue is the development of social enterprise businesses staffed by WIA youth which bring in revenue that can be used to support WIA programs. These are discussed in greater detail in the later section on “The Nature of Successful Youth Programs” (p. 71).

### **Delivering youth programs**

Many factors influence how youth services are delivered: the age and circumstances of the youth who can be recruited as participants, the approach and expertise of the contractor and the scope of the contract, and the geographical, economic, and cultural environment in which services are delivered. We will look briefly at some key components of the process, such as recruiting and enrolling in-school and out-of-school youth, where and how services are delivered, two distinct motifs for handling the employment-related portions of the programs themselves, and some of the obstacles youth practitioners encounter in trying to serve the youth. In addition, we will showcase some of the exemplary programs we have encountered during the course of our study.

### Recruiting youth for WIA programs

The first step in serving youth is to find and enroll them in the programs. How this is accomplished varies widely across our case studies as contractors face a spectrum of different local challenges—cultural and ethnic considerations, transportation issues, availability of job opportunities, presence or absence of gangs, prevalence of drugs, number of school drop-outs, and more. Some contractors concentrate on serving in-school youth, some work with out-of-school youth, and some offer programs for both.

There are both practical and philosophical matters at issue. From a practical standpoint, in-school youth are usually easier to find and sign up than out-of-school youth are, principally because the former are “a captive audience,” as more than one stakeholder told us. From a philosophic standpoint, most respondents who expressed an opinion felt—often quite strongly—that the time to work with at-risk youth is when they are still in school, rather than waiting until they have already dropped out, have adopted dysfunctional lifestyles, and thus become much harder to reach. We will return to the philosophical debate in a later section on WIA reauthorization.

The key practical difficulties surround recruitment of out-of-school youth. A service provider in Sonoma County said that her organization literally works the streets to find out-of-school youth in a relatively upscale neighborhood:

That's a difficult challenge. I'm about to go with one of our staff who has outreach, homeless outreach experience. We're about to go out on the streets and look for youth that way. I don't know how else to find them. This area kind of likes to hide any of the youth that are causing trouble...

Another Sonoma County contractor described how they work with partners to recruit out-of-school youth:

Now out-of-school youth, we are working with Migrant Ed on out-of-school youth; we are also working with the Independent Living Skills, the foster care part of the county, kids that age out of the system.

An administrative staff member in Solano County spoke of having to convene people from the sheriff's office, police, county office of education, probation, and juvenile justice to talk about how to capture out-of-school youth.

At the other end of the spectrum, Merced County indicated that it is forced to turn away out-of-school youth because their resources will only stretch across a limited number of them. Out-of-school youth in Merced County often hear about the WIA program by word of mouth and are also referred by the community college, adult school, and EDD. If it weren't for funding cuts, they would be able to serve many more qualified youth than they do now.

#### Enrolling youth/establishing eligibility

Our fieldwork confirms previous findings that suggest that eligibility documentation and verification processes required by WIA are resource-intensive, and may contribute to excluding eligible youth from receiving services (Government Accounting Office, 2002). A contractor in one local area believes it was the extreme rigidity of the application process that made it so difficult to enroll and serve youth:

They have a very stringent application process, in terms of finding out if someone's eligible to participate, so we have to be very careful about whether or not we can say, 'Oh yeah, you're eligible, we think you'll be eligible.'

The eligibility process is quite technical, requiring case managers to collect a great deal of information anchored by copies of personal records covering the youth and their families. In Solano County, only the WIB administrative staff are entrusted with this procedure, but in other areas it is part of the contractors' job. A service provider in Sonoma County who works with in-school youth referred by teachers gave us a glimpse of the cumbersome paperwork establishing eligibility entails:

If the youth is under 18, [parents] have to sign the loads of paperwork that we give them. And, if they're somebody who is not—does not have an IEP [*Individualized Education Plan, meaning that they are disabled and automatically considered low-income*], or does not qualify as a family of one, so they're not homeless or foster youth or runaway, and then we have to involve every working family member in the family. So, say it's a family of 4, and only one person is supporting that family of 4. We need to get their income for the last 6 months, AND get proof of how many members are in that family. It could be getting all 4 birth certificates, all 4 Social Security cards, it could be getting a letter signed

from the landlord, saying, 'Yes, there's Jack, Paul, Mary, and John are living in this home.' So, it's pretty—it's tedious in that case.

Another critical aspect of establishing which youth should be enrolled in WIA programs is more subjective, and is not covered in any legislation or instruction manual. Local service providers referred to the importance of obtaining buy-in from the youth, and—if possible—from the parents as well. Without a certain level of interest or commitment from the youth they serve, they recognize that the chances of keeping them in the program are slim. As one said:

You have to make sure these youth are on it, and that are going to be willing. I don't enroll every single youth that gets referred to me, because if they don't want to be in contact with me at LEAST once a month, or all they want is one thing, and they're never going to be in contact with me again, that's just a set-up for me to fail with these youth.

Another contractor made it plain that youth needed to recognize that they, too, had obligations when they sign up for the program:

If you enroll them in WIA, and don't have the working relationship to accomplish the services, then you're dinged, in effect, for not meeting performance measures. In no way in this county do we look for youth who are easy-to-serve, but we do look for youth who are willing to work with us, and we make a real clear distinction. We'll take the most needy, those with the greatest barriers, but we need them to demonstrate to us that they're willing to work cooperatively, participate fully, be accountable, and things like that.

A Solano County staff member finds out-of-school youth as difficult to retain as they are to recruit:

It is very difficult to get a high school dropout into our program. It is very difficult to get them to commit to following through on anything. You may be able to get them through eligibility, but they come in for some initial assessment appointments, and... it's too wordy, or too testy, or too whatever it is, and they don't come back. Even though you wave a carrot of vocational training, of help with your GED, of an adult mentor to work with you, of paid work-experience with you, it's very difficult to keep these high school dropouts engaged.

#### Co-enrollment, referrals, and other aspects of networking at the service delivery level

The ability of youth to move from one provider to another in a local area, or to co-enroll in complementary services, is vital to the holistic youth development approach encouraged by WIA. In Solano County and Santa Ana, a central administration manages enrollments and co-enrollments, while contractors on the front line are the ones most likely to see the need and request co-enrollment for a youth.



In the Santa Ana “daisy-wheel” approach, the system navigator guides individual youth through the interlocking set of programs offered by the contractors, sometimes co-enrolling youth in more than one program to provide the precise combination of elements needed at the time, and tracking each youth’s progress closely:

There's quite a bit of co-enrolling going on also between Orange County Conservation Corps, Taller San Jose, and... and that's very useful, because when one agency is done with a youth, and their purpose for being in that agency, they're easily transitioned into the other agency that will help with the different component. So they'll go to La Familia to sober up and clean up, and to kind of get their head straight; and then once they're set, they're not kind of thrown out into the wild, but they're sent to Taller San Jose to get training in construction so that they have something productive to go to after the fact, and get some money for it, because they pay them for it. The whole purpose of the network was also so that we complement each other. We're not providing the same thing, but that a youth coming into the system can actually bounce from one agency to the other, and get everything they need...to be a successful adult.

In fact, because of the model we have, we have to co-enroll. It's our preference, because, again, we don't want one provider to be perfect at everything, we want them to come to the table with what they do best already. So therefore, we encourage co-enrollments, because that means if we work together the way we're supposed to, then there would not be duplication of services.

One former WIA enrollee describes how he used the “daisy-wheel” services, which he called a “coalition:”

Like there's La Familia, a drug rehabilitation center, I went through them. Taller San Jose is a construction program, I went through them. Conservation Corps, I went there. And, unfortunately, I had to go through Probation, and then we have the Santa Ana College [not a contractor but represented on the YC], which I was just recently at. So most of the programs on there, I've been through, and I know what they have to offer. And I wished when I was younger that I knew that there was this coalition that would help me out, and go through these different ranks, but I still went through them, regardless.

He continued:

They're putting their message out, and you can find flyers for any of these programs. And then they refer you to the rest of their programs, if there's a subject they can't help you on, they send you on over. And that's what's real cool about it.

An administrative staff person described co-enrollment in Solano County:

So I'm sitting there next to Bridget from Planned Parenthood, and she's running the leadership class for Joey, and my case manager, Manuel, is teaching Joey

math on Wednesday, she's doing leadership on Monday, and we figure out where Joey's going, how can we better serve him, and feed that information back into WIB, and their case managers, who have probably given Joey a job. So the case managers from WIB have the carrot, they've got the job, and in order to keep your job, you need to raise your grades, go to tutoring, and get some leadership classes. And then Joey says to one of our case managers, 'I don't get out at all, I need after-school activity, I want to stay away from drugs.' I may then suggest at that meeting that the WIB case manager refer him over to YMCA, so Joey can get a membership at the Y, and fill up his after-school time, in order to strengthen his ability to live drug-free.

In response to Solano County's RFP, one contractor's proposal for funding was strengthened through sharing office space with another contractor. The two work together to provide multiple services to WIA-enrollees, as one of them explains:

So, for example, if we have a young person that we want to provide with tutoring services, but [the other contractor] has someone who's providing tutoring services, then it's to our benefit to coordinate our services. And that's a good thing for the WIB, it's a good thing for us, and it's a good thing for [the other contractor].

In Merced County, the county office of education (MCOE) has a competitive edge providing services to in-school youth because it runs the ROP program located at each high school. Its relatively large budget allows it to absorb some of the costs of WIA program administration through other programs.

In the Verdugo Consortium, the Glendale Youth Alliance (GYA) is a nonprofit organization staffed by city employees who work on site at the local One-Stop. Staff described their close relationship with several city departments that donate space, training, and other in-kind support for GYA fund-raising events and youth programs:

- The police department provides funds to pay youth workers, and jobs for them to do. Police also lend their large community room to the GYA for one of its fund raisers. GYA has a block party in front of the police department, and police shut down the street. The police bring out the SWAT team and the police helicopter. The department also has a family counseling service and refers youth from it to GYA. GYA in turn refers program participants who get into trouble to this service.
- The city fire department provides funds to GYA, and trains GYA staff who oversee youth brush-clearing crews.
- The public works department gives funds to GYA, hires youth, and helps GYA in other ways.
- The city underwrites the workers compensation costs of youth workers in GYA programs to make it less expensive for organizations in the area to hire them.

GYA has other partners outside of city government as well, such as community-based organizations and a health care provider that gives services to low-income children.

Because it is co-located at a One-Stop, the GYA can link family members of youth participants directly to other services that might help them.

### Making youth services accessible

Most areas have paid special attention to locating facilities where young people can have ready access to them, whether they are centers where all youth can be served or separate offices that work mostly with WIA-eligible youth.

### *Accessing universal services*

All youth are entitled to universal services at their local One-Stops, where older youth can avail themselves of adult services as well. As one of the NoRTEC Consortium's contractors said about their One-Stop:

The One-Stop system is designed for adults and dislocated workers. Youth are not always considered a partner or a player in the One-Stop. We just wanted to emphasize that our One-Stop Career Center is used extensively for identifying older youth in need of services, and for job placement opportunities for them.

Many local areas, recognizing that their One-Stops are not intrinsically youth-friendly and that many youth might be reluctant to ask for help, have specially-trained staff who intercept young people and help them seek employment and other services available to them through the One-Stop system. Determining whether they may be eligible for WIA-funded programs can be tricky, since it is difficult—and potentially illegal—to ask personal questions that will reveal the presence of the necessary barriers. Group workshops that offer help in finding jobs and mention the WIA programs can bring young people together in a non-threatening environment where skilled staff can reassure and befriend those who are skittish.

A few local areas have made additional efforts to reach out to all youth by setting up youth-only One-Stops, dedicating particular portions of adult One-Stops to youth, or carrying One-Stop services to places where young people already gather.

For example, the City of Garden Grove, one of the Orange County providers, has established a Youth Café in a retail area that serves both in-school and out-of-school youth. An estimated 200-300 youth per month come in to use the computers, look for jobs, and avail themselves of other services. Staff help them navigate job sites on the computers, build a resume, and fill out on-line applications. Youth get extra attention from case managers, such as making sure they have food and a place to live. The Café staff currently refers youth to One-Stops for access to the Employment Development Department's Youth Employment Opportunity Program, and other EDD services. Prior to EDD budget cuts, these services were available at the Café.

A former Solano County YC chair made an effort to see that a specially decorated "youth corner" was provided within the county's regular One-Stops. Sonoma County gave up trying to attract youth to its One-Stop on the outskirts of Santa Rosa and instead

transferred their efforts to Chops, a teen hangout that serves Santa Rosa youth. Because WIA funds support the job center at Chops, any Sonoma County youth can take advantage of the employment services located at the site.

#### *Access to contractor- provided programs*

Some contractors run youth programs directly from One-Stops, some contractors bring youth to their own offices, and several schools use on-campus facilities. In the NoRTEC Consortium's smaller counties, One-Stops may be the only point from which contractors are able to provide services to youth. One county has been successful in attracting youth to their computer bank, which they can use for doing homework (no games!) while they become familiar with the One-Stop activities. Another NoRTEC county's primary program for older youth is a youth-run restaurant that is so popular that there is a waiting list to work there (see a detailed description later in this report).

In Tulare County, two of the service providers have offices in many of the county's small towns, enabling youth to obtain services without having to arrange transportation to a central point. Tulare County's third contractor serves youth from a high school that is readily accessible to the local youth.

L.A. City considers ambiance such an important factor when trying to attract youth that it built the concept into its most recent RFPs, as one stakeholder explained:

...one of the things that we built into the proposals last year, when we selected youth providers, one of the elements we looked for is 'Does this youth provider have a facility for youth where young people can come, access computers, and do homework or just have a space that they consider as theirs, like a youth center?' If a provider applies for funding and they maybe didn't have a building or a structure, but maybe their partner who is a non-profit in that area had that space, we wanted to see that there was an agreement and an MOU and they pretty much were making space for youth.

#### Barriers and obstacles

The most intractable and most often cited barrier to good youth service provision is the decline in federal funding. Respondents in every area expressed their sorrow and frustration at having to reduce the scope of their programs and the numbers of youth they can serve as funding is cut and then cut again (see also *The effect of funding cuts on youth programs*, above). Practitioners also cited a number of issues inherent to the WIA program itself as impediments to serving youth, particularly the onerous paperwork involved, overly stringent eligibility requirements and performance measures, and the absence of a JTPA-style summer jobs program. These will be discussed below under "Perceived Weaknesses of WIA" (p. 83). The difficulty of recruiting out-of-school youth, already mentioned, is another widespread issue.

The following discussion deals with local issues that have a negative impact on program success. While many of these are specific to a particular area, three received frequent mention across our 10 areas, including (1) getting youth to accept the 10 program elements approach when what they really want is a job, (2) transportation, and (3) the difficulty in finding employment for youth.

*Many youth want jobs, not other services*

Youth we interviewed told us they appreciated mentoring and other social services, but service providers and administrative staff often described difficulties they had in getting youth to sit still for the full scope of WIA's 10 elements. The general experience they reported was that the kids wanted to earn some money and were impatient with the training and discussions that were part of the WIA package. Some of our youth focus groups bore this out, as one young woman in Tulare County took issue with the compulsory training component of her WIA program:

When you're out there, you know, you're trying to get a job because you need it, and they put you like in this program. I mean, it's good training and stuff, but, I mean, it's no pay. You know...you really go there to look for a job, you know, and they put you for training, and you're there for like *more than 2 weeks*, with no pay. And, I mean, it's good, but, you really need a job. So I think it's one of the problems that they have.

An L.A. City YC member observed, "Under WIA, you have to enroll them, do an assessment, offer other things before you get to jobs, making the ability to just jump right into a job more difficult, which is frustrating for young people."

Stakeholders in Solano County admitted that it was probably a mistake to market their services with green brochures covered with pictures of currency, since youth and parents come in focused on getting a job right away:

And some of these families just kind of come in, saying... and the kids, too, 'Hey, I signed up for a JOB. I don't want to go to tutoring, I don't want to go to leadership. I saw a flyer with a bunch of money on it, and it said, 'Come in for a job.' And now my case manager is telling me to run around and get services. I want my money and my job.' And the families are saying, 'Hey, my kid needs money. What are you sending him to tutoring for?' So we have a problem, buying in with the families, who think that these children should be working a lot more, and bringing in more money.

An administrative staff member in the same area explained further:

And so when we tell them that you have to do this, then we'll put you in work-experience, but you need to get those grades up, because we don't want you going to work when you can't read, or write, or understand basic instructions. So our job is to make sure that they are skilled. Parents are not buying into that. So when we

do our first assessment, I always make sure that the parents are there, invite them; make sure there's mom, dad, or both there, so they can buy into the program. Because if I don't make sure they read now, I'm going to get them again when they're 22, as an adult, in my adult programs. So why not deal with it now?

Some Verdugo providers use their ability to find young people jobs as the incentive for youth to stay in the WIA program and keep their grades up. If youth aren't thriving, they can move them into a more structured work experience. As they progress, youth are offered positions that give them more freedom, greater responsibility, and higher wages.

*Reliable transportation is hard to find*

Getting youth to service locations is an issue, particularly though not exclusively in rural counties. One observer noted that some Solano County One-Stops are “in Timbuktu” and one of the Solano County contractors made a virtue of locating his offices downtown:

...that's why I have 3 offices in downtown...right next to the main bus...And that's why I beat a lot of competitors out for those programs. We're more accessible than EDD or the WIB.

Sonoma County, although it is situated on the Route 101 freeway and its cities are linked by good roads, has major transportation issues. Gridlock during peak times is one of them and the lack of a good bus system is another. A staff member said, “That's why we moved our Youth Resource Center to Chop's, the teen center downtown. Youth don't come out here [to the One-Stop] as a general rule...it's a transportation thing.” A service provider acknowledged the problem, “Well, a lot of things happen in Santa Rosa. It could take 2 hours plus for a youth to reach, from the outlying areas, to the main cities, and some buses aren't even running on weekends.”

A young man who took part in our Sonoma County youth focus group confirmed this when he was asked what the hardest thing about being a teenager in Sonoma County is:

Being where I'm living right now, there's no way to get [places]. The bus ride to get to Santa Rosa takes 2 hours. And there's only 4 buses on the weekends.

Tulare County is both large and rural, and its bus service is nearly nonexistent. Transportation from the many small outlying communities is a major issue for adults, let alone for youth. Often just getting to school is challenging enough; to travel to larger towns and cities to take advantage of WIA services is simply out of the question.

The counties in the NoRTEC Consortium on both sides of the valley are mountainous and/or high desert and are sparsely populated with comparatively few main roads. All are poorly served by public transportation, making it difficult to organize activities that require continual in-person interaction with youth. Even the counties along I-5 are largely rural. A Butte County case manager said, “We find with youth, the transportation is just such an issue that, for a minimum-wage job, you're [traveling] 20 miles a day, usually

they don't have good, reliable cars, so... unfortunately, at the moment, they're kind of slipping through the cracks.”

Urban centers are not exempt from transportation issues, as a staff member who works with the Glendale Youth Alliance (GYA) reported. While explaining that funding cuts were forcing GYA to turn away youth because they can't pay them for work experience, she mentioned that another barrier is that they don't have funds to pay for another vehicle, which would allow them to employ more youth. They have work sites but just no way to transport youth to them. An observer in Orange County said that the geographic distribution of WIA-funded services doesn't always overlap with the location of poor communities.

### *Employer reluctance to take a chance on youth*

Several stakeholders in our study spoke of the lack of private sector involvement in creating job opportunities for youth, particularly WIA-program graduates. Even when WIA programs are set up to pay youth minimum wage for working and there is no direct monetary cost to businesses, most areas report that it is difficult to find employers willing to offer them jobs. Private employer reluctance is one reason that local areas are turning to public agencies or to social enterprises in their efforts to place youth in jobs.

In Orange County, stakeholders look to the private sector as the primary source of information on what jobs are going unfilled, which sectors are growing, and what sorts of education and skills youth need in order to be in demand in the future. With lots of small businesses in the area, local area practitioners also look to the private sector to mentor youth, and employ them year-round as well as in summer jobs. However, this potential is not well tapped and experts are skeptical that business would embrace the role of mentor, or that WIA-enrolled youth are attractive to many business owners. An observer in Orange County, an area with a large dynamic economy, said the two realms, workforce and private sector, seem to need more translation:

I believe our businesses are eager to do something but don't always know what it is. I don't know if we always know what to ask them to do, before you just partner.

In Solano County, the main sources of employment for youth are fast food, retail, and Marine World. Sonoma County has made cultivating local employers a major YC objective and in PY 2005-06 engaged a full-time Youth Employment Account Representative to approach employers around the county about giving graduates of WIA programs and other qualified youth the chance to work.

### **The nature of successful youth programs**

In this section, we describe examples of youth programs that local stakeholders nominated as their most successful in serving youth workforce needs. While the approach

and content of these programs vary, a few common features appear to be integral to their success:

- a holistic approach that combines employment preparation with social services and personal support;
- structures that group youth in cohorts where they work/learn together;
- youth gain not only a work placement but a learning experience that instills skills and confidence about what it takes to properly present oneself to an employer and to the public;
- caring adult supervision—of significant time duration—that combines discipline and support in appropriate measures.

### The importance of a holistic, developmental approach

A common feature of WIA programs in the 10 areas is a holistic, developmental approach, including mentoring (very popular with youth enrolled in WIA programs), counseling, and other services to help youth overcome such barriers to success as drug addictions, low self-esteem, unhealthy relationships, criminal histories, and mental health problems. Providers typically applaud the fact that these services are included in the 10 required elements under WIA. The comprehensive nature of youth services set the program apart from adult WIA services, which reserve one-on-one meetings with caseworkers for a small subset of those who use One-Stop services.

A provider related why it is important to first overcome barriers before reaching other goals:

It's just not about a job... how in the heck am I going to send a kid that's all screwed up on methamphetamines, and he's smoking crack, or whatever, to a job? Give me a break. You've got to work on those barriers. Or you have a girl that's being beat up by her boyfriend, and she's staying in the relationship; how do you handle those situations? So you educate them, and we educate ourselves, and we know now, we have to work on those barriers first.

Stakeholders in one area talked about how under WIA they have actually expanded youth programs that work on youth barriers:

I don't think we would have ever funded something like drug counseling services before. I don't even know that we would have even thought to go there, to be honest with you. It fits in perfectly. And they get people good jobs, too. But they're dealing with some really hard-core people that have had serious dope problems and jail time and whatever. We're meeting other needs, we're not just... resumes, and applications, and how to dress, and go get a job, and go on an interview, and... it's your mental health, and all that other stuff, that's going along with it.



An example of a program featuring a holistic approach is found in the Glendale Youth Alliance (GYA), which is a primary contractor for the Verdugo Consortium. GYA is a nonprofit organization that was started when the community came together to address a nascent gang problem. They started by putting youth to work in supervised crews clearing brush from hillsides as part of the city's effort to prevent wildland fires. Since then, GYA has developed a graduated continuum of programs that give youth increasing experience and responsibility working in local government offices, nonprofits, hospitals, and businesses. GYA pays the youths' wages except in the most-skilled jobs, where youth are paid directly by employers. The City of Glendale underwrites the cost of workers compensation as an additional incentive for businesses to participate.

The lure of employment is the initial draw for most youth, but in order to work they must be in school and maintain an acceptable grade point average, or be enrolled in a certificate program or vocational school. Each youth has a counselor/mentor that works with them on a very personal basis. GYA staff see mentoring as a key component of the program:

We take a very holistic approach to their employment needs. We don't just attack the work part; we attack the whole person because as you know in any work environment the whole person comes to work.

A youth who started in the summer brush clearing program later worked as a mentor supervising younger youth, and describes how he learned from other staff:

We sat down and she would give me scenarios, random scenarios. And she would be like, 'How would you deal with this? How would you deal with that?' The ones that I didn't know, she gave me – let's say I only thought there was two doors: either yes or no, black or white. She gave me another option. She said, 'You could also do this. You could also do that.' And this whole process for me is still a learning process.

Sometimes other agencies such as the school district ask GYA to help them with a youth who has lost a parent or has other deep needs. Sometimes GYA staff work with other organizations in the area to get help for their enrollees:

If there's a kid that's poor and needs certain services, then we'll call the Chamber, and they'll pay for something that they may need. If it's a Hispanic youth that needs a scholarship, we'll call the Glendale Latino Association. If it's a kid that needs health services, we'll call Glendale Healthy Kids and they all know us personally, so they . . . if there is red tape that needs to be gone through quickly, we'll do what ever it takes.

The holistic approach also is evident in GYA's Summer Trail Program which is for 14 and 15 year-olds. They work in the hills clearing brush, but they get intense life and job skills training first—three weeks of training, four days a week, four hours a day. They

also learn CPR and first aid, receive on-site tool training, and go on field trips such as to the Museum of Tolerance to learn about conflict resolution.

### Approaches to providing individual or group-based work experiences

We observed two contrasting approaches to providing the work experience parts of WIA's 10 required elements. The first approach handles work experience placements on an individual basis by placing youth into an existing job in the community. In the second approach, the service provider creates its own structured group work experience, with youth working together in cohorts and staff working alongside to ensure that the cohort learns key work attitudes and skills. In some cases, this latter motif operates as a social enterprise, with funds generated by the youth work projects being funneled back to support the program.

Both approaches incorporate the 10 required WIA service elements, but they do so in different ways, as illustrated in the following examples.

#### *Individual work experience placements*

Merced's Empower program, run by the Merced County Office of Education (MCOE), is a good example of the first approach. This program is for out-of-school youth age 17-21 who have deep needs but are committed to pursuing the program for at least a year.<sup>8</sup> While students tend to move through the program in cohesive cohorts (which is one reason for its success), their work placements and the social supports that surround those placements are handled on an individual basis.

With the help of a personal advisor, who is a combination mentor and case manager, Empower participants develop a plan. Their first step is to get a GED or high school diploma working through the adult school. After completing this step, some go to career technical training through the ROP, Merced College, or the nonprofit Central Valley Opportunity Center, which offers training in welding, business, food services, and auto services. Many are being trained at Merced College in medical assisting or computer office technology. In some cases, participants go right to work without any training.

During the entire process, Empower participants receive a lot of one-on-one support, as a MCOE administrator explained:

Our program is designed to give the students the mentoring they need. It provides support for success in school, but also a lot of hand-holding goes on; a lot of individualized support, because each student has a mentor/teacher assigned to them, who really works with that student. So if the student needs clothes, the house needs a refrigerator, if their mom kicks them out of the house, you know, all these things that happen, there's somebody there...helping in working with that kid.

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<sup>8</sup> MCOE likes to enroll youth before they're 21, but will continue to serve them until they are 23.

Participants work individually, but check in with their advisor once a month at a minimum, and more typically each week. Participants also convene in groups for workshops and tours. For example, a representative from Merced College might talk about what it means to go to college, or a representative of Planned Parenthood might make a presentation. At any given time, 60% of participants are active in a program component such as a job placement or career technical training. While this is happening, MCOE is paying for training, childcare, mileage, tools, equipment, etc.

*Structured work experience managed directly by the contractor*

A second approach to providing work experience is illustrated by the Checkers restaurant in Butte County, and by Workforce One in Tehama County, both part of the NoRTEC Consortium. Checkers is a busy restaurant in Oroville that serves elegant Italian food. It is also Butte County's primary program for WIA-eligible out-of-school youth, though its patrons might never guess that. When it opened in 2001, the idea was to introduce at-risk kids to the world of work in what the program director hoped would become a self-sustaining business enterprise. Checkers has surpassed all expectations, offering work-experience and a character-building program for 18-21-year-olds while generating an annual 6-figure income that helps support this and other programs. Now Checkers is branching out, doing catering for large social affairs, which is gaining even more positive publicity and revenue for the restaurant.

The 18 youth participants are paid minimum wage as they take on all the jobs in the restaurant from greeting to serving to cooking to cleaning up. As they perform the various jobs, they learn good customer service and how to present themselves as good employees. They also take and pass the state sanitation course as part of their duties. The program is designed to give each participating youth 1,000 hours of experience, and one of the most difficult administrative duties is getting the kids to leave when it is time for them to do so. Checkers gives them more than work experience—it gives them a family, a place to belong, and the chance to prove that they can do very good work.<sup>9</sup>

Workforce One is a work crew of older youth with one supervisor assigned to 5 youth. The supervisors function as a boss, trainer, mentor, coach, parent, counselor, and drill sergeant as the crews perform a variety of laborer, maintenance, and groundskeeper jobs. Crew members not only acquire job skills (basic construction and repairs, painting, plumbing, electrical, horticulture, use of tools, safety, etc.), but are taught the behaviors, attitudes, and responses that employers expect. They receive minimum wage and are expected to meet work standards for productivity, quality, attendance, and following instructions. Work-related mistakes and soft skill problems are approached as a learning

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<sup>9</sup> As part of our study, two researchers had lunch at Checkers and we can provide objective confirmation that the Checkers staff do very good work indeed. The food is outstanding by anyone's standards and the service is quick, skilled, and respectful. Visitors, intrigued by what they hear of Checkers and enchanted by the operation itself, often say that they would like to import the concept into their own communities. The director cautions them by asking whether they are prepared to give up all their free time, including their weekends, to make it work—which is what he and the other 3 staff members who oversee the restaurant have been doing since it opened.

opportunity, but youth who do not respond to instruction and warnings must then face the real world consequences and are suspended or fired.

Originally, Workforce One performed community service work, logging such accomplishments as refinishing and painting the city pool, rebuilding the dugouts, fences, and restrooms at the Little League ballpark, and planting trees as part of a downtown beautification effort. An unexpected outcome was the sense of accomplishment and civic pride that the youth experienced as they saw the fruits of their labor, and as they received accolades from city councils, county department heads, and community leaders.

As the reputation of Workforce One grew, requests for their assistance started coming from private sector business and home owners struggling to find trustworthy day laborers for minor clean-up and repair projects. Filling this niche, Workforce One regularly does minor sprinkler and fence repair, pruning and planting, painting, and simple building repairs. Although crews continue providing community service work at no charge, word of mouth advertising for fee-based services brings in a steady stream of paying customers, enabling youth crew members to learn and earn at the same time. After one year, Workforce One is generating enough revenue to cover the wages and payroll costs for a crew (5 full-time workers). With 2-3 weeks worth of work always on their schedule, Workforce One is on its way to becoming a totally self-sufficient program.

#### Providing an appropriate blend of discipline and support

Any effort to promote youth development must find an appropriate way to balance youth needs for discipline and support. A number of the youth workforce program leaders we interviewed emphasized the way discipline is structured into their programs. For example, a staff member at GYA describes their summer brush clearing program, which is where younger youth and youth with no experience usually begin, as a “boot camp,” but also as the sort of fun group experience that teens crave:

[There is a] hard start time and a hard end time. We provide the uniform from their shirt all the way to their shoes, their hat. There’s no room for doubt what the expectation is. Because they’re at-risk and young. If you miss the 1 PM bus your mom has to come and get you. If you miss it three times, you’re out. [W]e don’t even have to fire anybody, and that’s never been an issue. They get it, because it’s so structured. They understand what the commitment is, all the way to the end. There are always more youth than there are slots for.

There is something that happens here that I can’t explain. I think they develop a work ethic and an appreciation in that particular program that they carry for the rest of their life. [E]verybody that I know that’s ever gone through [summer] brush never forgets that experience. Because it’s also very fun, though it’s very rigid. [W]hen we take them up to the hills and they see the views and the trees and they’re working in teams outside they have a blast. And they’re working in the same group of 10. Every week we have “Team of the Week” and “Worker of the Week.”

Another example a program featuring discipline is the Orange County Conservation Corps. The Corps is an Anaheim-based countywide nonprofit organization with a \$3.5 million yearly budget. It works on WIA contracts with both the Santa Ana YC and the Orange County YC. It features a structured program in which many of the youth work in crews with supervisors, wear uniforms, are transported in Corps vans, and are eligible for better jobs and higher pay if they do well. Corps participants are dismissed if they step out of line too many times, although they are allowed one second chance to return to the program.

Corps members maintain a highly structured 40-hour week: 32 hours of work and eight hours of school. Eighty-six percent don't have high school degrees and attend the Corps-run charter high school. The rest get pre-employment and other skills training. They are paid between minimum wage and \$9.50 per hour. A Corps representative said:

What I like about our program is they come in thinking I'm going to get my high school diploma, I'm going to get the warehouse job. They leave thinking I'm going to go to community college and I might think about pharmacy tech or nursing tech. I'm really proud that they leave with a higher vision of where they can go. Our niche is not the 14-week job certificate get a job. There are other organizations that do that. We're more of a long-term approach where they learn how to work. Where they use us to get a wage and a paycheck while they stabilize their lives. We take a very employer-like approach. They get monthly evaluations, they can get merit raises. There is nothing automatic. They have to earn raises. There are criteria. They can earn bonuses, get scholarships. It's very incentive [based]— produce and earn while you're there and take advantage of the support services to get rid of the warrant so you can get a driver's license and fulfill your parole obligations and if you can get your record sealed, let's do that. It's really to stabilize. If you've got kids, let's get them going to child care, get you going to work, showing up for work every day. It's really a transitional work program where they take care of issues and move forward. My belief is if you give someone a 14-week course to get a certificate and they go out but still have trouble showing up for work and they can't keep the job because their boyfriend or whatever, what have you really done? We want to get to the point where they go out and get that other job and keep that other job.

## Local Stakeholder Reflections on Key WIA Implementation Issues

In the course of our interviews, local stakeholders commented on a number of issues surrounding WIA implementation. In this section we summarize their perspectives. A surprising number of them have had hands-on experience with both JTPA and WIA and are thus equipped to offer informed opinions on both programs. Nearly all expressed mixed feelings, preferring some aspects of WIA and sorry to lose some facets of JTPA.

### **The key tradeoff: service depth vs. numbers of youth reached**

All social programs face tradeoffs between the *depth* and level of service given to any particular individual and the ability to reach *larger numbers* of citizens in need. The evolution from JTPA to WIA youth programs has led to greater depth of treatment and far fewer numbers of youth being enrolled. The depth of treatment required under WIA means that the cost of services per youth served is higher than it would be otherwise.<sup>10</sup>

The JTPA emphasis on summer job programs that offered short-term employment and few auxiliary services has given way to the WIA requirement that each enrolled youth have access to a well-rounded youth development program, including the 10 required program elements. WIA's individualized, case-managed, wrap-around services reach fewer youth, but in principle offer the prospect of better long-term results. Of note, this evolution of youth programs is the reverse of what the JTPA-to-WIA transition brought in adult programs, where the momentum is toward serving more citizens with less-intensive services.

As noted earlier in this report, and frequently mentioned by those working on the front lines, WIA-funded programs are serving only a small fraction of the youth who need the services. A WIB staff member in Solano County expressed the painful tradeoff of working with a more comprehensive program that serves so few:

There are more comprehensive services; there are more thorough services. In JTPA, you didn't have leadership, or mentoring, or counseling. The counselors now go, 'This kid needs more than just a little job-readiness help; let me see if I can get them a counselor.' And we do that. It is much more comprehensive. Working with schools to get a kid a work permit. Now, on the other side, flip side of that, we're serving about 120 kids a year in WIA. We used to serve 600 kids every summer with paid work-experience. We were flooded with 6,000 applications for a summer job. But it's hard for a kid. I mean, just the numbers, 600 to 120. The JTPA program didn't provide comprehensive, wrap-around

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<sup>10</sup> The NoRTEC Consortium, with its internet-based record keeping system, maintains current cost-per-youth-served data and makes it accessible to anyone capable of penetrating the system deeply enough to find it. The numbers are startling; for example, among the 7 contractors, the highest "planned" cost per enrollment is \$10,065 (with the "actual" cost shown as \$14,538 three-quarters of the way through PY 2005-06) and the lowest is \$5,500 (with "actual" coming in at \$4,631). These figures reflect the entire cost of serving youth, including overhead, and rise and fall incrementally with the number of youth served and the intensity and length of the particular program.

connection to education, to adult mentoring, and to vocational skills for kids. It was a summer job. I wish we could do more. I wish we could touch more people.

In many local areas, the number of youth enrolled in WIA programs in local areas is quite low (as depicted earlier in Table 5). If anything, the yearly enrollment figures overstate the reach of services, since youth newly enrolled in one year are counted again if they receive a service in a new program year. On the other hand, the figures are an accurate indication of the number of youth that are being served at any one time with limited staff and fiscal resources. That there is an important difference between the number of youth enrolled each program year and the number of youth that are served that year is vividly demonstrated in Table 7, prepared for us by L.A. City:

**Table 7. L.A. City's youth enrollment, 2003-2006**

| L. A. CITY<br>YOUTH<br>PROGRAM | 2003-2004         |                   | 2004-2005         |                   | 2005-2006         |                   |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
|                                | Total<br>Enrolled | Newly<br>Enrolled | Total<br>Enrolled | Newly<br>Enrolled | Total<br>Enrolled | Newly<br>Enrolled |
| In-school<br>Youth             | 2746              | 943               | 1671              | 1235              | 1745              | 975               |
| Out-of-<br>school<br>Youth     | 1384              | 728               | 1797              | 1499              | 2214              | 1257              |
| Totals                         | 4130              | 1671              | 3468              | 2734              | 3959              | 2232              |

The youth left behind and efforts to reach them

During our interviews, respondents in all 10 of our cases expressed the sorrow they felt at being able to help so few of the thousands of young people in need, echoing the fundamental concerns that triggered the YCI's All Youth-One System movement. Chief among the constraints they mentioned were WIA's strict eligibility and the limited resources to which they have access—dollars, staff, facilities, even their own time and energy.

Some stakeholders wished they could work with more of the truly hard-to-serve youth while others identified particular populations, ranging from disabled youth to mainstream kids who simply weren't getting vital information about potential career choices. Several stakeholders said that they need the flexibility to serve individuals who come to them but are unable to qualify for WIA services. A practitioner in Verdugo noted that the working poor, as a population, are often left adrift with too much income to qualify for aid, but too few resources to get the help they need on their own. A staff member from Merced County illustrated this observation:

What gets very frustrating sometimes is you get a kid who really needs you, who's in dire need of the program, and his family made \$100 too much in the last three months, or something like that. That's very frustrating. And we have a very small window.

A Verdugo staff member said youth whose parents don't have documentation to live in the U.S. legally often don't ask for help because they are afraid it will work against the family's efforts to move through the immigration process. A Los Angeles City stakeholder said youth who have been incarcerated are not getting the services they need.

A former YC member said most youth need career counseling and don't get it. She taught a course that took students at an alternative high school through a vocational assessment and other exercises to prepare them for work. By the second year, employers were calling and asking for more students. Word got out on the main campus next door, and college-bound youth started coming over to see if they could take the class.

It's phenomenal; the schools don't have the money to do it. There's very few career counselors, or guidance counselors, or whatever you want to call them.

Some of the most important networking and leveraging local areas do is dedicated to helping the youth they can't serve under WIA. For example, Solano and Sonoma Counties and Santa Ana have tried to provide more services to these more general populations. The City of Santa Ana received an Earmark grant from the Department of Labor and decided to align the program with WIA, but received waivers that allowed them to be more flexible with eligibility and outcomes. This allows them to serve youth not eligible under WIA.

The Work Center hopes to break away from the 10 WIA program elements under this more flexible funding, and provide more customized service in the realm of job placement and mentoring. A Work Center staff member explained that this flexibility will allow them to meet the needs of youth who might not thrive in some of their WIA-funded programs.

If you look at the different providers that are within the [WIA-funded] network, they're all geared [to certain youth]. Orange County Conservation Corps is recycling (done mostly by young men), of course, they get paid for their thing, but a college-bound young lady that is in a bad neighborhood doesn't really want to do that, that might not be her ticket. So her ticket might not be that; it might be working for City Hall, as one of our work-experience clients, maybe working with her one-on-one on college information, and how to deal with her first year, and so forth. So I think in that sense I'm really looking forward to this program. We get more flexibility to do kind of what we want, within those guidelines. And we're able to set our own performance.

### **Perceived strengths of WIA**

In general, respondents in our case study mentioned the same two main attributes of WIA when asked what they liked about it: (1) it enhances the degree and caliber of networking among youth-serving entities, and (2) it permits a longer-term, more comprehensive, individualized approach to dealing with the "whole youth." Another point that some practitioners made, usually presented as a mixed blessing, is that WIA increases



accountability by requiring that each youth's progress through the program be closely monitored, documented, and followed up.

### Improved networking and collaboration

Several local areas said that youth-serving organizations in their areas and other stakeholders had become more integrated and collaborative under WIA than they had been before. One observer in Merced County thought this was because WIA involves more of the community, and because the WIB in his area is much larger and broader in membership than the PIC board was. Schools in his area were not aware of JTPA, whereas they are of WIA, even if they're not heavily involved in the YC.

A Santa Ana contractor and YC member pointed out that, although present contractors were serving youth prior to WIA, their current level of networking dates from WIA's inception. "There wasn't a network. We all knew of each other, but we didn't necessarily always work with each other; everybody kind of stood in their own little hole, if you will."

### *Importance of the YC's networking role*

YCs seem to have more naturally assumed this role of providing a place and forum for networking on youth issues than WIBs have for their sphere of economic development and adult workforce concerns. This could be because, relative to WIBs, the membership of YCs covers a more narrow scope, is smaller, and the task before them is more focused.

We observed that smaller communities seem to foster these connections more readily than larger ones since key local agents tend to attend the same meetings and serve on one another's boards. A stakeholder in the Verdugo Consortium made this observation about one of its constituent cities:

There's one thing about Glendale: It doesn't matter where you go – same people. I can go to Boy Scouts...It's like I call the "Top 100." It's like it's the same 100 people no matter where you go. Which is really helpful in the collaborative process because everybody needs to be engaged and when you start developing the personal relationships and trust it's real, not just on paper.

Similarly, Merced County is small enough that people with a professional interest in youth have overlapping associations and friendships. For instance, the president of the board of the nonprofit Community Action Agency is a WIB member and adult school principal who is close friends with the head of the county's human services agency. Both are friends with the assistant superintendent of schools who oversees alternative programs. The three met through work. One of them noted, "So we work together and try to accomplish things."

By contrast, stakeholders say the geographical scale of the City of Los Angeles, in addition to the size of its population, makes it difficult to bring key players together and

promote consensus. The fact that there are many different jurisdictions is a hindrance as is the fact that most of the businesses based in the city are small, making it hard to convene a coherent or representative employer base. Similarly, in Santa Ana the sheer number of organizations working with youth – said to number as many as 100 – is daunting for YC members and staff, who can only spend a part of their time on outreach. In the Orange County local area, contractors deal with the density issue by working only with organizations in their part of the county.

### More intense youth development

Local stakeholders are generally enthusiastic about their ability under WIA to work with youth for longer periods of time and with WIA's emphasis on education and developing soft skills, rather than focusing mostly on short-term work experience. Several practitioners applaud the individual focus, like the 10 service elements—especially those involving mentoring, tutoring, leadership training, and guidance counseling—and appreciate their alignment to required outcomes. One observer noted that a long-term relationship is especially important for WIA youth:

When you're working with hard-to-serve kids, or kids that we work with, it's like mentoring. You can't mentor a kid for 6 months, you have to mentor them for 2 years. More than 2 years if you're lucky, in order for them to get it. And so *the one thing good* about WIA is the fact that you can keep them longer until you know that they've completed what they need to complete, and they're ready to go off into whatever they need to do. I think that's the best thing.

Youth members of YC, and youth WIA-enrollees interviewed individually and in focus groups liked the mentoring and said it helped give them confidence:

I've been here for a while...what they do is they help bring up your self-esteem, and like, you go to a job interview and . . . like it's all right, you know, we'll go on this one, we'll research this. [They] don't let you give up on yourself.

[T]here's been times when like . . . I'm such a loser, I don't have a job. [S]o they're kind of like more than just advisors, they're kind of a friend. If something happens we call them and . . . feel better, give us an action plan instead of just crying.

A Sonoma County provider expressed her approval of the breadth of the WIA program:

I do appreciate the 10 elements, I think it's very, very well-rounded, and broad, and it's almost limitless what you could offer somebody in the program. I mean, the biggest draw—and I always say that—because most youth come in because they want a job, and I say, 'Well, I understand the biggest draw for this program is to get help with a job, but I want you to know, there's so many other things I can help you with.' And then I give them examples that pertain to them, or may pertain to them in the future. Like a 14 year-old, I tell them I can help them with

occupational training, or choosing a college, sometimes that's a little above most of them, but I just say it, and that's for the future.

A Tulare County staff member likes both the depth of the WIA program and the longer relationships with at-risk youth that it promotes:

WIA programs are much longer term. Our kids are in the programs anywhere from a year to three years. The average is a year and a half to two, as where with JTPA that wasn't the case at all. They had six weeks in the summer and then we did run a year-round program, but that was typically about six months. Once they're in WIA they're in WIA. We tell them 'We're going with you based on what you want.' So I like the comprehensive piece and a long-term piece. I agree with the people who wrote the WIA legislation that it makes for a greater impact in the lives of young people. All of those things are a great big plus.

### **Perceived weaknesses of WIA**

Local areas were in substantial agreement about the main problems inherent in the WIA program, citing a number of issues: (1) paperwork, (2) performance measures, (3) eligibility requirements, and (4) absence of a dedicated summer program.

#### WIA's paperwork

Local areas found reporting and certain other administrative tasks under WIA to be more onerous than those under JTPA.<sup>11</sup> In particular, local areas identified eligibility and screening requirements, reporting requirements, and midstream changes in regulations to be unnecessarily burdensome. For example, an Orange County provider said the paperwork required by WIA is repetitive and demands more time than the organization's 10 other funding sources combined. A YC member in another area complained:

Up front, a lot of money is spent on that. It would be better to streamline that and put the money into programs... You spend so much time monitoring the use of public funds that you end up spending a lot of public funds. I'd like to see something with a little more flexibility in the paperwork.

A WIA contractor in Merced County explains the ramifications of spending so much time on reporting:

The requirements for the paperwork are so huge and so cumbersome, that literally, we could serve probably 30-40% more kids if they would cut back on that. First of all, the intake is huge. Then let's take the diary entries—you're the guy who's working with these kids, you're doing everything for these kids. But you've got to write that down. You've got to go back to your office, and write all

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<sup>11</sup> This finding mirrors that in our adult case studies, and also the result of our survey of local executive directors and One-Stop managers, who told us that an estimated 40% of all local area time is spent complying with federal or state reporting, tracking, and auditing requirements.

that down. And if you don't word it right, you didn't do it. You know what I mean?

An L.A. City stakeholder puts the issue in another context:

I'd rather spend ten hours working with a youth than ten hours working on a work report. I'd rather spend my days working with youth providing services, developing programs, mentoring youth than having to do 'how many people walk in your doors and what was their satisfaction?' There has to be, of course, a system of accountability and performance. But there has to be a simpler way.

Several areas offered examples of local agencies that either refused to work under WIA because of the time-consuming reporting requirements, or were too small to be able to tackle the paperwork. A WIB staff member in one area gave an example:

During the first year of WIA, when we had our very first RFP out for youth, the schools applied, and they were awarded a grant. And then, when it came time to negotiate the contract, and they really understood what was involved, in terms of reporting, and follow-up, they refused the grant.

#### Eligibility requirements

Stakeholders in several local areas chafed at eligibility requirements that they see as too stringent, time consuming, and expensive. One stakeholder asked for more local flexibility especially in areas of high poverty; for the ability to use a rough indicator of need, such as eligibility for free or subsidized school lunches, as was permitted under JTPA; and to serve youth who come very close to qualifying but are just slightly above the income ceiling allowed. A service provider in Orange County pointed out that a higher income eligibility threshold should be set in wealthy areas, like the southern portion of Orange County.

The fact that youth have to be involved in completing lengthy paperwork and documentation in order to enroll creates an unnecessary barrier to recruiting them, which is already difficult enough. Stiff eligibility standards are a part of this and need to be simplified, as an L.A. City Community Development Department staff member states:

I think, in terms of documenting eligibility, we could simplify that process. It's a complicated process; it's very different from what's required on the adult system. If we could mirror something more like what determines adult eligibility, that would be huge.

#### Complex, ever-changing performance measures

Local stakeholders made frequent mention of how confusing the language of the performance measures is, how difficult it is when they are changed midstream, and how they divert substantial resources to address them. A Santa Ana contractor explained:

I think our biggest gripe about WIA would probably be the constant changing in performance, when you read all the terminology, and the big ol' regs, it's like, 'Who wrote this? And for whom did you guys write this for?' First of all, none of us are lawyers, none of us understand your terminology, and you throw this big, fat book of (laughs) do's and don'ts, we're like, 'Huh? What are we supposed to do with this?' I don't think the people that necessarily write it have any clue as to what the grassroots, what it takes to actually implement these. It seems that sometimes we're focused more on trying to learn, and learn the performance measures, and the criteria, and the eligibility, and collecting documentation, and writing the paperwork, than we are on serving the population. There has to be a better and easier way.

An administrative staff member in L.A. City finds the measures unnecessarily confusing:

I think the performance measures are somewhat complicated... to understand, the way that they're measured. You know, first quarter after exit, third quarter after exit. Those formulas are not easy, they're not clear.

One of the problems in dealing with youth who have the most significant barriers, the ones who need help most, is that they tend to have high dropout rates. This can make it difficult for providers to meet their contracted numbers and can lead to a reluctance to enroll certain individuals.

#### Demise of summer jobs program

Overwhelmingly, local areas—and, we were told, whole communities—sorely feel the loss of JTPA's summer jobs program. Summer jobs allowed large numbers of youth to gain basic work experience and helped youth and families pay for school clothes and other necessities. Several local areas said that parents still come to them asking about summer jobs, causing observers to wonder if communities should have been better oriented about the shift from JTPA to WIA. Some areas have found various ways to extend summer jobs programs after JTPA, but those have been reduced greatly in the last few years. For example, Merced County served 1,200 youth in the summer of 2004 but only 536 in the summer of 2005. A respondent there discussed the problem:

We were employing almost 1,600 kids in summer jobs...that's 1,600 kids that are not going to get to work in the summertime. And...it is my interpretation that the feds, the people that decide that, think kids should be better off doing other things than janitorial work. Well, give me a break. A 16-year-old, they learn to get to work on time, to work with other people, to understand the process of doing good work, who cares what they're doing, at 16, for a 6-week program? To put a kid to work is a big step. I think that's probably the only thing that I regret not seeing in the laws, in terms of the changes. And if they could do that, bring that back, that'd be money well-spent.

In Solano County, the onset of WIA meant the loss of summer jobs programs that put up to 700 youth to work. Now there are about 50 working in the summer. This change was hard for parents and youth. Said a Solano administrative staff member:

So many young people depended on the summer program to get their school clothes, and all of that. We had parents coming in crying, ‘What am I going to do? I can’t afford to buy my kids school clothes, I depend on that program.’ It’s been really hard.

Several observers among the NoRTEC counties recalled JTPA’s summer job programs with nostalgia bordering on bitterness:

The old days, when we had a summer youth program, that was well-received in the community, and had been in place so long that it was an expectation of everyone in the community: parents, and schools, and employers, and certainly the kids. And sometimes you hear them say, ‘Oh yes, my big brother was in your program.’ We actually have one person on our staff that had been on our summer youth program years ago, so you never know how it’s going to influence them. We miss the program. And the employers do. Any time I see any of these folks, it’s like, ‘When are you bringing that back?’

A youth case manager in a NoRTEC county mourned the summer program:

I haven’t met a person yet who didn’t like that component; I meet a lot of people now who are successful that started out in that component. WIA just doesn’t... it’s mandated that it must be ongoing, full-time, work experience. I can’t do that component through this, so that’s my biggest disadvantage.

### **WIA reauthorization**

Respondents in our case studies were philosophical about the uncertainties as to when the Workforce Investment Act would be reauthorized and what it would contain. One experienced Merced County stakeholder spoke for many others when he said:

[Y]ou never really see it coming. I mean, you’re ready for all these other things, and then suddenly—‘Oh!’ We just try to stay light on our feet, and be able to respond to whatever comes next.

Provisions that seemed concrete enough to warrant advance preparation were the likelihood that YCs would no longer be required and the shifting of significant funding and effort from serving in-school youth to serving out-of-school youth. As noted in a previous section, all but 2 of our local areas indicated that they intended to go on having their YCs. One contractor spoke about it this way:

I think it would be a loss. I think it’s a way to stay connected. In our YC there’s a representative from the junior college, there’s a representative from Probation,

there's a representative from small businesses, it's a nice cross-section. And these people are volunteering their time, because obviously they're concerned, and they want to be involved. I think it would be a loss, a big loss.

### Shift in focus from in-school youth to out-of-school youth

As mentioned briefly earlier in this report, this issue received considerable attention from many respondents in our study. Some local areas are already serving significant numbers of out-of-school youth for various reasons and have developed both the practical and philosophical accommodations to serve the out-of-school youth population. For example, Santa Ana stakeholders said the high rate of local youth dropping out of high school—some of them pregnant and/or parenting—created a dire need that led them to focus on out-of-school youth. At least 3 of the NoRTEC Consortium's contractors have been working primarily with out-of-school youth for years.

Orange County administrative staff reported moving toward serving more out-of-school youth as far back as 2003 when a countywide resource mapping effort revealed that there were relatively few services for out-of-school youth. At the same time, workshops and conferences revealed that the Department of Labor was tilting more toward out-of-school youth, so by PY 2005-06, Orange County had increased its spending on out-of-school youth from 30 to 60%. Explaining the shift, an Orange County stakeholder said:

You look at the graduation rate and you look at the kids that don't complete high school, the dropout rate, and the number of students that start freshman year that don't complete, it's huge. It's anywhere between 30 and 50 percent, whoever's data you believe. So that's a lot of out-of-school youth. And those students we're not reaching – any system. The only system that might be reaching them is unemployment, or social services, or law enforcement, or judicial. So it makes sense to put our resources there and if you think about the fact that those are the students that probably have literacy, numeracy, and all the complex social issues, the poverty, that's where we need to work together to do the social service model.

On the other hand, many stakeholders we interviewed expressed strong reservations about the new direction WIA is expected to take. No one we talked with denied that out-of-school youth constitute a population in desperate need of assistance if they are to take command of their lives and be steered in successful directions. Instead, most stakeholders who disagreed with WIA's new emphasis did so from the perspective of how many youth they could help in the face of ever-diminishing funding. They predicted from experience that a far greater percentage of WIA dollars will be diverted from youth programs into the effort to track down and work with out-of-school youth than are absorbed in recruiting in-school youth. A contractor presented the issue from the standpoint of a service provider, explaining that for one thing, it is resource-intensive; for another, it's a tough population to hold on to:

Whooh, the *time*! In order to recruit and retain out-of-school youth, I'd say probably 50-60%. Just because they're the hardest-to-serve, to find, and to keep

interested...A few years ago, there was more funding available because there was the governor's discretionary money, and so each agency had money for summer employment, subsidized employment. That was a big, big draw. And with older youth, something like that is going to be even more needed, and we're going to need to have incentives for kids to say, 'Okay, I'll help you do X, and then if you achieve this goal, you get a \$50 gift certificate,' or something like that...Whereas if it's an in-school youth, maybe they're failing in classes, or their attendance is poor, or they're having trouble at home and they need counseling, and that kind of thing. You're not... the dollars aren't being expended. Plus, they're a captive audience.

Several stakeholders offered powerful arguments for working with youth while they are still in school, on the premise that it makes sense to head off problems before they get worse. As a Merced stakeholder said:

We have so many cases of adults with failed lives; I mean, if we could have gotten involved earlier, there may have been a chance. And so I'm all for youth programs, because by the time... a lot of time we'll see someone in their 20s with 2 or 3 kids, and no hope of a job, and they're going to be on welfare for a long time. And if you can catch kids early enough, and sort of get in their head, 'You can be better than your parents, or your friends think you might have a lot of potential, and school's the answer, and not getting pregnant is the answer.' You know, if you get people at the right point in their life, it makes a big difference.

A stakeholder in Verdugo articulated the importance of early intervention programs geared toward youth who are not academically bound:

Our biggest concern is that with all of the emphasis on college preparation in the high schools, there's been a tremendous de-emphasis in vocational tech, career counseling, whatever. So our primary job is just to make sure that it stays on the radar, and then to try and do whatever we can to promote that, because we firmly believe—myself and as a group—not every student is going to go to the UC system... There might be some nurses out there that'll make \$90,000 the first year, who may not go to UC Berkeley, but they'll make a heck of a contribution to society, just saving lives, making lives better for someone else, and if we can steer kids into those, that's why I believe that if we could get the kids—especially in the 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup>, grades—and educate them as to what careers are. There's a tremendous need for aircraft mechanics. Well, those guys are making \$75,000 a year.

Some stakeholders feel that this is a question that should be left up to the discretion of local areas to decide, perhaps with the backing of the California WIB. One executive director could see no point in DoL's decision to cut back effective in-school programs:

Their argument is, 'Well, the in-school kids have all the resources they need.' Well, they *don't* have all the resources they need. And, in fact, why you would



want to take a program that's good about intervening with these kids before they become dropouts and wait until they are dropouts is beyond me. And, to me, that's the sort of policy issue that the state board ought to be taking up and trying to challenge the feds to stop that.

One stakeholder felt there should be more focus on even younger youth, rather than on out-of-school youth, as is the direction of the DoL:

My suggestion is that you start working with kids in 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade, so that they understand what paths they can use, what they need to do, so that they can get a good career, rather than wait till they flunk out of school, or don't go to school, and are already on a welfare line, getting food...whatever they can. You're trying to solve the problem after you've created the problem, rather than not create the problem in the first place.

A Sonoma County provider made the point that shifting to out-of-school youth would require a major restructuring of programs, not just a change in the budget. The program, she said, has been focused more toward in-school youth. Older youth need considerably more training or education, as well as extra help in areas such as legal issues.

### Common Measures

Toward the end of our case study interviews, local stakeholders had become more familiar with the new Common Measures and their implications. The new Youth Program Performance Measures replace the previous 7 measures—broken out into 4 Older Youth Measures and 3 Younger Youth Measures—with 3 “common measures:” Placement in Employment, Education, or Advanced Training; Attainment of a Degree or Certificate; and Literacy or Numeracy Gains. Local areas were required to report on their compliance with all but the literacy and numeracy gains in PY2005-06 and will be held accountable for their those gains starting in PY 2006-07.

Far from hailing this apparent simplification as a positive step, youth service providers foresee troubling implications. The reactions we heard from respondents tended to range from unenthusiastic to resigned.

A staff member in one rural area who expressed strongly negative feelings, said, “The Common Measures are killing us.” He pointed out that 96% of their out-of-school youth are basic skills-deficient in either math or reading, testing at less than a 9<sup>th</sup> grade level on entry. Under Common Measures, they will need to move to the next DoL-set level in one year, an increase that will represent 2 school years of skill gain. He doesn't see how this can be done.

A spokesperson for the NoRTEC Consortium described the dismay youth service providers in the consortium felt in coming to terms with the combination of Common Measures and out-of-school youth emphasis:

Probably the most disturbing to our youth program people are the implications of the new Common Measures for current younger youth and in-school program design. They realize that with the Common Measures focus on out-of-school youth, they will be serving *very few* younger youth in the near future. In our rural communities, we have a great number of at-risk in-school younger youth, so this is a hard pill to swallow! Efforts will be on-going in finding alternative ways to serve these youth.

### Preparing for the changes

Accepting the inevitable, several local areas have spent PY 2005-06 orchestrating their transition from in-school youth to out-of-school youth and mapping out their approaches to the Common Measures. At least 3 areas we spoke with have been holding intensive workshops for administrative and contractor staff. Contractors and administrative staff in at least 2 areas are working more closely than ever with partners to fill the gap they anticipate leaving when they must concentrate on serving out-of-school youth. For example, Siskiyou County in the NoRTEC Consortium has always had a very close working relationship with local schools and, after detailing their plans to comply with DoL requirements, the program manager wrote, "Additionally, our staff is currently researching methods to serve younger youth through our community employment centers."

One of the smallest NoRTEC counties is forced to shut down its in-school youth program entirely: "We are structuring our youth program to serve youth ages 18-21 who plan to complete a high school diploma, enter post-secondary education, or enter employment. We will no longer be serving younger youth."

One contract service provider in NoRTEC described staff reallocation and incentive management:

The youth department is in the process of re-assigning the duties of our Program Advisors and recently completed an evaluation of our incentive program. Incentives are given to youth who complete workshops, pass the GED exam, graduate from high school or college, or successfully complete other education or work related items. We will have two Program Advisors that will manage the majority of the caseload and one who will teach our workshops and provide remedial instruction. We began the evaluation and re-structure of our incentive program over the past few months and will soon begin to implement those changes.

Another NoRTEC provider is looking closely at meeting the credentialing requirement by:

- Considering the option to include hours of participation in an approved GED/diploma program as paid hours when the client is enrolling in Work Experience;

- Reviewing pre/post testing tools for documenting academic gains; and
- Setting up a monthly focus group to discuss, explore and reinforce academic progress (peer involvement) and will use this opportunity to post-test appropriate clients.

Both Sonoma County and Tulare County made Common Measures and the out-of-school youth requirement part of the RFPs they issued this year. The Sonoma County YC is asking service providers to build in pre- and post-testing capability, as the chair said:

...the providers will need to gravitate towards that, and we've asked them to gravitate towards that, and we've asked them to hold aside a certain percentage of the money that they receive to be able to administer these tests. And they revolve around numeracy and literacy, and pre- and post-testing.

One YC chair personally values “face-time” the service providers are able to spend with the youth over complying with measurement objectives:

...I get why politicians want them, and I understand that they want accountability, and I understand all of that. I just think that, for the small amount of money that's there, it really negates the... sort of like the ‘the medicine is worse than the problem’ sort of thing.

### **Suggestions for policy makers**

#### Consider incentives or mandates for employers

A few stakeholders independently suggested that the state or federal government use carrots or sticks to encourage local employers to hire—and even train—youth who are enrolled in WIA programs. This echoed a broad sentiment that more of the community needs to be involved in preparing youth for meaningful roles in the workforce. Incentives suggested include state or federal tax credits for firms that hire WIA program participants, especially for summer jobs.

Another respondent suggested that the federal government make loans available to small businesses that hire WIA participants. These ideas corresponded with stakeholders’ observations that many of the businesses in their areas are small. A Verdugo stakeholder said they can’t focus only on big companies:

The business partnerships can’t be just GM bringing in 10 kids and showing them around the factory, and I’m not picking on GM. But everybody looks at all the big companies, and a lot of those guys do a lot of very good work. But the majority of any city is, at least in this area, is not the General Motors plant, it’s small business owners.

A Solano County stakeholder suggested that nonprofit and local government agencies that receive government grants should be required to hire WIA-enrolled youth.

### Reinstate the state Youth Council

Several respondents felt that there should be a State Youth Council which fairly represents the local areas and provides them with the technical support and guidance they need. A Santa Ana YC member said the State Youth Council should provide direction to local YCs on policy matters such as All Youth-One System. Local YCs can implement that vision based on their local needs and local input.

Other observers felt that a State Youth Council should have more representation from the San Joaquin Valley—noting that interests from large urban areas—e.g., Los Angeles and San Francisco—dominated the previous body. They pointed out that the economy in the San Joaquin valley is such that the government is often the biggest employer, followed by agriculture, and that youth in this area work in fast food or retail. There are no large private employers.

A former state YC member from Merced noted that WIA youth programs don't get much attention from state agencies or legislators:

There's really not a champion, I felt, at the state level, from a legislator, who could support the things that we were doing. You had the State Youth Council, but then you had these other state agencies. They didn't really support what the Youth Council was doing. We were kind of appointed by the governor – it wasn't really backed, you know.

### Build in local flexibility

Comments from local youth stakeholders mirrored what we heard in our case studies looking at adult and dislocated workers—local areas want state leadership and guidance, but only if it doesn't interfere with local flexibility:

From the state level we will need somebody to continue to do the kind of work that YCi has done for the State Board and the State Youth Council, whether it's YCi or the state staff or whomever it is. I think that that network and those tools are really valuable and when WIA reauthorizes there will be much work to be done in terms of technical assistance and guidance and I do mean *guidance*. We don't want to lose the local flexibility. That was a big plus of WIA, that local flexibility piece. So we don't want the feds or the state coming in and saying, 'Well, here, we'll tell you what to do.' We want resources and guidance and information but not direction.

A rural county stakeholder in the NoRTEC Consortium had this to say:

It is unfortunate that programs are modified with a "one size fits all" mentality rather than considering the uniqueness and challenges of individual service providers. Rural areas such as ours with remote communities such as Happy

Camp and Tulelake have limited opportunities for youth, especially those who are younger and lack the mobility of an older youth. I also believe that early intervention as related to work and associated life skills is a key factor in the success of youth job retention and future employment activities. Our successes with previous participants support this belief.

From Merced County came a plea for local control of the proportion of in-school youth to out-of-school youth:

I wish that the federal government, in all its wisdom, would say, 'Let each WIB decide what the ratio should be, based on the needs of that community.' I mean, rather than being prescriptive, and saying, 'At least 30% have to be out-of-school, and 70 in,' and now they're talking about 70 out-of-school and 30 in-school. Why not say, 'OK, in Merced County, you know what you're dealing with, *you* make the decision about how that should be divided up.'

#### Consider the effect of funding cuts on youth services

When respondents across our 10 cases were asked what message they would most like to send to government policy makers, funding for youth services topped the list. We are including a few representative comments here:

As youth funding decreases, so too do the options we are able to provide to the already underserved youth in our rural areas. In light of recent years' funding cuts, it is increasingly difficult to offer a quality youth program that will enhance youths skills and abilities and allow them to become productive members of the workforce.

The current amount of funding is pathetically inadequate to address the real needs in terms of both quantity and quality. The new focus on out-of-school/older youth drives the cost per enrollee even higher.

WIA funding itself has been cut to the point where, I mean, it's a joke. I mean, to have a credible youth program with WIA funding is a joke. It can't be done.

A former YC chair suggested that state and federal government officials listen to locals about what their issues and challenges are and find ways to help them overcome them. Similarly, he noted that they could better coordinate their own programs. One outcome could be the sharing of confidential records among agencies that need the same information. Disappointment was widespread over cuts in the Employment Development Department's local offices, which some areas relied on as a valued local partner.

## **Conclusion**

WIA Youth Councils and youth programs are making important contributions toward meeting California's youth workforce development challenges. Like other educational endeavors, their work is labor- and resource-intensive. Youth workforce programs require determined and patient efforts if they are to succeed in helping youth build skills and confidence in the context of relationships that offer both support and challenge.

Regrettably, the system can serve only a small fraction of the youth who need services at current levels of funding, and there are few signs that the long trend of declining federal investment in these programs will soon be reversed. This makes it all the more imperative that workforce leaders and their private sector partners learn how to "work smarter" and to attract non-federal sources of funding.

The careful reflections and comments offered by state and local workforce stakeholders to drafts of this and earlier reports reinforce our observation that California has an abundance of committed and able leaders throughout its workforce development system. The challenge is to harness their commitment and expertise as effectively as possible and to build upon the renewed sense of state-local collaboration that is being created. It is toward those ends that we hope our descriptions, analysis, and recommendations have contributed.

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# Appendix 1. 10 Local Areas for Youth Case Studies



## Appendix 2. Examples of Youth Success Stories

Every youth the WIA system can put on the path to secure employment is a youth less likely to cost the state later in social services or prison expenses. Success stories abound within the system, and state leaders might consider crafting a focused strategy for translating youth success stories into increased support and funding—whether from federal, state, or local governments or from foundations.

Here are four of the many examples of WIA youth success stories gleaned from our field work (names and other identifying details have been altered):

- Juan had dropped out of high school in his senior year and was on juvenile probation. Through WIA-funded programs he got drug counseling, construction training, and employment in a team setting at construction sites, as well as receiving a high school diploma through a charter school affiliated with one of the programs. He has since attended community college and worked in construction. Juan is such an advocate for the system of WIA-funded programs that he has referred friends, has taken a seat on the local Youth Council, and speaks at community-wide YC events, such as an annual youth forum attended by hundreds of youth. He says it was especially helpful for him that the WIA-funded programs that served him were networked so that he was referred among them to receive the different services he needed.
- Dolores was 17 when she entered the WIA program. At the time, she was a dropout from high school with no direction for her future. After she enrolled, she was guided through successful completion of high school and was given a work experience placement at a local bookstore. She did so well that the owner hired her on a part-time basis. This suited Dolores perfectly because the local area staff, in working with her, had helped her identify a strong interest in forestry that was supported by her aptitudes and values. Dolores is now enrolled in the local community college, pursuing a degree in forestry while keeping her part-time job at the local bookstore.
- Charles enrolled in WIA having dropped out of high school, knowing only that he wanted to work full time, be independent of his family, and have his own car and apartment. WIA staff discovered that he has a passion for working with engines and motors, and found him a paid internship as a boat mechanic at a local marina. Charles needed first to complete his high school education and LifeSkills training, which he has done. His trainer and supervisors at the marina are very happy that Charles is on track to obtain entry-level certification as a motorboat mechanic. Charles anticipates being offered full-time employment when his internship is completed. He has opened a savings account, bought a car, and is well on his way to fulfilling his goals.

- Rosanna, 21, looks back five years and says, “I could never imagine myself being where I’m at now. Never.” At 16, she was in a gang, on probation, and not attending school. Raised by a single mother—a farm laborer who didn’t speak English—she saw her older brother’s friends go to prison for drug offenses. Her high school transferred her to a continuation school where she could catch up on credits she had missed. It was there that she heard about a WIA-funded program for in-school youth. “I was interested that they were going to provide us with a job...I had applied at a theatre and at Wendy’s and nothing at all [came of the applications].” Rossana enrolled in WIA, started volunteering at events and programs, and found a work site where she received helpful mentoring. She says, “Without the [WIA] program I don’t know if I would have been able to be where I’m at.” Today she is attending a community college and working as a peer educator for a non-profit organization that educates youth about health and family planning.

### **Appendix 3. Issues with WIA-Required Documentation and Reporting**

We interviewed more than 100 local area stakeholders for the youth case studies, and heard widespread agreement that documentation and reporting are important functions, both as a necessary component of good service delivery and as a way to ensure that public investment is creating measurable outcomes. At the same time, however, we also heard widely-shared frustration with many aspects of WIA-required documentation and reporting and of unintended effects they have on youth programs. Analysis of our 10 local area case studies confirms that these frustrations are pervasive and create significant impediments to local area youth service delivery.<sup>12</sup>

In commenting upon an earlier draft of this report, state officials indicated a desire for additional details regarding the specific difficulties service providers and local areas experience. The information presented here is compiled in response to that request, drawing both on data obtained during our full case study analysis and on information recently obtained for this purpose through supplemental interviews with four individuals with years of experience and intimate knowledge of youth service provision.

We caution that this brief compilation should not be confused with a systematic study of the complex issues involved. Our purpose is simply to help illuminate some of the difficulties local areas experience with specific WIA requirements.

As a follow-up to our evaluation, we strongly recommend that state and local officials collaborate on a more thorough and systematic review of documentation and reporting issues. Guided by the knowledge of experienced front-line personnel, the goal of this review would be to eliminate unnecessary paperwork and to streamline procedures so that WIA resources are more efficiently deployed. Such a process could build on the hard-won progress that state and local officials already have made in addressing these difficult issues and the tradeoffs they pose.

#### **The nature and extent of the problem**

Respondents describe WIA paperwork as much more burdensome than was the case during JTPA. One respondent recognizes that this is an inherent part of WIA's program design, the down side of WIA's emphasis on providing more holistic and long-term contact with youth:

[We] really like WIA because it compensates for some of the short-term inadequacies of JTPA. The paperwork is more intense because the programs are much longer, include far more services, and can work with the whole kid.

One respondent describes the current paperwork as "horrendously time consuming" and thought that survey evidence estimating that 40% of staff time is spent on reporting (see

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<sup>12</sup> As detailed in our third interim report, documentation and reporting issues are evident in WIA programs for adults as well. Our focus in this report is on issues related to WIA youth programs.

Campbell, Lemp, and Treiber, forthcoming) is probably an understatement, *particularly* for the youth program:

It takes three times as many file cabinets to hold the youth paperwork as it does the adult, just in terms of space on the floor. It's because the youth programs are so much more comprehensive than the adult ones. They are holistic, we have so many partners, and these are long-term programs—we figure an average of two years per kid.

Respondents explained to us that Management Information System forms must be filled out for every categorical activity performed with every youth. For example, the goals (also known as skills attainment) forms often track up to three different goals per year per individual. *Every interaction* with the youth must be documented, both in case notes and on the appropriate form. Workshops, for instance, require sign-in sheets, pre- and post-tests, plus case notes on every participant to demonstrate positive outcomes.

There are times, such as during the last quarter of the program year, when thousands of pieces of paper are being produced. Case managers must continue working with their young clients while simultaneously submitting a constant flow documentation related to enrollments, exits, and follow-up. Many case managers, reluctant to spend precious daylight time filling out forms, work with the youth all day and then take the paperwork home with them to complete during evenings and weekends.

### **Examples of specific issues and problems**

#### Establishing eligibility

Local providers testify that eligibility determination is a highly technical process, requiring case managers to collect a great deal of information anchored by copies of personal records covering the youth and all members of their families. The sensitive nature and sheer volume of the necessary documentation discourages some youth and their parents from participating in WIA programs.

While the WIA eligibility rules are similar to those under JTPA, local areas can no longer use being eligible for the free lunch program to confer automatic eligibility. This was a means local JTPA providers depended upon to avoid having to force families to undergo the detailed income investigations required to document their income level. Respondents are unable to understand why such a valuable tool was not included in the WIA design. A case manager says:

The parents of youth program applicants really get bummed when we have to document their income and some are reluctant (or even refuse) to share with us. Being able to use the free lunch designation would be far less intrusive, documentation is easy to obtain, and more kids would end up being eligible.

In accord with state guidance, some local areas make significant use of “applicant statements” to verify eligibility when other documentation is not readily available: “It’s *definitely* not the preferred documentation but it’s acceptable as a last choice.”

One respondent noted that the requirement that males sign up for Selective Service before they can be enrolled is discouraging enrollment among young men who don’t want to go to Iraq.

#### Follow-up after program exit

Local areas question the practicality, value, and actual effect of follow-up procedures. Most importantly, follow-up can be counterproductive in that it actively alienates some youth. The requirement that case managers follow up with exited youth at prescribed intervals runs up against the reality that many youth don’t want an ongoing relationship with adults. These youth want to get what they need—usually a job—and move on, rather than becoming part of an institutional program. One local respondent noted:

This program is designed the same way the educational system is, with constant monitoring. The kids we’re trying to reach dropped out of that, it didn’t work for them. So you lose the set of kids that didn’t like school for whatever reason.

Another respondent stated:

The feds want this to be an outcome-based program, but kids simply won’t be contacting an adult for a year. Even my teenage daughter wouldn’t go along with that, so obviously they can hardly expect to succeed in getting these totally disaffected, out-of-school kids to agree to it.

One respondent suggests that case managers be given more discretion regarding follow-up:

Case managers know these kids individually. They are in the best position to decide whether follow-up will be welcome or whether it will be received by the young client as an unwanted intrusion that actually drives him or her farther away. So instead of being forced to follow rigid rules, local areas should be permitted to make the judgment call—which kids would still like to be called and which wouldn’t. Youth are not all alike and treating them as though they are doesn’t work. Bottom line...whether or not a youth requires follow-up should be left to the case manager’s professional opinion.

Completing follow-up calls is by its very nature complicated—the youth who have jobs are at work when the case managers call them; those who are going to school are at school; multiple messages have to be left and a lot of the youth don’t return them. Although case managers are not supposed to talk to anyone but the client him/herself, in real life they often end up talking to parents, roommates, or whomever answers the phone

to try to determine what and how the youth are doing in order to comply with performance measures.

Funding cuts have reduced the number of youth program case managers and the time available to conduct follow-ups. Local areas are well aware that important outcome data such as the entered employment rate, employment retention rate, and 6-month earnings change are already available via the UI wage records that are EDD's primary data source. Some have asked why they are required to spend their time on an activity that is redundant as well as often ineffective and unwelcome.

### Testing

While they accept the need to develop youth skills, local providers note that youth often chafe at being subjected to multiple assessments or frequent testing. A respondent sums up the essence of the issue:

The kids have to submit to testing; they hate that. These are kids who dropped out of school for a reason. So you lose the set of kids that hate testing. Common Measures will make it even harder to access and serve these kids. Not only is the testing element going to cause endless trouble, but we're being shifted from in-school kids that they have some chance to keep in school to out-of-school youth who have already left the system.

The challenge for local areas is to provide objective assessments of youth skill development, but to do so in a manner that is more suitable to their youth clients than traditional testing. Local respondents expect difficulty in doing this given the nature of the literacy/numeracy goals in the new Common Measures.

### The JTA system

Throughout our evaluation, state and local contacts have cited the out-dated and cumbersome JTA data management system as a significant obstacle to any effort to reduce or streamline paperwork, or to use the data system for timely feedback. Local data systems are typically unable to communicate directly with JTA, leading to the redundancy of devising less time-consuming ways to capture information on youth and then having to enter everything again into the state system.

By the same token, only "canned" reports can be extracted from JTA unless the local area invests in or develops special software. Respondents indicate that they believe the state is well aware of this issue, but that the cost of overhauling/replacing JTA is so high that no one can imagine it actually happening.

### **State and local efforts to address persistent problem areas**

Local respondents credit EDD with being open to suggestions for improving information collection and with offering training as new federal requirements arrive. They also

recognize that EDD's ability to effect change is somewhat limited, given that many of the problems local areas are experiencing with WIA stem from Department of Labor requirements over which the state has little direct influence.

On their own initiative, local areas have pursued a variety of strategies to cope with documentation and reporting requirements. The following are examples we encountered.

- Recognizing that they can collect information any way they want so long as they obtain everything the state and federal government requires, one local area brought youth program administration together with service providers to see how paperwork could be reduced. They came up with ways to redesign their own reporting forms so that check-off boxes replaced frequently-repeated items that had to be written out. This saved a lot of time for capturing the information, but because that can't be streamed directly to JTA, there is still unavoidable redundancy in preparing state forms.
- One local area is experimenting with splitting off certain less personal aspects of the activities required by law to spare the case workers. They assign the follow-up component—"retention and all that"—to other staff. "You don't have to be the case managers to make those phone calls, you just need to be able to find out what's going on and offer additional services, if needed, and if there's any problem—*any* problem—reconnect them with the case manager...That helped a whole bunch, splitting that up really helped."
- Some youth program administrators make it a point to search the Internet for tips on how other local areas have reduced the paperwork burden.

### **Recommend for moving forward**

We strongly recommend that EDD convene regional *work groups* that meet directly with local area caseworkers, the people who are doing the work. Members should be people from both the state and local areas who are able to maintain open minds, in order to engage in creative brainstorming about forms/requirements between the people who need the information and the people experiencing the difficulties collecting it. The purpose of the work groups would be to devise practical solutions rather than simply to describe the problem one more time. In some cases there may be straightforward solutions such as redesigning forms to make them simpler, combine their functions, or submit them less often. In other cases state and local stakeholders may need to gain access to federal decision makers and attempt to convince them to relax or change certain requirements in light of experience on the ground.



#### **Appendix 4. Youth Participants in WIA Programs: Findings from Focus Groups**

As part of our evaluation of WIA Youth Councils and youth programs, we conducted 8 focus groups with a total of 53 youth ages 18 and over, most of whom had participated in WIA-funded programs. The purpose of the focus groups was to learn generally about youth connections to the world of work and specifically about youth experiences in WIA programs.

##### **Key findings**

Overall, youth report positive experiences with WIA programs, which some described as “life changing.”

- Youth are primarily attracted to the WIA programs by the promise of being placed in a job, as well as by other tangible supports such as financial aid and help paying for books, transportation, and childcare.
- Once in programs, some youth value the comprehensive personal support they receive more than others. Many describe a growing sense of self-esteem and for some enrolled in especially cohesive programs the environment is described as “like a family.” Others are impatient with the unpaid training time that comes before they can begin paid employment.
- The youth we met want to work but have found that many jobs are closed to them. The work experience opportunities provided by WIA programs not only help prepare them for better jobs, but also enable them to demonstrate that they are responsible workers so that employers will take a chance on them.
- Most youth received little workforce preparation in high school and many were surprised at how difficult it is to find well-paying work that they would enjoy.
- The point of reference for many young people is their own or their parents’ experience with bad jobs. For many youth, the hours or seasonality of jobs surfaced as an important issue, especially for those who are pursuing educational opportunities.
- Youth want to be asked by the community about what types of facilities and services they need instead of having others make those decisions for them.
- Youth report significant economic and social problems in their local environments including high unemployment, drugs, gangs, violence, and what many described as an almost overwhelming lack of things for youth to do. The latter was often further compounded by a lack of transportation, including viable public transit.

## Methods

The focus group interviews were held between October 2005 and April 2006 with one each in 7 of the 10 local areas in our case study analysis, including Los Angeles City (Watts), Merced County, NoRTEC (Butte County), San Joaquin County, Solano County, Sonoma County, and Tulare County. Funding limitations prevented us from conducting focus groups in our other 3 cases, Orange County, Santa Ana and Verdugo. An eighth focus group interview was held in Culver City, part of the Los Angeles County local area.

We worked with local WIA youth service providers to recruit focus group participants and to identify an appropriate time and place for the group interview. In order to avoid certain restrictions associated with the University's human subjects requirements, we limited our recruitment efforts to youth who were 18 years of age or older.<sup>13</sup> We rewarded participating youth with a gift certificate worth \$20 at a local Target or similar store, and we always offered them something to eat and drink. In most, but not all, cases participants knew one another, having participated in the same WIA program.

We attempted to have from 8-12 youth in each focus group, but it sometimes proved to be extremely difficult to coordinate the schedules of enough older youth to assemble a viable focus group, and in one case we could only get 2 participants. In a small handful of cases, youth who had not participated in WIA programs attended. They were unable to respond to questions that dealt specifically with youth experiences with WIA programs, and their other responses did not differ significantly from those of the WIA participants.

In all, 53 youth participated, an average of about 7 youth per group. Of the 53, 36 were female and 17 were male. Participants included 19 Latinos, 17 African-Americans, 9 Asian or Asian Pacific Islanders, and 8 Caucasians.

Five of the 7 focus groups were co-facilitated by local youth who had been trained on the UC Davis campus on Sept. 10, 2005. Adult facilitators were members of the UC Davis research team. In some cases, local WIA program staff who had helped to arrange the focus groups were in the room at the time the focus group was conducted, potentially affecting how youth responded to the questions about WIA programs.

### Focus group questions

In all 8 focus groups, a common protocol featuring the following questions was used:

1. What kind of job would you never want to do and why?
2. What is an example of a good job and what makes it good?
3. What is the best job you can imagine? Why? What would you have to do to get that job?
4. In school, what were you taught about jobs and working?
5. If you were looking for a job, where would you go or whom would you talk with to find out about job possibilities?

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<sup>13</sup> In a couple of focus groups, younger youth showed up unexpectedly and were allowed to participate.

6. How did you find out about the WIA program you participated in? Why did you decide to be part of it?
7. Would you recommend this program to a friend or family member? Why or why not?
8. Are there specific ways the program has helped you?
9. What's the most important thing you learned from this whole experience?
10. Has anything about the program been disappointing?
11. What could your community do to better prepare young people for work?
12. What is the worst thing about growing up in \_\_\_\_\_?

Not all youth responded to every question. The following sections summarize general themes that surfaced in the responses we received to each of these 12 questions.

### **1. What kind of job would you never want to do and why?**

This was intended as a warm-up question and produced a certain amount of merriment, but many of the answers are evocative. The youth know what they don't want: work that they see as menial, dull, or involving heavy physical labor. Many said, "Fast food!" and others rejected working outside in the heat (farm work), with trash (janitorial or refuse work), or in situations where they might face unruly customers.

The point of reference for many young people was their own or their parents' experience with bad jobs. One youth didn't want to work in fast food after having watched both parents work at McDonald's for more than a decade. A young woman in Merced said, "[M]y mom's working right now. She's doing labor after labor and it's hard for me, personally, to see my mom to that."

### **2. What is an example of a good job and what makes it good?**

Most of the youth answered this question as though we had asked what would be a good job *for them*. Some youth referred to specific occupations, some to a specific type of location (e.g., a shopping mall), and others to a sector of the economy (small business, large corporations). Some clearly had information relevant to their goal and plans for achieving it through school, certificates, or work experience. Others answered the question in general terms, sometimes choosing a prestigious career without sounding as though they had given the matter much thought as yet. Few offered details about their personal attributes or motivations, or the characteristics of the job that attracted them.

Two patterns emerged in all the groups. Youth of both genders said they would like to have a job that helped people, and primarily young women were interested in working with children. Sometimes these two goals overlapped. Many named jobs in the medical field, perhaps a reflection of the emphasis on the demand for these jobs that is articulated in some of the WIA-funded programs. Specific helping professions that youth aspired to across areas included registered nurse, firefighter, physician, teacher, elderly care, paramedic, midwife, and medical assistant. Those who wanted to work with children

cited careers as teachers, teaching assistants, child care providers, social workers, pediatricians, and child protective services.

Other interests included being a corporate executive, lawyer, veterinarian, fashion designer, architect, or small business owner. One youth planned to get vocational training in working with heating and air conditioning systems so he could own his own business and be resilient and independent enough to fix a number of things with his own hands. A few young women talked about working in a mall because they like to shop, or about becoming models. A few youth talked about jobs that they had liked because they were easy and fun, including coaching children in basketball and sampling and testing tomatoes in the summer.

### **3. What is the best job you can imagine? Why? What would you have to do to get that job?**

This question didn't generate much new information compared to question #2, and eventually was dropped from later focus groups.

### **4. In school, what were you taught about jobs and working?**

The majority of these youth reported receiving very little preparation in the K-12 system for seeking jobs or transitioning into the workforce. Some did recall being given information in high school about preparing a resume and interviewing for a job, and a few had taken computerized skills assessment tests. Some could say that they had heard something about various soft skills needed to find jobs and hold them, but couldn't elaborate much further.

Youth who reported taking a life skills or career development class said it was offered too late—their last year of high school—or was not presented in a way that underscored the realities of what youth would face after they left school. They would have preferred more concrete and hands-on training at an earlier age. In particular, they would have liked to have received information that would help them fully understand what it would be like to be out of school and in the job market. A young man in Tulare spoke to this issue:

They should teach us how to actually go out there . . . what it's gonna be like, not tell us, but show us what it's gonna be like. Because when you're in school and they're telling you, it's totally different when you go out and you're actually interviewing. You don't know what to expect, you don't . . . you're nervous. But in school there's, 'Oh yeah, you're fine.'

Some youth expressed regret about not taking greater advantage of high school opportunities and said they hadn't realized what they would face when they left school. "You don't realize how easy you got it in high school until you get out of high school," said a young woman from Los Angeles. "You would not act the same way in high school as you would now that you know. I just graduated and I tell my sister to enjoy it now because once you graduate you start taking these classes and you have to pay for them."

We heard youth say they wished they had had more of an understanding of the competitive market for even menial jobs, the high cost of living, and other realities facing them. Some talked about utility bill increases, rent, and trying to make ends meet. A youth who lives in an urban housing project said:

I mean at the time when I was in the class I figured it was nothing. I took the class so I could hurry up and get out of high school. Then you get out of high school and it hits you – OK, resume, I remember that. They really don't put emphasis on it so you really understand like OK, they tell you this is what you are going to do when you get out but it's like 'nyah, nyah, nyah, nyah. Just stop talking to me and give me my grade and then let me go to the next class.

A few youth said they had positive experiences with the ROP program, though one said she didn't hear about it until after her schedule had been set. A Los Angeles youth said a program called Weed and Seed had been transformational. "I came out a different person 'cause they changed my ways, helped me, like, understand." Home-schooled youth reported no exposure to workforce preparedness information.

One youth who had no workforce preparation in high school said, "Well actually, we didn't hear very much about jobs in school. We were more worried about getting into college so we only heard a little about jobs."

**5. If you were looking for a job, where would you go or whom would you talk with to find out about job possibilities?**

Youth in every area were able to toss out Internet sites and other sources such as newspapers and cable television channels. It wasn't clear that they had used these avenues themselves. A few youth mentioned family and friends as sources of information on jobs. For example, a Merced youth said he landed a job outside of town requiring a lot of lifting and standing, but only because his uncle worked there and because he himself already had two years of work experience under his belt.

Relatively few youth mentioned One-Stop centers in response to this question. The Butte County (NoRTEC) focus group was an exception. All the focus group participants work in the youth-run restaurant called Checkers and have been well schooled in using the whole spectrum of local One-Stop services.

A San Joaquin youth said he would rely on job listings posted at the government agency he currently worked for. A Sonoma youth landed a job interview at E-Z Boy by submitting an application to them at a job fair.

**6. How did you find out about the WIA program you participated in? Why did you decide to be part of it?**

Roughly equal numbers of youth reported hearing about the WIA programs through personal contacts—family and friends—and from professional sources, including school and EDD offices. A foster youth heard about it through her foster parent, and youth whose parents received welfare learned through a letter sent to their home in at least one area.

Most of the youth were drawn to WIA programs by their desire to find a job. Many had not been able to get jobs on their own, and others spoke of disliking jobs they had found for various reasons. Several hoped to gain better work experience through job placements in the WIA programs and some said they had also heard the programs offered funds for college tuition, books, and other assistance such as transportation.

A number of youth said they were out of school and out of work and at loose ends when they decided to join a WIA-funded program. Sample comments include the following:

I was like 20, and I didn't have nothing going on. I was kind of waiting—so, now I'm in college.

I guess what made me want to do it was because I kind of already dropped out of high school, and I needed to get my diploma. They said they'd help me get my diploma and then they told me they'd give me a job also, so that's a plus.

I'm out there looking for jobs and you got to have experience for a year. You got to have this experience; like cash register experience for a year.

I needed a job because I have a two-year-old daughter, and I need to get my diploma. My family started telling me about it, so it's like, well, that's a good deal.

**7. Would you recommend this program to a friend or family member? Why or why not?**

Nearly all youth who answered said they would recommend the program because it offers skills and experiences that lead to desirable jobs. For example:

They give you jobs that you can't get, mostly, until you're 18 or older.

I would because it gives you experience. It gives you opportunities to get jobs that you couldn't get on your own being 16 or 17 years old that you can just walk in and say, 'Here I am. Hire me.' Because you don't have the experience and you don't have the education.

Two youth in one area were more reluctant to recommend the program. Their complaint had to do with staff turnover, and a feeling that new staff were not as committed to them as the previous staff had been.

### **8. Are there specific ways the program has helped you?**

At least half of the testimony was about skills and experience youth gained that will prepare them for the workforce and job searches. In near equal measure, youth talked about the support and nurturing the programs gave them, and the confidence and self-esteem they built because of it. Sample comments included:

I never had confidence before; now I do.

What they do is, they help bring up your self-esteem, and like, you go to a job interview and like it's all right, you know, we'll go on this one, we'll research this. They don't let you give up on yourself.

A youth who worked for 2 years in Butte County's Checkers restaurant supported by WIA funds and WIA-funded staff said the whole team was like a "family" to her. Another Checkers worker said:

I know at least for myself doing most of the baking here, when you make the food, when you prep the food, and hear customers tell you about how good the bread was today, or that the soup was excellent today, you know, if you knew you had a hand in it, or you did it yourself, it makes you feel better, and then the next time you're making it, you know 'I can do a pretty good job at this,' so you're not worried about messing up.

Youth who valued the job search preparedness aspects talked of learning how to prepare a resume, fill out job application forms, dress for and present themselves in job interviews, and look for jobs.

### **9. What's the most important thing you learned from this whole experience?**

Accenting their answers to the previous question, a few youth responded to this follow-up by citing particular aspects of their WIA program experience. For example, youth working at Checkers talked about the ease with which they could now approach adults they didn't know, even when the customers were trying or difficult. Some of these restaurant workers also talked with pride about how rigorous their training had been and how closely they follow it.

Youth in Tulare talked about the concrete benefits they had gained from the nurturing environment:

They actually help you graduate. At basic high school they just were in there for the money.

Another young man in Tulare said:

And they'll help you get a job AFTER you finish, when you graduate, they'll put you at the corporation with a contact, and they'll even qualify you for grants to go to college.

#### **10. Has anything about the program been disappointing?**

Most youth did not have anything negative to share, but some did offer criticism. One complaint echoed a theme we had heard program staff express, namely, that youth are often eager to get a job and don't appreciate having to take time to go through the required training. For example, one young woman complained that she had to go to two weeks of unpaid training before she could get her job. Another spoke of enduring 150 hours of training.

You really go there to look for a job, you know, and they put you for training, and you're there for like more than two weeks with no pay. And I mean it's good training and stuff, but, I mean, it's no pay.

Two youth in one area complained about how dull their work experience placements were. Though they were in offices, the youth were provided little direction and spent the time phoning their friends, or at best did rote tasks such as photocopying.

A youth in another local area complained that she didn't have enough hours in her work experience job, just 15 a week. A youth in another area said the WIA program allots her 500 hours of work experience and that she used it up in just five months and wants more.

#### **11. What could your community do to better prepare young people for work?**

Comments from youth on this subject were scattered but often passionate:

- Youth said they need help getting basic work experience and think employers should do more to aid them. At least one suggested employers recruit from WIA programs.
- Schools should intervene early to help youth understand the true nature of the job market and workforce, and help them build concrete skills to address these situations through required classes. Some recommended schools intervene in middle school before youth get distracted by negative peer pressure. "When you're 12-years-old, that's when you actually have a dream," said a Culver City youth.
- WIA programs need to be better advertised or located at schools.
- Youth said they respond best when they know people care about them and appreciate their efforts.
- Youth in some areas said they need a safe place for younger youth to hang out where there are no drugs or drug dealing, but where activities are free (even \$60



for sports equipment was deemed to be too much.). In one community a landmark city park had been sold for a housing development, the public pool had been closed because of violence, and there had been shootings at the skating rink. In other communities there was nothing affordable for youth to do. However, the idea of a teen center wasn't necessarily palatable to youth. Youth said adults should survey them for ideas and needs rather than establishing a program or facility they don't want.

- Youth said they need better transportation.

## **12. What's the worst thing about growing up in \_\_\_\_\_?**

In two rural counties youth painted an extensive and bleak picture of pervasive gang violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and drug dealing. They said there was nothing safe or healthy for them to do locally. This problem was compounded by their lack of transportation to other areas, and their lack of funds to afford some sports and other activities. Some had seen older siblings become addicted to drugs. Youth in one of these two areas tied what they saw as intractable drug problems, including methamphetamine labs dotting the neighborhood, to the high unemployment rate and lack of economic opportunities:

[Name of county] is like a dead-end. Because there's a lot of drug addicts, and it just tears our town way down. There's a lake. There's no beach. There's nothing for kids our age, or under 21 pretty much, or even 18. There's nothing to do. Except get in trouble. Except for turning to drugs.

A youth from the other rural county:

Just think about it. Between the ages of 13 and 17 are the biggest gang members in [name of county]. That's why statistics are so high, if you actually look at them. You always have to be a certain age to do something and these little kids don't have nothing to do so they go run amok.

Youth in a third rural area talked about the lack of jobs and stiff competition with adults when a hardware chain opened a store there. Youth in a suburban county complained about transportation, especially to the county seat from rural locations.

A young woman in a poor neighborhood in a large urban area said her aspirations rose when she transferred to a suburban high school. She talked of inadequate teachers who don't assign homework, a poor school library, dirty classrooms, and graffiti at her previous school.