

### Citation

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### Highlights

- This report presents a process study of the national Job Corps program. Initiated in 1964, Job Corps provides comprehensive education and employment skills training to disadvantaged youth ages 16 to 24.
- The study drew on survey, administrative, and qualitative data to present students' and Job Corps centers' characteristics across the full population of participating students and centers in 1996; sampling for site visits excluded noncontiguous states. This study was part of the National Job Corps Study that also included an impact evaluation and a benefit-cost analysis.
- Job Corps united federal agencies, private contractors, and unions in implementing a training and support model for disadvantaged youth. Job Corps centers generally implemented core service components with consistency. Links between outreach and admissions counselors to Job Corps centers, and job placement services, proved challenging.
- Findings are generally applicable to program implementation nationally; however, the study did not measure outputs such as content or quality of services, participation, or dosage.

### Features of the Job Corps Program

The Job Corps program was funded by the U.S. Department of Labor and began in 1964. It targeted disadvantaged youth ages 16 to 24. Eligible youth must have been economically disadvantaged (demonstrated through receipt of welfare or food stamps) and in need of education or training to gain meaningful employment. Job Corps provided basic education, vocational skills training, health care and education, counseling, and residential support through 110 Job Corps centers located in 46 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Job Corps served slightly fewer than 40,000 students at any one time in 1996. Most students resided at Job Corps centers while in training, though 12 percent of students were nonresidential. Implementing agencies were state employment security agencies and other state and local agencies, and some private organizations.

### Features of the Study

This process study described the Job Corps model, examined implementation, and identified variations in program elements or characteristics across centers and administering agencies that could affect students' outcomes. The study was conducted in late 1995 and throughout 1996 as part of a broader study that included an impact analysis. The process study used four data sources: (1) a telephone survey of

outreach and admissions counselors in 536 of 556 (96 percent) district offices; (2) in-depth site visits to 23 Job Corps centers in 20 states (selected through a stratified random sample); (3) a mail survey of all 110 Job Corps centers (with a 100 percent response rate); and (4) Job Corps administrative data on students' characteristics and program experiences for 69,118 students who terminated from Job Corps in 1996. Data for the study were drawn to represent students' characteristics and Job Corps centers' characteristics across the full population of participating students and centers in 1996; however, sampling for on-site visits excluded noncontiguous states. This study was part of the National Job Corps Study that included an impact evaluation and a cost benefit analysis.

## Findings

The study concluded that Job Corps had a well-developed program model that was implemented as planned. The study's authors concluded that Job Corps students received intensive and meaningful training and services. Findings focused on three areas: outreach and admissions, center operations, and placement. The study found eligibility screening to be effective; youth were rarely found ineligible based on discretionary criteria, such as capacity to benefit from the program. Students typically entered Job Corps with substantial academic deficits. Outreach and admissions counselors had limited direct knowledge of the centers. Their average tenure was short and few had prior experience with Job Corps. As a result, students did not always have accurate perceptions of the program when they arrived at centers.

Job Corps offered a uniform program structure and content, but was flexible in shaping vocational training to individual's interests and local industry needs. Job Corps followed a distinctive open-entry, open-exit approach to vocational training to allow for individualized and self-paced instruction for students with differing needs. Job Corps offered training programs in more than 75 vocational areas, but 80 percent of training slots corresponded to the 10 largest vocational areas (with the highest projected demand for workers). The program gradually adjusted trade offerings in response to changes in employers' demand. Experiential learning occurred at centers or through employers' placements; a computer-based instruction system provided uniform curriculum and delivery of academic courses, though some centers offered supplemental courses or approaches. Remedial education improved literacy and numeracy skills of students. Residential living was a distinctive program component and residential counselors provided key social and personal supports and were effective in retaining at-risk students. Gender and ethnic composition was similar between students and staff, so students could work with staff of their own gender and ethnicity. The physical condition of centers' facilities varied substantially because Job Corps had taken over facilities built for other purposes (such as military barracks and hospitals). Respondents said that improving dormitory facilities, especially for women, would improve student retention. The behavior management system, which rewarded good performance and sanctioned poor performance, effectively encouraged positive behavior among students. The expanded zero tolerance policy for drugs and violence also appeared to improve behavior and the general center climate.

Social skills training was generally viewed as valuable to youth, but it needed improvement in curriculum content and facilitator training. Progress and Performance Evaluation Panels assessed students'

performance in all program areas and guided each student in ongoing self-assessment and goal-setting processes. The evaluation system was seen as useful by staff and valuable by students, but suffered from inconsistent implementation and administrative burden. The performance bonus system, which granted pay bonuses based on performance ratings, was viewed as subjective and inequitable. Job placement agencies, national contractors responsible for helping former students obtain jobs, rarely met students in person, which limited the provision of comprehensive placement services. The centers and contractors lacked coordination of services, and contractors were not building linkages with employers to support placement.

### **Considerations for Interpreting the Findings**

This was a carefully designed, systematic study of the national Job Corps program. The data sources and methods of selection and sampling make the findings generally applicable to implementation of the program as a whole across the country. The findings were descriptive in nature and useful in identifying the variation in implementation that occurred across centers, and in identifying potential strengths and weaknesses in implementation (though these were not necessarily highlighted in study findings). The study was not focused on the measurement of outputs such as content or quality of services, participation, and dosage.