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ABSTRACT

In April 1994, the U.S. Department of Labor initiated a systemwide dialogue to identify ways of improving job training and employment preparation for economically disadvantaged individuals. The dialogue process was intended to help achieve broad consensus among system partners and serve as a model of ongoing communication to ensure continuous improvement. It included the following outreach/consultation activities: small group discussions in 15 cities; 5 town hall meetings; meetings with partners and stakeholders; meetings with foundations; minialogues with low-income advocacy groups; Federal Register Notice; customer satisfaction survey; meetings with researchers and academics; review of current research, and National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC) report. The following principles identified during the dialogue were used to develop an action agenda to improve job placements and customer satisfaction: customer needs should drive program decisions; federal/state/local partnerships are essential; quality and high performance must become standards; and accountability should rest in program outcomes. The action agenda addressed the following key areas: improving training-to-work connections; meeting customers' needs; streamlining program administration; improving consumer information and customer access; strengthening program linkages; building system and staff capacity; and providing early and comprehensive youth interventions. (Appended are the following: findings from a customer satisfaction survey; advocates' agendas; NYEC findings; and selected research findings.) (MN)

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Dialogue on the Disadvantaged

Response to Stakeholders

Employment & Training Administration

June 1995

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U.S. Department of Labor

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Disadvantaged

Response to
Stakeholders

Employment & Training Administration

June 1995

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U.S. Department of Labor

Assistant Secretary for
Employment and Training
Washington, D.C. 20210



May 24, 1995

Dear Colleagues:

In less than 2,000 days, we will enter the new millennium. The 21st Century brings hope that as a nation, we will achieve even greater productivity and prosperity, and as a citizenry, we will be prepared to compete in a high-tech, global economy. The new Century workforce will need new skills, higher skills, and higher levels of education to create their own employment security in a workplace that may be less secure. It is our desire to equip all Americans to make their own way in the economy, and it is our particular duty to ensure that the economically disadvantaged are empowered to earn their way into the American dream.

We aim to accelerate the agenda of reform: streamline and consolidate the current maze of adult education and job training programs, and reform and revitalize current program design. But reform is no longer enough--we need to reinvent lifelong learning. To that end, in April 1994, the Department initiated a Dialogue on the Disadvantaged--a nationwide conversation with our customers, partners, and stakeholders to learn how to improve employment and training programs and services for disadvantaged individuals. We view this Dialogue as an opportunity for those of us entrusted with the stewardship of the Federal government to engage in our own continuous learning and continuous workforce development system improvement.

This is a Report on the first phase of the Dialogue--what we set out to do, how we did it, what we have learned thus far from the process, and what directions we are taking. What follows is an unfinished story, encompassing national, State and local level effort. At this writing, and in view of the changing environment, our actions agenda as a result of the Dialogue is still being formulated--but the direction for our actions was shaped by the honest feedback from our customers, partners, and stakeholders, and is being fine-tuned by ETA's dedicated persistent staff.

We are grateful for your candor and your commitment to excellence, and we offer the same to you as we continue to search for new and better ways to ensure that all Americans are equipped to lead productive working lives.



DOUG ROSS
Assistant Secretary
Employment and Training Administration

Executive Summary

What We Learned from the Dialogue

In April 1994, the Department of Labor initiated a system-wide dialogue to examine new directions to improve job training and employment preparation for the economically disadvantaged—directions based on customers' needs. The Dialogue was designed to help achieve broad consensus among system partners on goals, overall strategy, and next steps for improving current programs and services, and to serve as a model of ongoing communication and feedback with customers and partners to ensure continuous improvement.

To collect the information needed, the Department pursued a broad outreach and consultation process. Small group discussions, town hall meetings, reviews of studies, surveys and reports, a notice in the Federal Register inviting response to our questions and suggestions for improvement, a customer satisfaction survey, and other such methods were used to collect information.

The message we heard loud and clear is that we need a workforce skilled and prepared to compete in a high tech, global economy. Through the Dialogue, we learned that our customers, partners and stakeholders believe that these programs are essential, the system can be improved, and that in every locality, there are some model programs that provide quality, comprehensive services to disadvantaged individuals and to employers seeking a quality workforce. In short, **there is no workforce problem in America that is not being solved successfully, somewhere.**

To bring exemplary programs to scale, and to pick up the pace of reform in workforce development, we need to craft a coherent response based on national economic goals and market needs, and built upon the broadest Federal/State/local and public/private collaboration. We must discard programs that cannot meet the market test, and seek out bold and innovative approaches that dare to break the mold. We continue to distill what we heard in the dialogue process and turn it into an action agenda. We are open to fresh experimentation, and willing to take prudent risks.

Putting it simply, we are building immediately upon what we learned during the Dialogue:

Common Themes from the Dialogue

- Match Training to Employers' and Participants' Needs.
- Meet Employers' Expectations for Workplace Skills.
- Make Program Information Accessible to Employers and Program Participants.
- Provide Flexibility and Simplicity, while Ensuring Accountability for Results.
- Simplify Eligibility Determination and Unify Systems.
- Increase Availability of Supportive Services.
- Provide Comprehensive Services, including Case Management.
- Enable Participants to Demonstrate their Commitment.
- Reduce the Paperwork Burden.
- Develop Performance Measures that Reflect Results.
- Extend Program Follow-up to Improve Job Adjustment and Retention.
- Improve Connections With Schools to Better Integrate Education and Workforce Preparation.
- Improve Federal/State/local Program Coordination.
- Improve Consumer Information and Customer Access.
- Continue the Dialogue.

As a result of what we learned during the Dialogue process, the Department has developed and begun implementing an Action Agenda designed to improve the quantity and quality of job placements and increase customer satisfaction—both participant and employer—with employment and training programs and services. This Action Agenda is built around certain fundamental principles that emerged from the Dialogue:

1. Customer needs should drive program decisions
2. Federal/State/local partnerships are essential
3. Quality and high performance must become standards
4. Accountability should rest in program outcomes

Using these guiding principles, the Department has already begun implementing many of the agenda items. While some of our action plans are long-term in nature, and some will require changes in legislation, the Department has already initiated and/or is continuing specific policy, administrative, budgetary, research and demonstration, and technical assistance activities designed to improve program performance and increase customer satisfaction.

This Report summarizes the Department's Action Agenda in seven key arenas: 1) improve the training-to-work connection; 2) meet customers' needs; 3) streamline program administration; 4) improve consumer information and customer access; 5) strengthen program linkages; 6) build system and staff capacity; and 7) provide early and comprehensive youth interventions.

With the changing environment and within budget limitations, we will do what we can to implement each element of this Agenda, continuing to move in the directions suggested during the Dialogue.

DOL Dialogue on the Disadvantaged

I. How the Dialogue was Carried Out

Formulating the Strategic Questions. In initiating the Dialogue, the Department sought answers to the following questions:

1. Who are the customers?
2. What are the characteristics of a customer-driven system?
3. What types of services work best for the disadvantaged?
4. How should the system be structured?
5. How should success be measured?
6. How can we develop staff capacity for delivering quality services?
7. How can we improve the system? What action agenda is required?

Conducting Open Outreach and Consultation. To collect the kinds of information we wanted, the Department pursued a systematic process of broad outreach and consultation. Small group discussions, town hall meetings, reviews of studies, surveys and reports, a notice in the Federal Register inviting response to our questions and suggestions for improvement, customer satisfaction surveys, and other such methods were used to collect information. Following are some of the activities used to open the discussion with stakeholders across the country.

1. **Small Group Discussions in Fifteen Cities.** Around the country, small groups were convened to address questions designed to elicit information on program operation and methods to improve program quality and effectiveness. Meetings were held in St. Louis, MO; Des Moines, IA; Mt. Rogers, VA; Boston, MA; Bangor, ME; Tucson, AZ; Cleveland, OH; Chicago, IL; New York, NY; Memphis, TN; West Memphis, AR; Portland, OR; San Jose, CA; Caldwell, ID; Great Falls, MT.

The discussions resulted in a list of common themes that are presented on pages 6-7 of this Report. Groups at each site included adult and youth participants, employers, front-line staff, program managers, and policy makers. Several sites also included participants who did not complete their programs, to determine why and solicit their suggestions to make it work for them in the future.

2. **Five Town Hall Meetings Nationwide.** These Town Hall meetings—in Des Moines, IA; Boston, MA; Chicago, IL; Memphis, TN; and San Jose, CA—were convened to elicit diverse viewpoints from an entire community, as well as from our customers and partners. Again, feedback was sought on the success of current employment and training programs for the disadvantaged, and on ways to improve service.
3. **Meetings with Partners and Stakeholders.** Meetings with partners and stakeholders were held in April and August of 1994. At the first meeting, the Dialogue process was described, and active participation was solicited. The second meeting was held to advise stakeholders of the preliminary Dialogue findings and engage them in analyzing the findings and suggesting next steps.
4. **Meetings with Foundations.** A meeting was held in July 1994, with prestigious foundations which provide funding and/or services to the disadvantaged. Findings of the Dialogue were discussed as Assistant Secretary Ross posed questions to the group.
5. **Mini-Dialogues with Low-income Advocacy Groups.** In June 1994, small dialogues were conducted with representatives of advocacy groups representing low-income wage earners, and the Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs. A similar session was convened in July at the national meeting of the National Council of LaRaza. A summary of feedback from these discussion sessions is provided in the Appendix.
6. **Federal Register Notice.** On May 18, 1994, the Department published a notice in the Federal Register announcing the Dialogue and inviting public response to the Dialogue questions. More than 100 responses were received, analyzed, and considered in developing the Department's action plans.

7. **Customer Satisfaction Survey.** A survey was commissioned to ascertain customer satisfaction levels among Title II-A participants. Social Policy Research Associates conducted a survey of 2,100 adult customers. Among the 66 percent who responded, 68 percent indicated the program was very helpful or extremely helpful. A summary of survey findings is provided in the Appendix.

8. **Meetings with Researchers and Academics.** Three meetings were sponsored by the Department's Chief Economist with leading academics, researchers, program evaluators, and economists. The first meeting focused on the role of job training in improving the employment and earnings of the Disadvantaged. The second meeting examined next steps in youth demonstrations and experiments, and the third meeting focused on performance standards. A summary of key research findings is provided in the Appendix.

9. **Review of Current Research.** The Department conducted a review of currently available studies, surveys and reports about job training systems for the economically disadvantaged.

10. **National Youth Employment Coalition Report.** The Department commissioned the National Youth Employment Coalition which represents 83 national, State and local youth serving organizations, to conduct meetings and discussions nationwide to focus exclusively on issues pertaining to disadvantaged youth. The NYEC engaged a broad spectrum of youth practitioners to assist in determining the elements and criteria needed to strengthen and improve outcomes for youth, particularly out-of-school youth. Their Report, summarized in the Appendix, suggests immediate and longer term steps to improve services and program results for at-risk youth.

The following section synthesizes what we learned from all of the above Dialogue activities.

II. What We Learned

Throughout the Dialogue, there was striking consensus on what should be done to improve program efficiency and effectiveness. Following is a summary of what we learned from our customers, partners and stakeholders in these areas.

Common Themes

- **Match Training to Needs.** A better match is needed between labor market needs, individual participants' needs and training provided.
- **Meet Employer Expectations.** Employers want employees who come equipped with workplace skills and realistic workplace expectations.
- **Make Information Accessible.** Employers and program participants need easy access to accurate information on available programs and services.
- **Provide Flexibility and Accountability.** Reduce statutory and regulatory prescription, provide clear expectations about desired results, and let local programs determine how best to achieve those results.
- **Improve Eligibility Determination.** Simplify eligibility documentation and unify systems where possible.
- **Increase Supportive Services.** Ensure availability of adequate supportive services during program participation—child care, transportation, medical insurance, and housing assistance.
- **Provide Comprehensive Services.** Employ a holistic approach, including case management, and attention to the needs of the entire family.

continued...

Common Themes

continued...

- **Enable Participant Contribution.** To receive services, some participants want the opportunity to demonstrate their personal commitment to the program, i.e., to share program costs or treat costs as a loan to be repaid.
- **Reduce Paperwork.** Reduce the paperwork burden in eligibility determination, assessment and service strategies, and referrals.
- **Measure Performance.** Develop performance measures that reflect individual accomplishment, competency attainment, educational achievements, economic independence, and longer-term results.
- **Extend Program Follow-up.** Increase post-program follow-up and services, if needed after job placement, i.e., supportive services and trouble-shooting to improve adjustment and job retention.
- **Improve Connections With Schools.** Work more closely with the education system, secondary schools and elementary schools, to better integrate schooling and work preparation.
- **Improve Program Coordination.** Improve program coordination at every level, beginning with Federal agency coordination, to reduce duplication, fill program or policy gaps, and share information.
- **Improve Public Image.** Improve public information about and perceptions of the programs—nationally and locally—by ensuring that accurate and timely information is available to all who need or want services.
- **Continue the Dialogue.** Continue the dialogue consultation as next steps are implemented, sharing results and action agendas.

Perspectives from the Dialogue

As we traveled the country, and spoke to our customers—program participants and employers—we collected their views on **how the system should work**. Here is a synthesis of what is desired:

A View from the Participant's Perspective...

An individual seeking assistance comes to a convenient location or taps into an electronic system where his or her individual needs are assessed and various options and opportunities to address those needs are presented, selected, and immediately available. Supportive services help the participant to take full advantage of programs and services. Participants gain the education, work readiness, employment skills, and lifelong learning skills needed to secure quality jobs with career potential. Self-sufficient and self-assured, the participant supports his or her own family, and becomes a contributing member of the community, helping others do the same.

A View from the Employer's Perspective...

Prospective employees come to the workplace equipped with the skills, knowledge, and experience needed to be fully productive and promotable. They are able to adapt as market needs, technology or other factors change. They take responsibility for their own growth and development, and help employers meet their bottom line, knowing that this builds greater security for the participants and for the company. Employers' training investments are geared to their industry's own standards, and produce substantial and documentable bottom line returns. As a consequence, their human resource investments are the single best investment they make. The people they employ thus become assets which appreciate in value, rather than costs to be cut.

III. The Department's Action Agenda

Introduction. The Action Agenda outlined on the following pages is built around what we heard throughout the Dialogue process, and is based upon what we know works. Our plans include fast-track action plans that are already underway, and longer term activities to try to bring about systemic change. With the changing environment, we will do what we can, continuing to move in the directions suggested during the Dialogue.

Goals of this Action Agenda. This Action Agenda is based on the understanding that technological advances, global competition, shifting markets, and structural changes in the workplace have created a different environment, requiring more highly educated, highly skilled workers. Now, more than ever, the disadvantaged must compete in the market place with workers displaced through corporate realignments, restructuring and re-engineering. These factors, in turn, are having a significant impact on the way we need to respond at the Federal level.

This Action Agenda is designed to improve the quantity and quality of job placements and increase customer satisfaction—both participants' and employers'—with employment and training programs and services. To accomplish these goals, the specific actions described in the following pages focus on:

- 1) Improving the training-to-work connection;
- 2) Meeting customers' needs;
- 3) Providing flexibility, simplicity and accountability;
- 4) Improving consumer information and customer access;
- 5) Strengthening program coordination and collaboration;
- 6) Building system and staff capacity for continuous program improvement; and
- 7) Providing early and comprehensive youth interventions.

Principles Guiding the Development of Our Action Agenda. To accomplish the above goals, certain principles guided the development of the Department's plans:

1. **Customer Needs Should Drive Program Decisions.** The needs of the disadvantaged should be the basis for the services and activities provided through the employment and

training system. The best place for deciding upon the needs of disadvantaged clients is most often at the level closest to the customers. Thus, the Department will act to remove barriers, such as statutory and regulatory provisions, which do not add immediate value to this level of customer decisionmaking.

2. **Federal/State/Local Partnerships Are Essential.** One barrier to program success has been the lack of consistent coordination and partnership across Federal agencies, and among levels of government—Federal, State, and local. The Employment and Training Administration (ETA) is committed to establish meaningful partnerships with other Federal agencies that share responsibility for workforce preparedness and development. ETA is also strengthening partnerships with State and local entities committed to high-quality customer service.
3. **Quality and High Performance Must Become Standards.** The success and quality of training and employment programs depend upon well-prepared training and employment professionals and readily available information on the most effective program strategies and models. ETA will provide maximum support toward both of these ends by undertaking activities that will contribute to the highest level of professional staff capacity, and through continuous efforts to identify and promote the most efficient and effective program techniques.
4. **Accountability Should Rest in Program Outcomes.** It is appropriate for the Federal partner, in consultation with States and localities, to set an outcomes-based framework for determining success in Federally-funded programs. ETA will focus its efforts to ensure that such outcome measures (rather than input measures) become the ultimate basis for evaluating program effectiveness.

Elements of Our Action Agenda Already Underway. While many of our action plans are long-term in nature, and some may require changes in legislation, the Department has already initiated and implemented Dialogue-related activities designed to improve program performance and increase customer satisfaction. Among the activities currently underway are the following:

- With close links to the Enterprise Council, the "**Simply Better**" initiative is designed to **help local employment and training agencies improve services to their customers.** Among the products being developed by the team composed of Federal, State, and local

program staff are a Self-Assessment Guide for use by local program managers, a guide to developing and interpreting customer satisfaction surveys, a Return on Investment primer, and an Operations Manual for continuous improvement and Total Quality Management techniques.

- Significant progress has been made by the interagency task force that is crafting **common definitions for program eligibility** for the broad range of employment and training programs.
- Work continues on **computerized tutorials of the JTPA technical assistance guides**. The **first tutorial** on Eligibility Determination has been **completed and distributed**; tutorials on case management and assessment are under development.
- The **Capacity Building Panel of Experts**, which crosses program lines and includes representatives from Federal and State agencies, Public Interest Groups, Community Based Organizations, and program operators, has been established and is **providing guidance and direction on implementation of the ETA capacity-building strategy**. Funding has been secured to continue the Panel for an additional year.
- **Focus groups have been held** in several States to establish a baseline for our review of the sources of the **paperwork burden** connected with the administration of employment and training programs. The National Governors' Association is responsible for the review.
- As part of our effort to **improve our public information effort**, **ETA sponsored a well-received marketing seminar** prior to the recent National Association of Workforce Development Professionals conference. Additional seminars are contemplated as part of the Targeting, Outreach, and Referral project headed up by Region X.
- The replication of the **successful Comprehensive Employment Training (CET) model—a highly structured training design incorporating contextual learning principles—has been funded and is underway**. CET staff are currently working with five local programs to implement the CET program structure.

- The major portion of the **project validating the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) needed by front-line staff has been completed**; the next step in the process is the development of curricula and standards for employment and training professionals.

- The **Oregon Option project**, a prime example of **inter-agency and federal-state collaboration**, is close to initiating a "**performance partnership**" that will introduce new and better ways of using program outcome measures as program management tools.

As a result of the Dialogue, Workgroups have been formed within the Employment and Training Administration to develop detailed action plans and begin to implement these plans. Following is a brief summary, providing highlights of the Department's action agenda:

Agenda: Improve the Training-to-Work Connection

Dialogue Findings. Training is most effective when it is designed to meet customers' needs, provided within a context that simulates a work environment, customized to an employer, a job or a worksite, and matched to subsequent employment. **Participants** want training that provides exposure to real work and they want to know what career opportunities are available in different occupational areas.

Employers indicated that employment and training programs must do a better job of preparing participants for the workplace. They consistently stated their preference for people who come to work equipped with the basic skills and a strong work ethic, and indicated that **they** would provide specific job skills training on the job.

Program participants and employers asked for longer-term training, more comprehensive strategies, and extended follow-up after placement to help ensure participant success. For all participants, better outcome measures are needed.

DOL Actions:

- **Improve services to participants and employers** by identifying, documenting, disseminating and replicating model programs. Models include effective employer and work-based training; on-the-job training; internships; entry employment experience; customized training; and advanced career training.

The Department is moving forward in providing resources and assistance to school-to-work initiatives at the State and local level nationwide. **By July 1, 1996**, programs for unemployed youth, targeted to improve "training-to-work" strategies (i.e., work-based training opportunities, training that simulates working conditions, increased employer involvement in training design development), will be ready for implementation by local programs. Funding for these programs will be made available through a simplified, competitive process designed to reward programs with innovative ideas and demonstrated commitment to customer satisfaction.

Agenda: Improve the Training-to-Work Connection

- **Improve the connection to training** by improving labor market information and connecting training to labor market needs. Activities include enhancing employer involvement in identifying training needs, linking employers offering high-skill, high-wage jobs, and developing training models and resources that incorporate basic workplace skills. A major ETA initiative is committed to implementing a state-of-the-art electronic system—America's Labor Market Information System (ALMIS)—which soon will be available nationwide.
- **Improve performance standards**, designing measures which reflect program quality and results, such as 1) services to those most in need; 2) quality of training; 3) training-completion ratio; 4) ratio of training related placements; 5) program retention; 6) wage gains; 7) fund utilization; 8) linkages/ coordination; and other results-oriented measures. Work has begun to initiate a pilot project designed to identify and measure program results or outputs rather than inputs.

Agenda: Meet Customers' Needs

Dialogue Findings. For both participants and employers, we must ensure service quality. For participants, this means keeping the bureaucratic requirements to a minimum, assessing their needs and interests, and matching education, training, and supportive services to their needs, rather than matching people to available training slots. It also means providing the intensity and duration of service and supportive services necessary to help them gain employability skills and become employed—no more, no less. We heard many complaints that eligibility determination was cumbersome and redundant, and that program "process" requirements often take precedence over participants' needs. This validated that we have "missed the mark" in making our workforce development system truly responsive to and driven by customers' needs.

Employers need assurance that individuals trained in the public system and placed into their jobs are as good as or better than those they find elsewhere. We need to measure employer satisfaction and develop appropriate mechanisms to respond to employer feedback.

DOL Actions:

■ **Provide incentives and flexibility for local programs to meet customers' needs.**

Amend program regulations to increase the availability of financial assistance, child care services, transportation services, follow-up services, and employer support for participants. Encourage service providers to use a holistic approach and promote strategies that involve family members.

By September 1, 1995, the Department will develop a systematic series of actions to provide local program operators with information about and incentives to provide additional child care, transportation, follow-up services, and employer support—helping them develop creative solutions to better meet the employment and training needs of customers.

- **Measure—and improve—customer satisfaction.** As part of the Dialogue process, the Department conducted a customer satisfaction survey for JTPA Title II-A participants. To further measure and improve customer satisfaction, the Department will conduct a national

Agenda: Meet Customers' Needs

youth customer satisfaction survey, and an employer satisfaction survey. The Department will use these findings to help improve programs and services on a continuous basis, and will provide technical assistance and capacity building to promote replication of programs with high levels of customer satisfaction.

By January 1, 1996, the Department will complete the youth customer satisfaction survey, and by **February 1, 1996**, the Department will complete the employer satisfaction survey. Results of these surveys will help guide and refine the Department's action agenda.

Agenda: Provide Flexibility, Simplicity and Accountability

Dialogue Findings. One consistent theme heard throughout the Dialogue was the considerable burden in documenting eligibility for participation. Program participants and staff cited the lack of coordination among various Federal programs and agencies in setting eligibility criteria, determining program eligibility, and handling paperwork. In some instances, Federal, State, or local requirements seemed too rigid, placing a higher priority on program rules and regulations than on individual participants' needs.

Where possible, we must reduce regulatory and statutory prescription to allow more program flexibility, reduce and simplify paperwork, improve incentives for exemplary performance, and focus on results rather than on the process. However, we must balance simplicity and flexibility with accountability, giving appropriate latitude to State and local organizations while guarding against misfeasance or malfeasance on behalf of the taxpayers.

DOL Actions. In accordance with our current efforts to re-invent government and make it more customer responsive and less bureaucratic, we are pursuing actions within our agency and across Federal agencies to ease the administrative burden. Through incentives and other administrative means, the Department will work to:

- **Streamline the participant application process.** To simplify eligibility determinations for individuals needing employment and training services, the Department is exploring solutions developed by one-stop centers and other government reinvention efforts. These streamlining efforts can help achieve economies of scale, improve sharing and coordination among programs, increase returns on investments, and increase customer satisfaction.

By October 1, 1995, ETA will announce its strategy to accomplish the goals of establishing common eligibility definitions for all employment and training programs and rescinding the restrictive cost-categories that now burden program administrators. This strategy will include simplification efforts currently underway, as well as initiation of additional efforts as conditions warrant.

Agenda: Provide Flexibility, Simplicity and Accountability

- **Reduce regulatory and statutory restrictions.** The Department is working with other agencies to address interagency common core definitions, create a new definition of poverty, and explore whether the changes sought must be made through legislation, regulation, or administratively. The Department is also exploring immediate administrative solutions which provide greater flexibility to the States.

By January 1, 1996, a new tool kit will be developed in partnership with the employment and training system. This tool kit will promote new and effective kinds of performance measures—measures which form the basis for "performance partnerships" that will empower program managers to focus on quality and results rather than process and procedural requirements. The "performance partnerships" will be based on the groundbreaking work of the Oregon Option and other performance-based models being developed in the system.

- **Reduce paperwork.** The Department is reviewing the system's paperwork requirements to identify problem areas and recommend specific solutions. This review, being conducted by the National Governors' Association (NGA) is designed to ascertain the locus of responsibility for establishing paperwork requirements and to examine possible steps to alleviate the burden. Our reinvented federal role is to de-emphasize control and inspection and focus instead upon 1) providing information, 2) providing resources, 3) identifying and certifying experts for use by system builders, 4) providing opportunities for State and local choice, and 5) eliminating unnecessary workload and burdens for grantees, allowing them to focus on solving problems and improving customer service. We will establish an interagency task force to make recommendations based on the NGA findings.

By July 1, 1996, the Department will implement the recommendations emerging from the National Governors' Association (NGA) study of the paperwork burden within the JTPA system.

Agenda: Improve Consumer Information and Customer Access

Dialogue Findings. We need to make it easier and more efficient for our customers—prospective program participants, and their prospective employers—to get the information they need about programs and services, so that they can make informed decisions and take advantage of those options and opportunities best suited to their needs.

We need to improve public information about available programs and services, improve employer access to information, ensure timely and accurate information about options and opportunities, and increase our capacity to communicate about effective program models. We will design new and different approaches to sharing public information about our programs, using appropriate technologies and systems.

We will take some lessons from the private sector—how they identify their target audience, how they target their messages, how they package their products for their customers, how they promote public confidence, and how they capture and sustain customer interest.

DOL Actions:

- **Improve prospective participant and employer access to information about available programs and services.** The Department aims to ensure that all customers—individuals needing service, and employers needing competent workers—have access to accurate and timely information about available programs and services. To do this, the Department will improve its communications systems using our established network of partners, stakeholders, and service providers.

The Department will conduct outreach through electronic, print, and broadcast communications to work toward continuous program improvement and upgraded services. The Department will use its Clearinghouse and its system-wide communications network to spread the word about available programs and services, and to increase communication about success stories in local communities.

Agenda: Improve Consumer Information and Customer Access

The Department plans to develop a customer-oriented communications plan, and will begin to develop communications products suitable for national, State, and local distribution. A communications campaign implementing the plan will begin in the **Fall of 1995**. In **Winter, 1995-96**, when we have the results of the customer satisfaction surveys of employers and of youth participants, these results will be built into our overall communications plans. In **1996-97**, the Department will follow up with a sample survey to determine the effectiveness of our response to the needs identified. Results of this research will also be used to refine our plans and activities.

Agenda: Strengthen Program Coordination and Collaboration

Dialogue Findings. There is great interest in promoting cooperation and collaboration among Federal, State and local programs and agencies with common workforce development goals and objectives. We must improve linkages across different agencies, at different levels, and among different sectors, including schools. Many statutes, including JTPA, require coordination, and many governance or oversight bodies—Private Industry Councils, State Job Training Coordinating Councils, Human Resource Investment Councils, State Councils on Vocational Education, and others—have coordination responsibilities.

Within our own workforce development programs, the Department must work to build a more coherent system, with systematic coordination and collaboration across programs, sharing information about exemplary programs and best practices.

To ensure that we reach out to our customers where they are, we need to work closely with community based organizations (CBOs). As part of our "supplier network" helping the most severely disadvantaged become economically self-sufficient, contributing citizens, CBOs need access to the Department's capacity building and technical assistance.

DOL Actions:

- **Strengthen interagency linkages and promote interagency coordination.** The Department will continue our work with the interagency team focusing on common definitions and other program eligibility issues—setting common criteria, sharing common forms, accepting others agencies' determinations, and reducing redundancy among systems, thus improving program coordination and customer service.

By September 1, 1995, ETA will convene a National Interagency Coordination Team, consisting of representatives of federal agencies involved in employment and training, which will work to improve the coordination of programs, strengthen program linkages and reduce duplication of effort and conflicting program policies.

Agenda: Strengthen Program Coordination and Collaboration

- **Improve program coordination across agencies, levels, and sectors.** The Department is working on an ongoing basis to improve coordination among our own programs—School-to-Work, One Stop Career Centers, Skill Standards, the work of the Enterprise Council, and others. We are reviewing options for program consolidation, including vouchers, skill scholarships, and other alternatives.
- **Continue the dialogue process.** To ensure broad-based coordination and collaboration, the Department will continue its outreach and conversations with diverse constituencies, including our supplier network, community-based organizations, public interest groups, partner associations, and other stakeholders. This will ensure that we remain close to our customers, partners and stakeholders, and responsive to their needs.

By August 1, 1995, ETA will announce plans for continuing the Dialogue.

Agenda: Build System and Staff Capacity

Dialogue Findings. Customer feedback about their needs and how we can best meet those needs forms the foundation for the Department's efforts to build system and staff capacity. To enhance the system's capacity to serve customers' needs, we need to ensure continuous growth and development of staff. And the best way to build staff capacity is to create a learning network through which staff learn from each other, take responsibility for their own skill development, keep current on research and best practice, and have opportunities for greater exposure to innovative and new approaches through direct experience, colloquia and seminars, and through technology, including on-line computer networks. Best practice and model programs must be collected, validated, disseminated, and replicated.

We must accelerate our efforts to build Federal, regional, State and local system and staff capacity using contemporary technology and techniques, making information available through print and electronic means. We need to foster staff exchanges, internships, peer-to-peer networking, and other such activities.

We need to take lessons from the private sector, studying how they build capacity within their own organizations and their vendor networks, how they leverage their investments, and how they measure the effectiveness of their training. We must work to ensure that staff in our system are connected into our own clearinghouses and electronic data bases and those of other social service systems. This represents a significant investment in technical assistance and capacity building.

DOL Actions. To accelerate our efforts to build capacity and improve customer service throughout the system, the Department will:

- **Continue to consult with the Capacity-Building Panel of Experts**, representing all levels and sectors of the employment and training community. This panel provides guidance on the direction and implementation of the Department's Capacity-Building strategy.

Agenda: Build System and Staff Capacity

- **Make technical assistance and training resources available to the entire employment and training system**, focusing on enhancing the ability of the system to improve services to all customers—participants and employers—while adapting to the changes in program structure now being implemented.

By November 1, 1995, resources aimed at helping local programs develop accessible, state-of-the-art training capabilities to improve the effectiveness of front line staff will be in place. Funded by ETA, these technical assistance initiatives will be organized by local and State training providers now most active in running such programs.

Identify and validate promising training models. Catalog programs for participants and for front-line program staff that incorporate concepts rooted in work-based and/or contextual learning principles. The ETA clearinghouse will be expanded to provide information on program models and best practices designed to improve program performance.

Promote the successful concepts and provide technical assistance to the system on replicating the innovations demonstrated by the ETA capacity-building challenge grantees. Examples of the projects are a labor market information training system, distance learning models, training curricula adapted to meet the needs of consolidated programs and the introduction of One-Stop configurations, and improved methods for designing programs to increase customer satisfaction.

Provide support for the development of local training capability for front-line staff.

An August 1995 conference will inaugurate the project, featuring a coordinated system of "peer-to-peer" technical assistance provided by those States, organizations and individuals now delivering quality front-line staff training.

Agenda: Build System and Staff Capacity

- **Establish a capacity-building electronic service center**, to link the employment and training community, to provide timely access to information, share best practices, and improve program performance.

By October 1, 1995, the Capacity-Building Electronic Service Center will be inaugurated, which will link all partners in the employment and training system, providing convenient access to best practices, up-to-date information, and innovative training courses and learning modules.

Agenda: Provide Early and Comprehensive Youth Interventions

Dialogue Findings. Evidence suggests that additional years of schooling have high payoff for disadvantaged youth and that young people learn better and retain more when they learn in context. Thus, programs for youth, whether they serve high school dropouts or young people preparing for continuing education beyond high school, must increase their educational levels. Services must be of sufficient intensity and duration that they address the "age- and stage-appropriate" needs of youth.

The Department's strategy seeks to integrate school curricula and classroom teaching with real work experience, to decrease dropout rates for disadvantaged youth seriously at risk of leaving school, and retrieve and enroll school dropouts into alternative work-based learning programs.

DOL Actions. The Department has developed a strategy for transforming youth programs (JTPA Title II-B and Title II-C) into high quality education and training programs emphasizing work-based learning and ensuring closer ties to employers to guarantee greater training validity. This strategy supports the national education goals as set forth in Goals 2000 and the School-to-Work Opportunities Act. To that end, the Department will:

- **Replicate the Center for Employment Training (CET) model.** Ten CET sites are already operating, and additional sites are being provided technical assistance. Evaluation of replication sites is scheduled to begin in the **Fall of 1995**.
- **Expand work-based learning and school-to-work systems.** The Department will re-direct funding for non-college bound youth initiatives, and enhance dropout prevention programs through the expanded use of work-based learning.
- **Identify and replicate successful youth training programs.** The Department will identify programs that develop youths' employment potential, as opposed to simply providing traditional social services, identify model criteria, and disseminate best practice models to each State and substate area.

Agenda: Provide Early and Comprehensive Youth Interventions

- **Create a promising and effective program network for youth.** The Department will work in concert with a National Working Group to design a "promising and effective" programs network (PEPNET) for youth. The purpose of the Network will be to recognize programs that have made significant differences for youth, to identify programs that meet or exceed established standards of excellence, to provide models for replication by service providers, to serve as a vehicle for sharing knowledge among program operators, and to expand the network as programs meet the criteria for excellence.
- **Replicate and evaluate the Quantum Opportunities Program (QOP).** The Department will fund a replication and evaluation of the Quantum Opportunities Program, a multi-site, multi-year youth development demonstration that provides education (computer-assisted instruction, peer tutoring, and homework assistance), developmental activities (life and family skills training, and planning for college and jobs), and service activities (performing community service, helping with public events, and holding regular jobs) for disadvantaged youth. The grant announcement was published on April 9, 1995, and the demonstration is scheduled to begin in the **Fall of 1995**.

IV. Conclusion

One year ago we began this nationwide conversation with our customers, partners and stakeholders to learn how to improve employment and training programs and services for disadvantaged individuals. We learned a lot from everyone who participated—practitioners, program participants, and policymakers alike—and we owe each and every individual and organization who worked with us a debt of thanks. Through you, we have gained a deeper understanding of the issues and constraints that people in the field face on a daily basis. You have helped us to define our vision and refine our agenda. We know that, given the realities of the current environment and budget limitations, we will not be able to act upon every recommendation, and we know that the Department alone cannot resolve some of the issues which require broad, collaborative attention at the Federal level.

The Department continues its commitment to lift the skill levels, incomes and prospects for all American workers, and particularly those who are economically disadvantaged. Beyond issues of partisanship and politics, we are charged with this mission, and dedicated to carrying it out in partnership with our customers—program participants, employers, concerned citizens and community leaders.

We face some uphill battles, and we will need to build consensus and seek cooperation as we chart the future for our economy and for the American workforce. We will continue to seek solutions to the labor market problems faced by new entrants into the labor force, the skill development needed for employed workers, and the retraining and reemployment of workers displaced by economic or technological changes.

We have begun to make changes—some evolutionary and some revolutionary—as we seek to re-think how we do business, and improve the quality of our programs. Effectiveness will be the "prism" through which we will examine our policies and programs. The very best programs in the nation will be the standard toward which we aim. And, in the process of reinventing our policies and re-designing our programs, we will seek to provide the flexibility desired along with the accountability required. The framework for our efforts will be the desire to meet customers' needs. In such a framework, the Federal role will shift from providing prescriptive regulatory guidance to finding and sharing important program principles, best practices, and other information that serves as a basis for an effective and continuously improving workforce development system.

Acknowledgments

The United States Department of Labor wishes to extend our particular thanks to the hundreds and thousands of our customers, partners and stakeholders who took the time and the trouble to provide their good counsel to us in a spirit of constructive and continuous improvement. Without their efforts at the national, State, and local level, the Dialogues would never have been possible. Because of their efforts, we are inspired and encouraged to continue to seek new and better ways to serve the economically disadvantaged, and enable them to become self-sufficient and self-fulfilled.

The Department extends its gratitude to the many organizations that helped sponsor and/or implement Dialogue related activities, including the National Youth Employment Coalition; Technical Assistance and Training Corporation; Jobs, Education, Employment & Training Working Group, National Immigration Law Center, and National Employment Law Project; Social Policy Research Associates; numerous Foundations; SDAs throughout the country; and Department of Labor Regional Offices.

DOL Dialogue FAX Back 202•219•7190

The Department of Labor wishes to continue our nationwide conversation begun during the Dialogue process. We welcome your ideas, suggestions, and comments.

We'd like to hear from you!

Please place me on your mailing list. I'd like to continue to learn about the Department's action agenda in response to the Dialogue.

I'd like to share my thoughts about this Report:

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I'd just like to say:

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Name:

Title:

Organization:

Address:

City, State, Zip:

Telephone:

FAX:

If you experience difficulty sending this fax, please call (202) 219-5229. Thanks!

Appendix

Selected Findings from the Dialogue

Employment & Training Administration

Appendix—Selected Findings from the Dialogue

Selected Findings from a JTPA Title II-A Program Customer Satisfaction Survey

Following are highlights from a survey of 2,100 JTPA Title II-A participant customers:

Overall Satisfaction

- Two-thirds of customers rated the program as extremely or quite helpful. Although the program was highly rated, there is still room for improvement.
- About 80 percent of customers agreed that the services they received were well coordinated.
- Occupational training, either in the classroom or on the job, is the most highly valued service provided by JTPA.
- The level of satisfaction varies substantially with the type and intensity of training received. Those receiving job skills training were most satisfied with the program. Those receiving on-the-job or basic skills training were less satisfied, while those receiving no training were least satisfied.
- Among those employed customers who used the skills learned in training a great deal, fully 95 percent rated the program as extremely or quite helpful.

Ways that Customer Satisfaction can be Increased

- Increase the comprehensiveness of up-front and case management services.
- Increase the focus on job skills training and increase its intensity.
- Place participants in jobs where they use the skills learned in training.

Appendix—Selected Findings from the Dialogue

Synopsis of An Advocates' Agenda for Reform of Title II-A

The Department invited a broad spectrum of advocacy organizations to participate in the dialogue, and to provide their recommendations about how to improve accountability, economic self-sufficiency, access, and coordination. Following are some highlights excerpted from the recommendations offered:

Accountability

- Adopt performance standards which take into account family size, age of children, local area costs for housing, child care, food, healthcare, and community wage indices.
- Set a wage level floor or minimum standards for family self-sufficiency so that no individuals are worse off in employment than they would be if they were on welfare.
- Enforce broad public access and involvement in local level planning, including labor, community-based organizations, and disadvantaged populations.

Economic Self-Sufficiency

- Fund programs that are future oriented, flexible, adaptable to an individual's needs, and directly related to the kinds of jobs available in the local labor market.
- Withhold credit for job placements where jobs do not lift training participants out of poverty.

Access

- Use bi-lingual outreach workers, produce multi-lingual outreach materials, and enable immigrants with lower reading and mathematics skills to enter JTPA programs.
- Incorporate a definition of "family of one" for displaced homemakers (exempt spousal income), ensure supportive services and pre-vocational preparation activities for participants.
- Re-design the participant eligibility form to facilitate access by limited-English speaking participants, and explore technology to widen access.

Coordination

- Review HUD initiatives, empowerment zone and enterprise community plans to identify opportunities for innovative linkages with JTPA programs.
- Explore waivers of JTPA regulations to enable greater collaboration across Federally funded programs.

Appendix—Selected Findings from the Dialogue

NYEC's Principal Findings on How We Can Better Serve At-Risk Youth

The National Youth Employment Coalition calls for a national re-thinking of how we plan, implement, and measure efforts to develop young people in our country, and offers the following findings and suggestions:

Finding #1: Quick Fixes are Ineffective. Evaluations have only confirmed what our Coalition members already knew from direct experience—that short-term, single focus programs are usually largely ineffective for youth at risk.

What We Need: Long-term Coherent Youth Development Services. Our nation needs coherent youth development policies and programs which incorporate positive youth development principles and strategies that support them.

Finding #2: Current Quality Assurance Mechanisms Are Inadequate. The current mechanisms for and investments in quality assurance, including measurement tools, management tools, and staff development supports, are inadequate.

What We Need: High Standards, Outcome Measures, and Professional Development. Our nation needs goals, standards, and outcome measures for youth development that are commensurate with what we are trying to achieve. Likewise, we need professional development that builds capacity to more effectively serve youth most at-risk.

Finding #3: Youth Program Governance is Fragmented. Rearranging the existing organizational boxes within a particular Federal agency will not provide the type of cross-cutting, integrated Federal, State, and local governance structure needed to radically improve the quality of services we provide to young people.

What We Need: A National System for Youth Program Planning and Accountability. Our nation needs a national system or infrastructure that fortifies the Federal, State, local, public and private collaborations on behalf of youth.

Finding #4: There are Only Islands of Excellence in a Sea of Mediocrity. While there are many individual programs that work and professionals who succeed, we have not managed to transfer expertise, transmit knowledge and replicate success at the scale or pace that is needed.

What We Need: Bridges to Connect Best Practices. Our nation needs to invest in replication of best practices and adaptation of successful program models, experimentation with incentives, cross-fertilization with other youth serving fields, and other strategies that build capacity and expand effective programs for youth most-in-need.

Finding #5: Administrivia Gets In The Way. The paperwork involved in administering the programs—extensive and redundant documentation, lack of common definitions across programs for elements as fundamental as eligibility determination—creates a bureaucratic bog.

What We Need: A Seamless, Simplified Management Information System. Our nation needs a computerized management information system that is coordinated, streamlined, accessible and portable across programs and agencies—from eligibility to intake to case management through follow-up.

Appendix—Selected Findings from the Dialogue

Selected Research Findings on At-Risk Youth

What Researchers Found

- There is a high correlation between teen parents and dropouts and prison populations. Eighty percent of prison inmates were school dropouts, and only 20 percent had jobs when they committed the crimes for which they were incarcerated.
- By almost any set of measures, the economic and social well-being of disadvantaged American youths and young adults—those with limited education or skills, from poor families and impoverished neighborhoods, and from minority backgrounds—deteriorated substantially over the last two decades. In the early 1990's, the real hourly pay of recent male high school graduates was more than 20 percent below that of their counterparts twenty years earlier.
- Increasingly, disadvantaged young men and women are idle—not in school, not working, and not looking for work. Roughly 50 percent of out-of-school American youth (16 to 24 years old) without a high school degree are currently not employed. The non-employment rate for 20 to 24 year old non-white males increased from 22 percent in 1964 to 42 percent in 1992.
- On average, the public spends roughly \$5,000 educating a youth who drops out of school, compared to \$25,000 educating a youth who graduates from college.
- Currently, inner-city, predominantly minority high schools have dropout rates of around 50 percent. Predominantly Hispanic high schools in Chicago have dropout rates as high as 70 percent.
- Peer pressure is an important indicator of job success. Researchers find that young people are sensitive to status among their peers, and how their jobs and treatment on the job is viewed by their peers. There is a disconnect for minority youth between street values and work values.
- Early and comprehensive intervention is important. Comprehensive services and perhaps two or three years of follow-up may be required to get a person on the right track.

What These Findings Mean

- More resources devoted up front to human capital development would save much money in the long term on social welfare and criminal justice costs.
- Dropout prevention and college-bound efforts are important.
- Early and comprehensive interventions are needed.
- Resources should be concentrated where poverty is most severe and persistent.