WELFARE PEER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE NETWORK

New York City Human Resources Administration Site Visit
New York, New York
June 3, 2004

Technical Assistance Report

On Thursday, June 3, 2004, the Welfare Peer Technical Assistance (TA) sponsored a one-day site visit to the Human Resources Administration (HRA) in New York City (NYC). The purpose of the TA was to provide the State of Maryland, Department of Human Resources (DHR), Family Investment Administration (FIA) the opportunity to observe the city's use of JobStat, which allows the city to set goals, monitor, and measure outcomes of performance indicators established for NYC welfare recipients, workers, and job centers.

Maryland is rolling out JobStat within the month and is also very interested in examining the front-end fraud detection systems that are currently in operation in the NYC HRA Bureau of Eligibility Verification (BEV). More than 150,000 Temporary Assistance for Needy Families recipients in 24 Maryland counties will potentially benefit from this activity. Lessons learned will be integrated in FIA within four to seven months from the date of this event.

The Welfare Peer TA Network provided logistical support to allow the following representatives from Maryland DHR, FIA to travel to NYC on a day trip and observe a JobStat session and visit the Bureau of Eligibility Verification:

Executive Director:
- Kevin McGuire, Baltimore, Maryland

Director, Office of Work Opportunities
- Larry C. Pinkett, Baltimore, Maryland

Bureau Chief, Planning, Budget & Procurement Unit, Office of Work Opportunities
- John H. Huegelmeyer, Baltimore, Maryland

Project Manager/Analyst, Office of Policy, Research & Systems
- Vince Kilduff, Baltimore, Maryland

Director of Operations, Office of the Inspector General
- Terry Scates, Baltimore, Maryland

TA participants were provided with an in-depth review of the JobStat process and BEV by Dr. Swati Desai, Executive Deputy Commissioner of JobStat and other senior managers of the New York City Human Resources Administration, including:

Commissioner, New York City Human Resources Administration
- Verna Eggleston, New York, New York

Executive Deputy Commissioner, NYC, HRA
- Patricia Smith, New York, New York

Director for Planning & Operations, JobStat
- Joe Demartino, New York, New York

Executive Director, Bureau of Eligibility Verification
- Betty Shurberick, New York, New York

Director, Bureau of Eligibility Verification
- Marcia James, New York, New York

Observation of New York City JobStat Session

The JobStat sessions take place in a meeting room known as the "Situation Room." On one side of the long meeting table sat two center managers (centers are like our LDSS district offices) and members of their staff, while senior administrators from HRA central sat on the other side. PowerPoint slides were used to supplement the printed charts that were distributed to attendees.

There were separate charts for both centers. In addition to the two page JobStat report, there were 3 pages of engagement reports, a JobStat childcare report, a front line staff report, a two-page payment accuracy report and a Paperless Office System usage report. Most of the reports compared the center's performance data with regional and citywide statistics.

The JobStat Report first identifies key management, work activity vendors, the number of cases and "engageables," percentage of front-line staff "on board" and the area's poverty rate. Other metrics displayed include job placements, vendor placement rate, 3 month retention, 6 month retention, rate of child care after 3 months of closing, and rate of informal child care providers. The rest of the first page provides more information and scores the center's performance, based on a system described in the "JobStat Reference Guide". This section, which continues onto a second page, divides the measures between employment related and administrative measures and provides weekly averages for the center, region and city, scoring each row. The bottom half of the first page provides the employment measures: placements, retention, and process. The administrative measures are timeliness, error rates, application process, undercare process (undercare means cases under care, or active cases) and fair hearings.

During the JobStat session, center directors are closely questioned about their center's performance. While the questioning is not punitive, it involves digging for details as to why a center's performance was good or not so good. Understanding the "why" seems to be a key part of the process, and makes it a learning experience rather than a "gotcha." Another good management practice demonstrated was using the PowerPoint slides to show "top ten lists" when certain statistics were being discussed, such as FS error rate reasons or the top ten reasons fair hearings were requested. Having hard numbers seemed a good way to prevent "seat of the pants" management.

One of the managers present operates the East End Center, which is considered a "model center." Among the strategies used in a model center are three to four receptionists to route clients, a "quick service" line for budget letters, replacement cards, interim changes, or complaints. Work activity vendors are onsite at a model center, each on a one-day rotation. While it may have not been part of the "model," the East End Center also used a mobile office for reconsideration. The JobStat results did not conclusively show that the model center performed better than the "normal" center, however.

Note: POS as a management tool from http://www.uwnyc.org/technews/v4_n4_a4.html.
In addition to fostering a paper-free application process, POS also serves as a valuable management tool. POS stores key data elements that follow the progress of a case throughout the eligibility determination process. Center management can generate POS reports that track the timeliness with which staff make eligibility determinations and there are reporting capabilities that notify management when cases are coming-due or over-due. These reporting abilities, in conjunction with a variety of other POS functions, provide management with a reliable tool for increasing the operational effectiveness of a center.

Points to ponder:
- The JobStat Action Items assignment seems to be a good idea. The tasks are driven by each session and have due dates. Subsequent versions have a "Status Update" column to note progress and encourage follow up.
- Our CARES system does not track the engagement status of our clients.
- As of March 2002, NYC went to a case management system, where a client has the same worker throughout their application and eligibility period. This is the opposite of the compartmentalized roles for case managers that some of our locals are taking. Based on experience in other states, the conventional wisdom is that specialized case management roles are less labor intensive than the one-client/one worker model.
- CARES does not indicate whether a "plan" exists for a TCA household. Mr. McGuire directed that he wanted a hard edit programmed into CARES to indicate that an employment/assessment plan existed for each active TCA client.

Meeting with Senior Managers of the New York City Human Resources Administration

JobStat has led to large gains in application timeliness. More generally, the JobStat process has helped the center managers become more focused and more likely to make decisions based on data. Dr. Desai said that New York's level of data collection and reporting was not necessary to build a good human services management system. She advised reporting on the five areas that mattered the most and setting goals, allowing for a "ramp up" period. She also said, "don't be afraid to ask why"? Buy- in from the centers is important, as it is important for local managers to take ownership. Dr. Desai said it is important for the JobStat data to be as up- to- date and as accurate as the data possessed by local offices: "if the data is old, you lose credibility." New York's JobStat is 90 percent automated, but they have to scramble to make sure the other 10 percent is current. Another important point is that JobStat is a "living document." Data elements are dropped when there are no longer problems associated with them, and elements can be added when problems occur in other areas.

Generally, the data used for JobStat is from Microsoft Excel or Access applications that are merged into a data warehouse. To deal with the problem of clients who find jobs but do not report them (instead allowing their cases to close or expire), HRA gets new hire data from their child support operation. Due to New York laws, the disposition of active cases is not allowed based on these data, but they can give centers credit for placements.

According to Dr. Desai, ranking between sites is important. Some of the charts from the JobStat session compared performance of all centers by name, and the Situation Room had large charts comparing center performance on all of its walls.

Points to ponder:

- It was suggested that we should consider getting the University of Baltimore to include more work with UI data in our Data Linkage contract.
- Could we restructure FIP demonstration projects to support different incentives for locals?
- We could do JobStat on the Web. It could generate traffic to the site and get the locals more involved, as their operations would be more transparent. NYC does it: http://www.nyc.com/go.aspx?bkurl=%2fgovernment%2fthe_human_resources_administration.aspx&url=http%3a%2f%2fwww.nyc.gov%2fhtml%2fhra%2fhome.html&s=11&n=Human+Resources+Administration&sn=Human+Resources+Administration. Terry Scates said that OIG's reports on DHRNet generate phone calls from locals. OIG reports can be found at http://192.168.63.4/dhrnet_oig/PageLink_DivOfAudits_LDSS_Reports.htm.

Visit to the Bureau of Eligibility Verification

New York's system was designed to ensure that only eligible people receive assistance. In addition to screening all new applications, the Bureau of Eligibility Verification (BEV) samples certain populations within the active caseload and has completed two caseload sweeps. BEV is divided between In-House and Field divisions.

The In-House division screens all applicants in the five boroughs. Applicants are given an appointment with BEV approximately one week after they apply. Each new client is assigned to an investigator, who performs a number of matches prior to the interview. Among the matches are motor vehicle, health department, Social Security numbers and benefits, bank records, fleeing felon matches, wage screens, credit report (one of the most valuable, according to BEV, and available either with a volume discount or a daily batch download), NYC marriage license match, new hires, and building data. After the face-to-face interview, the investigator tries to verify the information, usually via telephone. Investigators can only hold an application for one day if there is no clear evidence of fraud. Investigators do, however, have the power to deny cases when applicants provide false information.

The Field division enforces the 100 percent home visit reviews required by HRA. Most are active cases referred by the In-house unit, but they also conduct home visits on applicants when appropriate. To ensure that difficult to locate clients remain eligible, the Field division does redets on active clients who list homeless shelters as their addresses. Payees for child recipients also receive home visits, as it reduces crowding in the HRA centers. BEV is a technology savvy organization, and they have a project underway to videoconference with clients in homeless shelters, which should save travel time.

One of the key tasks for the Field division is to ensure that children are in recipients' homes. Maryland could benefit from such an integrity test to its TCA caseload, especially in child only cases, as we suspect that in some cases, custodial parents may be living with the children despite declarations to the contrary. Caseload integrity seems to be the primary mission of BEV. They use photo identification of clients, finger and electronic signatures as tools to keep the caseloads as "clean" as possible. In addition to deterring or discovering fraud, their work also saves labor for LDSS, as they compile electronic case records that supply much of the information needed by case managers to disposition cases. Since records are permanent, they also save time for clients.

Obviously, New York City's BEV is not cheap, as it has significant equipment and personnel costs (I believe I heard that it takes 475 staff, 240-300 of them investigators). However, senior management assures us that it "pays for itself" through "hard savings" such as recoupments and by cost avoidance through reducing assistance payments to those not eligible and through reduced workload.

Points to ponder:

- Mr. McGuire would like to see photos of heads of household on Maryland's EBT cards. The technology should not be expensive, as club cards for BJ's or Sam's Club has black and white photos, and our State ID's have color photos and signatures. Incorporating photos on EBT cards should hamper FS trafficking and could cut down on LDSS workload and lobby traffic as fewer cards will be "lost" by clients (for example, a card is actually sold by a client, who must then obtain a new card to access their benefits the following month).
- While the current budget environment would not support start up and personnel costs for this infrastructure in Maryland, perhaps DHR could shift existing resources to lay the groundwork for a Maryland BEV in the future. The OIG Division of Program Fraud and existing local department overpayment staff could strengthen ties.