
Chapter 8: Lessons Learned

As one of the first comprehensive, community-based prevention programs, Title V offered a unique opportunity for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and others in the field of prevention to observe as hundreds of communities nationwide attempted to translate theory into practice. In the early years of Title V, and still to some extent today, representatives from potential Title V communities had to learn the risk- and protection-focused delinquency prevention model, a model with which most were wholly unfamiliar. However, the challenge did not stop with learning the model. Once communities were familiar with the model, community representatives then had to discern how to implement it within the context of their own unique circumstances. Some communities struggled and some failed, but others negotiated the Title V model successfully, reaping its benefits at the local level with increased collaboration, reduced duplication in services, and better prevention programming. Along the way, as more and more communities applied for Title V funding, these different scenarios provided OJJDP with learning opportunities, including the opportunity to identify the conditions under which communities could negotiate the Title V model successfully and those under which they could not.

This chapter examines issues related to the program model and its evaluation. These issues stem not just from the experiences of the national evaluation communities, although their experiences contributed immensely, but also from the experiences of the national evaluation team, OJJDP program and administrative staff, and the technical assistance providers who have interacted and worked with hundreds of Title V communities nationwide. The discussion also includes lessons learned through the implementation of the national evaluation. Some lessons are common to any comprehensive, community-based initiative; others are more specific to the Title V experience. These lessons can be used to refine the Title V program model, inform future prevention initiatives, and add to the growing body of research on “what works” in comprehensive, community-based prevention planning.¹

Program-Related Issues

The Title V risk- and protection-focused approach to delinquency prevention was based on persuasive evidence from early communitywide efforts in the health field showing that a risk reduction and protection enhancement approach to preventing unhealthy behaviors is effective. Early studies demonstrated the effectiveness of comprehensive, communitywide programs in reducing risks for heart and lung disease by persuading people to change their behaviors in such areas as diet, exercise, and smoking. As researchers increased their understanding of the risk factors associated with juvenile delinquency, attempts were made to generalize the risk- and protection-focused approach to delinquency prevention to see if it might be as effective in reducing juvenile delinquency as it was in reducing heart and lung disease.

¹In 2000, OJJDP hired a new training and technical assistance provider, Developmental Services Group (DSG). One of their first major tasks was to revise the Title V training curriculum. The new curriculum, in presenting a more balanced and integrated approach to prevention planning than the previous curriculum, addresses many of the issues outlined here. Although some communities continue to struggle to implement local prevention efforts under Title V, the new and vastly improved training curriculum (and related materials and tools) has assisted many communities nationwide to achieve success in implementation. Improvements to Title V training and technical assistance are described in greater detail below (see OJJDP’s Response to Emerging Issues).

In the early 1990s, rising levels of serious adolescent crime and victimization underscored the compelling needs of families and communities for a comprehensive approach to address juvenile crime and delinquency. In response, OJJDP developed the Comprehensive Plan for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders, of which Title V would be the prevention component. OJJDP selected a risk- and protection-focused approach as its delinquency prevention model because of its strong empirical basis and systematic approach to community-based, collaborative assessment and planning. In 1994, when it was introduced nationwide, the Title V program embodied the key elements of what was known to be effective in prevention. In addition, as one of the first comprehensive, community-based prevention initiatives designed to address delinquency using a risk- and protection-focused framework, it was not clear early on if, or under what conditions, communities could embrace and implement such a model.

To assess the impact of the Title V model, in early 1995 OJJDP awarded Caliber Associates a contract to conduct a process and outcome evaluation of the Title V program model. Over time, the evaluation provided OJJDP with numerous opportunities to learn from the experiences of Title V communities as they negotiated the implementation of the Title V model—experiences that were mostly unanticipated, but that were used to refine the model and shape training and technical assistance activities. From these experiences, several issues regarding the implementation of the Title V program model emerged, including:

- ❖ Title V means different things to different communities.
- ❖ Scope plays a role in success.
- ❖ Comprehensive, community-based prevention planning can be difficult to understand and implement.

Each of these program-related issues is discussed in the following paragraphs.

Title V Means Different Things to Different Communities

Because the Title V model is built on four key stages required of all subgrantees, it was expected that in its implementation, Title V would have more similarities than differences across communities. Generally, all communities implement each of the four stages to a greater or lesser extent. It is the manner in which they implement each stage, however, that differs across communities. These differences can often be attributed to a community's previous exposure to comprehensive prevention planning when it is introduced to Title V and its unique prevention needs. For communities like Norfolk and Valentine, NE, Title V was their first introduction to community-based, data-driven prevention planning. In these communities, Title V was the force that drove the communities to develop prevention policy boards, conduct risk and resource assessments, and write 3-year delinquency prevention plans. Having no previous exposure to this type of model, these two communities were mobilized by the opportunities Title V presented. In Waynesboro and Hanover, VA, however, Title V meant something very different. Having been engaged in other comprehensive planning initiatives before their introduction to Title V, these communities had long ago mobilized around some other federally or state-funded prevention effort. To them, Title V was nothing more than a funding vehicle to implement

activities to fill a local service gap; however, this did not diminish Title V’s contribution to their local prevention efforts. Both sets of communities were equally appreciative of the opportunities the Title V grant afforded them. It is simply that these opportunities, and Title V’s influence on them, were defined in relation to each community’s starting point.

The implementation of Title V-funded prevention strategies also looked different across communities. Based on locally driven risk and resource assessments, communities selected strategies to meet their needs. For some communities, like West Ottawa, MI, and Windsor, VT, this meant communitywide system change efforts. For other communities, such as Hanover and Waynesboro, VA, and Kaneohe, HI, it meant implementation of one or more specific prevention programs. Although various interpretations of a single model may appear to some as a shortcoming, the flexibility of the Title V model was seen early on to be one of its greatest strengths—a strength that is evident in the national evaluation communities’ ability to adapt the model to effectively meet their own unique circumstances.

The Role That Scope Plays in Success

It is not enough for communities’ prevention plans to be comprehensive. These plans must also be reasonable enough that implementation is possible. The experiences of the national evaluation communities have shown that a reasonable plan generally means communities are trying to affect no more than three risk factors and are implementing no more than two or three prevention strategies. Communities that attempted to implement plans that were too ambitious, such as in Kaneohe, HI, Middlebury, VT, and the two Pennsylvania communities, experienced only partial success in implementation. Because of the lack of focus that often accompanies overambitious efforts, these communities also tended to have plans that were always evolving and had more difficulty with sustainability than communities that had more manageable plans. Sustaining an initiative can be challenging enough when there are only a few programs to institutionalize. Attempting to institutionalize multiple strategies, some of which are not fully implemented, requires effort and resources over and above what would be required to institutionalize one or two programs or strategies.

Understanding and Implementing the Title V Model

Many stakeholders across communities talked about having to lay extensive groundwork before community and agency representatives could really understand and embrace the Title V model. Even in communities that had participated in OJJDP-sponsored Title V training, making the transition from theory to practice was sometimes difficult. For example, community representatives in several of the national evaluation communities noted that it is one thing to understand the concept of collaboration, but it is something altogether different to try to implement it with real people in actual community settings. In addition, having subscribed to “program first” thinking for years, agency representatives also reported a reluctance on the part of some prevention policy board members to embrace a more comprehensive planning model that emphasized “assessment first, program planning later.” Although these issues were more frequently reported in communities where Title V represented the first time community members had been brought together for comprehensive collaborative planning, more experienced communities also were challenged in the translation from theory to practice.

Communities also must possess the skills—such as leadership, strategic planning, and community organizing—required to implement the Title V model. These skills are more difficult to learn than such technical skills as data analysis and interpretation, but are critical to successful implementation of the model. In addition, in many of the national evaluation communities, developing these skills while navigating such practical constraints as limited resources and turf issues among agency representatives proved most challenging to implementation. Finally, some communities reported that the Title V requirements (e.g., mobilizing, assessing, implementing, and monitoring) were even more difficult to achieve in relation to the small amount of grant money available to many grantees. Although planning grants in states such as Michigan and Pennsylvania helped to ease the difficulties associated with implementing planning activities without added financial resources, the challenges inherent in translating the model from theory to practice often remained. Nevertheless, grantees that were able to stay the course reported that the resulting community changes were well worth the effort.

Program-Related Lessons Learned

The challenges described here are not necessarily unique to the Title V program. Challenges related to the scope of an initiative in particular are well documented in the literature on comprehensive, community-based initiatives. In addition, it is no secret that comprehensive models can be difficult to translate from theory to practice, especially when one considers the variation of community characteristics and the personalities of the individuals involved. Although challenging, these issues identify a set of “lessons learned” that can help OJJDP and future Title V communities implement the model successfully. These lessons include:

- ❖ Broadening the definition of “success.”
- ❖ Encouraging communities to start small and build on successes.
- ❖ Providing ongoing training and technical assistance to help communities understand and implement the program model.

Each of these is discussed in detail in the following sections.

Broadening the Definition of “Success”

Title V means different things to different communities. In the context of the national evaluation, this difference was most often attributable to the fact that communities start in different places. That is, in some communities, Title V represents the first foray into comprehensive prevention planning. In others, Title V may be the second, the third, or, for example, in Waynesboro, VA, the fifth time the community has applied for a comprehensive planning grant requiring a process similar to Title V. What is important is that for the less experienced communities, the Title V model was more evident because each stage was initiated and completed as part of the Title V process; no other process was in place. For the communities with more experience, the Title V model was less evident and, in a few communities, appeared nonexistent. For example, interviews for the national evaluation revealed that some of the prevention policy board members in Hanover, VA, did not know what Title V was and so were unable to discuss its influence on their community prevention efforts. Was this indicative of a community that

failed to implement the Title V model? Technically, the answer is yes. Hanover, VA, did not implement the Title V model, per se. Hanover had, however, implemented a model very similar to Title V, including having developed a long-term prevention plan in response to a state-sponsored substance abuse prevention initiative. This initiative, around which the community mobilized for the first time, had begun a few years before the community coordinator was invited to apply for Title V funds. Hanover had mobilized, conducted a community assessment, identified prevention strategies to meet its identified needs, and had implemented them—although not as a part of the Title V grant process. In fact, the Hanover prevention board was so successful that, at the time Title V came along, it was both institutionalizing existing prevention activities and, based on the findings of their most recent community assessment, looking for funds to support prevention activities in underserved communities. The Title V grant allowed the community to fill a gap in its existing prevention plan, which had been developed prior to Title V.

The lesson learned from the experience of Hanover, VA, and other communities like it is that considering the full community context when assessing the success of their efforts is important. Had the national evaluation team used a narrow vision of success to judge the Hanover community, one that did not include their previous experiences, it would have come to a very different conclusion about Hanover's ability to plan and implement a comprehensive prevention initiative. Instead, the team used the community's previous efforts and current standing to help interpret its use of the Title V grant. By broadening the definition of success to include the full community context, the team was able to put Title V into perspective in this community and realize its success.

Encouraging Communities To Start Small

Because the Title V model is complex, especially for communities that have little experience with it, encouraging and supporting communities to develop manageable plans is important. Over time, as they become more familiar with managing a comprehensive prevention plan, including reassessing community risk and protective factors, communities can modify or enhance existing efforts or, when a gap in service or new target population emerges, put new programs and strategies in place.

The Importance of Training and Technical Assistance

Comprehensive planning models can be difficult to translate from theory to practice. As a result, communities need access to ongoing opportunities for training and technical assistance. Throughout the national evaluation, and in interactions with many other Title V communities, the importance of training and technical assistance was obvious. In Nebraska, for example, where communities had no Title V training, their ability to effectively understand and implement the model was limited. Even in Pennsylvania, where training is mandatory and all Title V grantees receive it, community representatives in Northampton and Fayette Counties still struggled (although to a much lesser extent than the Nebraska communities) to implement the model effectively.

A funding agency that recognizes the importance of effective training and technical assistance is essential. OJJDP not only has provided training and technical assistance to states and communities from the beginning of the Title V grant program, but it has continued to refine the training curriculum and expand technical assistance activities in response to issues that have emerged at the state and local levels

over time. Throughout the evaluation, OJJDP program staff listened carefully to the issues emerging from the experiences of the national evaluation communities and took the information seriously. With the hiring of a new training and technical assistance provider in 2000, the training curriculum was revised again with input from state and community representatives nationwide. In addition, technical assistance activities were developed and made available to individual communities to meet their unique circumstances. The provision of ongoing, targeted training and technical assistance will continue to influence the success of future Title V communities.

Evaluation Issues

As indicated in the case study presentations (see chapters 2–7), most of the communities participating in the Title V national evaluation struggled to develop and implement local evaluation plans. As evidenced by the experiences of the OJJDP Title V manager and the technical assistance providers, and as documented over the years in the Title V Reports to Congress, this struggle is not exclusive to the national evaluation communities: Evaluation has posed a challenge for Title V communities since the early days of the initiative. What is the struggle about? During the implementation of the national evaluation, several issues at the program, state, and community levels emerged that help explain the struggle. These issues are presented in detail in the following section.

Program-Level Issues

First, there is the issue of how well evaluation was built into the program model. Risk-factor tracking was built into the program model as part of the “Institutionalization and Monitoring” stage, but many communities did not track their risk factors over time. There seem to be several reasons for this failure. For example, risk-factor tracking was not mandated, and states did not hold communities accountable for reporting these data. More important, however, is the issue of scope.

Compared with other, similar initiatives, Title V subgrants can be considered a moderate to small amount of money. In the national evaluation states alone, grants have ranged from \$520 in one Nebraska community to \$283,000 in a Michigan community. On average, nationwide, most subgrants are around \$65,000. As a result, program strategies are often being implemented in sites with very small populations, sometimes as small as 30 to 50 children or parents. Even in communities that receive sizable subgrants, prevention strategies generally target one or two areas of a community (e.g., schools, neighborhoods, groups) rather than the community at large. For this reason, a gap frequently exists between the levels at which risk factors occur (e.g., city or county) and the levels at which program strategies are being implemented (e.g., schools and neighborhoods). As a result, communities are often not likely to see changes in their risk factor data and they may, therefore, not see the value of tracking these data. Furthermore, because of its emphasis on tracking risk factor data, the Title V model does not emphasize local program evaluation.

Given the issues related to scope, perhaps communities’ evaluation efforts would have been more successful if they had received support to develop and implement rigorous program evaluations. Having program evaluation data would have allowed communities to make theoretical links between program outcomes and reductions in risk factors without having to track risk factors over time.

State-Level Issues

State-level factors also emerged in relation to the evaluation challenge. In fact, in many states, the evaluation struggle began with the application process, whereby request for proposal guidelines were too vague to translate into rigorous evaluation plans. Although federal guidelines require each state Title V grant application to include “quantified objectives and baseline measurements of identified risk factors,” the states must interpret and articulate this requirement into local grantee requirements. In most states, the State Advisory Group (SAG) or the Title V Coordinator or prevention specialist is responsible for translating the federal Title V Program Guideline (*Federal Register*, vol. 59, No. 146) into a request for proposal package that includes guidelines and requirements for evaluation.

In many states, SAG members and other state program staff do not have research or evaluation backgrounds and, as a result, are unable to write guidelines specific enough to translate into a rigorous evaluation at the local level. For example, one state’s evaluation guidelines consist of the following phrase: “A plan for collecting data for the measurement of performance and outcome of project activities.” Another state has guidelines that read: “Eligible participants must provide an evaluation plan that contains program objectives, supportive data, and a description of the measurement and analysis techniques.” Still other states merely request that potential grantees submit “a plan for evaluating activities under Title V.” These general requests provide little guidance to potential grantees, especially those inexperienced and unfamiliar with evaluation, which is often the case. In addition, because the guidelines are vague, they are subject to interpretation and often result in evaluation plans that are inconsistent in design and data collection specifications.

The evaluation struggle often continues once grantees receive Title V funds. In addition to helping grantees develop and implement local evaluation plans, the states are responsible for holding grantees accountable for having these plans in place and for reporting evaluation findings. In many states, a Title V coordinator or prevention specialist is responsible for monitoring Title V grantees, including ensuring that they meet state reporting requirements. Because staff are not required to be knowledgeable about research or evaluation issues, however, many are not. As a result, staff do not know what constitutes a rigorous evaluation plan and, therefore, cannot hold grantees accountable. In addition, many state agencies are reluctant to withhold grant funds from communities when they do not meet minimum requirements. Without consequences, communities are less likely to meet requirements.

Another difficulty is holding grantees accountable for evaluation plans other than those that are approved in their grant application—plans that are frequently vague and include outcomes that are not measurable. For example, in reviewing the evaluation plans of one of the Vermont communities, the national evaluation team noted that its goals and objectives were not measurable. Having presented these same goals and objectives in their state quarterly reports for 2 years without protest, the project coordinator was unwilling to modify or change them. She believed that if the plan had not been acceptable, the state program manager would not have approved the progress reports and the applications for continuation funding.

Community-Level Factors

Community-level factors also play a role in the struggle to evaluate programs. As is the case in many community-based programs, the priority at the local level tends to be program implementation, not evaluation. This preference develops and tends to go unchallenged for several reasons. First, most of the individuals involved in Title V-sponsored programming at the local level are administrators of direct service-providing agencies or direct service providers. As such, they tend to be more interested in implementing programs and working directly with children and families than in collecting data and reporting on outcomes. Second, many direct service providers, having degrees, experience, and training in service delivery, are not particularly knowledgeable about evaluation. Without adequate knowledge, developing, let alone implementing, a rigorous evaluation plan is difficult. Third, service delivery is often a labor-intensive job, frequently requiring service providers to balance their time between program activities and logistics and administrative tasks. Service providers and project coordinators often report that these activities leave little time (or energy) for evaluation activities.

Besides the labor involved, direct services also are expensive to maintain. The resources available to support them come most often from grant funds (i.e., funds that tend to have time limitations and other restrictions). As a result, stakeholders and administrative and program staff often spend inordinate amounts of time searching for continuation funds. In the national evaluation communities, prevention policy board members, project coordinators, and program staff frequently spent as much time identifying sources of continuation funds as they did engaged in administrative tasks and direct service provision. This constant struggle for funds not only reinforces the focus on service delivery, but also draws attention away from other important tasks, including evaluation. A member of one of the Vermont communities compared this situation to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, noting: "If you do not have food, clothing, and shelter, you are not likely to be worried about self-esteem and spiritual enlightenment."

Training-Related Factors

The issue of training also affects evaluation efforts. OJJDP built training (including evaluation training) and technical assistance into the Title V program and set aside funds to support it, but the training is limited. States struggle to offer Title V training frequently enough to maximize participation. As a result, some Title V grantees receive no training at all. Additionally, because evaluation is a complex and multifaceted science, it is difficult to develop a basic training session that covers the full range of evaluation-related topics, and covers them in enough depth for participants to learn them all. Instead, Title V training covers basic evaluation concepts and skills without giving attention to, for example, how to translate basic concepts and skills into a local evaluation plan. In addition, the Title V training curriculum focuses on tracking risk factors rather than evaluating programs.

OJJDP provides opportunities for communities to receive additional and individualized evaluation training and followup technical assistance through its training and technical assistance contractor, but many communities are unaware of these opportunities or simply do not take advantage of them, sometimes because they are not sure what kind of training they need. In addition, someone in the community must spearhead the effort, whether by mandate or otherwise, and be willing to develop and oversee the evaluation, often without being paid to do so. The national evaluation found that in many cases, community members did not have the time nor the expertise to develop and manage the

evaluation and, without additional resources, could not hire a local evaluator (although many never considered this option). Finally, those communities that attempted to implement a local evaluation were often unable to manage it over time, even with ongoing training and technical and moral support from the national evaluation team.

Evaluation of Lessons Learned

As with the program-related issues, the challenges described here are not necessarily unique to the Title V program. In the past 10 years, the study of comprehensive, community-based initiatives like Title V has provided ample evidence to support the challenge of evaluation at the local level. Despite the challenges that evaluation presents for state-level staff and grantees, the lessons learned from the Title V national evaluation suggest ways to encourage states and local grantees to prioritize evaluation and support its development and implementation at the local level. These lessons include:

- ❖ Emphasizing program evaluation and risk-factor tracking.
- ❖ Building state-level evaluation capacity to monitor and support local-level evaluation.
- ❖ Mandating evaluation and set-aside funds to support it.
- ❖ Requiring the use of evidence-based programs.

Each of these is presented in detail in the sections that follow.

Emphasizing Program Evaluation and Risk-Factor Tracking

Risk factor tracking was built into the Title V model as the evaluation component. Specifically, communities are instructed to measure risk factor indicators (e.g., juvenile arrests, incidence of child abuse and neglect) before and each year after implementing Title V-sponsored prevention strategies. Given the issues outlined in section 3.1, the mismatch between the scope of most Title V initiatives and the level at which risk factor data are available (i.e., implementation is occurring with target populations that are too small to effect change in county- or city-level indicators), communities should be encouraged to focus, perhaps primarily, on program evaluation. Implementing rigorous program evaluations would allow communities to document program outcomes that could then be linked, if only theoretically, to anticipated changes in risk factors—changes that might not appear for many years. Modifying the training curriculum to emphasize risk-factor tracking and program evaluation—and the links between the two—during the planning process might facilitate more rigorous local evaluation plans. Linking the two at the outset could also reinforce the idea that program planning and evaluation should occur simultaneously. In addition, emphasizing program evaluation might provide opportunities to collect outcome and impact data for future national evaluation efforts, something that was not possible during this evaluation study.

Building State-Level Evaluation Capacity To Support Local-Level Evaluation

It is not fair to expect grantees to plan and implement local evaluation plans without support and guidance from the individuals who are required to monitor them. Throughout the national evaluation,

community representatives sometimes turned to state-level prevention staff for guidance regarding evaluation. In many cases, this query was met with a suggestion to apply for training and technical assistance, which is both appropriate and helpful; however, training and technical assistance opportunities are limited. With approval, communities can receive up to 10 days of OJJDP-sponsored training and technical assistance each year. In the interim, community members would also benefit from support from state representatives who are knowledgeable about evaluation. Although it may be unrealistic to expect that state staff also are evaluators, local capacity could be increased if state staff had enough knowledge to help communities translate state evaluation requirements into local evaluation plans.

State Monitoring To Encourage Local Evaluation Efforts

To ensure that evaluation capacity exists at the local level, communities need financial resources and access to ongoing evaluation training and technical assistance opportunities. OJJDP continues to invest in training and technical assistance, modifying the training as necessary and developing new tools to enhance capacity. Communities also might benefit from more rigorous evaluation monitoring at the state level, however. From the experiences of participants in other initiatives similar to Title V, anecdotal evidence suggests that monitoring can play a supportive rather than adversarial role in helping communities plan and implement local evaluation activities. Holding communities accountable for implementing local evaluation activities and reporting findings, and enforcing consequences on those that fail to meet specific requirements, has shown some success in recent years. To monitor effectively, however, state staff need to be knowledgeable about evaluation, as discussed above.

Accountability alone may not produce desired results. Accountability standards enforced by a supportive and responsive staff person who understands implementation issues in general, and those imposed by the local community context in particular, may hold the most promise. In Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Vermont, where the juvenile justice or state prevention specialist has both knowledge about evaluation and positive working relationships with the local grantees, community representatives were less negative about evaluation and reporting requirements. They also reported feeling confident that should their state representative have concerns about their local initiative, he or she would not only discuss it with the community but also help them find solutions.

Mandating and Funding Evaluations

If communities are to be held accountable for implementing evaluation plans, evaluation must be mandated at both the federal and state levels and mechanisms must be put in place to hold communities accountable for submitting evaluation plans and reporting evaluation results. In addition, if evaluation is going to be a priority, communities should be required to set aside a certain percentage of their subgrant award for evaluation activities, a strategy that has proven successful in other federal initiatives. In addition to providing communities with the resources to hire a local evaluator, this requirement also reinforces the importance of evaluation at the outset. Invariably, project directors and coordinators across communities report a reluctance to spend money that is targeted for direct services on evaluation activities.

Requiring the Use of Evidence-Based Programs

To support evaluation efforts and ensure that communities implement research-based strategies in the future, OJJDP will continue to require adherence to a research-based approach. Local subgrant applications will be reviewed for inclusion of a comprehensive delinquency prevention plan that is data-driven. Applications will be reviewed for inclusion of prevention strategies shown through research to be exemplary, effective, or promising in reducing risk factors and enhancing protective factors associated with delinquency. Local communities will be required to include plans for service coordination and colocation and innovative collaboration approaches. OJJDP will continue to support technical assistance and training on programming, including the enhancement of the Plan and Program Development training. By requiring research-based programs, communities will be more likely to demonstrate positive outcomes. In addition, because most research-based programs come with evaluation plans, choosing to implement them facilitates evaluation efforts.

OJJDP's Response to Emerging Issues

As mentioned previously, Congress established the Title V Community Prevention Grants Program in the 1992 reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974. In 1994, the first Title V communities were funded. From the very beginning, OJJDP offered training and technical assistance to help build state and local capacity to plan and implement Title V efforts. Over time, however, as more and more communities had the opportunity to apply for and receive Title V funds and plan and implement local initiatives, issues began to emerge that helped OJJDP and the national evaluation team identify factors that were helping and hindering communities' ability to implement the model successfully. In response, OJJDP continued to revisit and refine the training and technical assistance activities available to help states and local communities implement the model successfully. With the hiring of a new training and technical assistance provider in 2000, both the training and its availability to potential grantees have improved substantially.

The new training curriculum, initially implemented in 2000, presents a more integrated, balanced approach to prevention planning and implementation than the previous training by combining risk- and protection-focused prevention with community asset building. In addition, the new curriculum was developed with input from more than 30 state juvenile justice specialists, resulting in a curriculum that is flexible enough and can be customized to meet the specific needs of participating communities and includes a variety of risk- and protection-focused models.

The new curriculum also places a stronger emphasis on selecting and evaluating research-based prevention strategies. To assist communities in these activities, three tools have been developed: the Model Programs Guide, the Model Programs Guide Database, and the Community Data Collection Manual. The Model Programs Guide and Database contain detailed information on more than 250 evidence-based prevention programs and is used by communities to locate programs that meet their identified gaps. OJJDP also has taken steps to more heavily market the training curriculum and its other training resources to states and communities, increasing its visibility and the number of community requests for it. Development Services Group, Inc., the Title V training and technical assistance contractor at the time of this writing, reported that training requests increased from 162 communities participating in Title V training in 2001 to 367 communities in 2002.

In addition to improvements in the training curriculum, OJJDP also has invested resources in training state-level representatives to implement the training more effectively. For example, OJJDP, in its annual regional training sessions, developed and implemented training sessions designed to assist state juvenile justice specialists and other state prevention staff with Title V-related activities such as writing a request for proposal that clearly articulates the Title V program requirements, planning pregrant training sessions to coincide with state funding cycles and maximize participation, and mandating pregrant training as a prerequisite for Title V application. In combination, these efforts demonstrate OJJDP's ongoing commitment to using evaluation feedback in decisionmaking and planning and to helping communities plan and implement effective prevention initiatives.

Conclusion

With each passing year, the Title V Community Prevention Grants Program continues to evolve. From its inception in 1992 to the completion of the national evaluation in 2002, OJJDP has learned a great deal about how communities plan and implement local prevention efforts. In response, OJJDP has refined the program model and developed and implemented new and improved training and technical assistance activities to support efforts at the state and local levels. In addition, communities have become more experienced in implementing this type of planning model. In 1992, Title V was one of the first comprehensive risk- and protection-focused prevention planning models; now it is difficult to identify a federal or state social service agency that is not supporting one or more comprehensive, collaborative initiatives. It is equally challenging to locate a community that is not currently or has not previously been engaged in this type of planning model. As a result, communities have become better at collaborating, assessing local needs, identifying appropriate strategies, and institutionalizing and evaluating local efforts.

Despite its evolution, however, progress remains to be made. Communities continue to report that turf issues interfere with successful collaboration; that community assessment data is difficult to access, analyze, and interpret; that research-based programs do not meet their local needs; and that evaluation is not feasible because it takes too much time away from service delivery. In addition, variations in local community contexts and the personalities of the individuals involved, combined with the complex nature of the Title V model, practically guarantee that new issues will emerge in time. As presented here, however, new issues provide opportunities for additional learning, and additional learning allows for ongoing refinement of the model and improvement to training and technical assistance activities.