

## Article

# Esperanza Trabajando gains, losses, lessons learned and steps forward: An evaluation report

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Accepted 23 July, 2009

**Esperanza Trabajando aimed to build capacity of 17 Hispanic faith-based and community based organizations for providing job training and development to adjudicated and at-risk youths in 10 regions of the US. Three areas of capacity were targeted by this project: organizational, service, and network capacity. Evaluation findings showed that organizational capacity increased significantly for all participants, with 70% registering organizational maturation and growth. Programmatic outcomes exceeded the federal benchmarks, with 91% of all clients receiving job training and/or remedial education; and 2,261 youth securing employment as a result of the project, of which 1,938 (86%) retained employment for more than 90 days. Client satisfaction findings indicated improvement of participant organizations' service capacity (reported by 42% of the clients) specifically targeting adjudicated youths (67% reported a perceived improvement in specialized services). Community reinsertion, as a result of this project is also an indicator of success, with recidivism rates for ET participants being below 7%. This is significantly lower than national rates for similar population groups. Fifty-eight percent (58%) of all participant organizations considered that the ET project created visibility and credibility for them among other nonprofit organizations; 50% stated that they are now part of a better job development organizational network.**

## INTRODUCTION

Esperanza Trabajando (Hope Works) is a program designed to respond to the employment and career needs of adjudicated and at-risk Latino youths. Funded by the Department of Labor (through its office of Faith-Based Initiatives), the project started in 2005 as a three-year project, and targeted at-risk and adjudicated youths in 9 U.S. cities, with large concentrations of Latino/Hispanic<sup>1</sup> population. The overarching goal of the project was to enhance the capacity of faith-based and community organizations to support targeted youths in the development of their employability skills and successful reinstatement in the community.

The intermediary organization Nueva Esperanza, Inc. that was awarded the grant established a success record in capacity building for the faith based sector becoming a Hispanic faith-based organization with a national presence. This was a

result of a previous capacity building project<sup>2</sup> for which it was awarded one of the largest grants through the Compassionate Fund (DHSS, 2002-2005). The Esperanza Trabajando project thus built on previously established organizational networks in regions like New York, Florida, Pennsylvania, California and Seattle, and created new regional networks in Chicago, Boston, and Tucson.

The scope of the Esperanza Trabajando project was to introduce and legitimize the participation of faith-based and community-based organizations as equal partners in job development for specific population groups: at-risk (18 to 25 years old) and adjudicated (18-34 years old) Latino youths. To this end, the project was launched with the following objectives:

- Establish a program presence in nine targeted cities

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this report, we will use the term *Latino*, as an all-inclusive term for all Latino and Hispanic groups in the target areas.

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<sup>2</sup> The Hispanic Capacity Project (HCP) was funded by DHSS as a three year project that built organizational capacity for 140 faith-based and community-based Latino organizations in 6 U.S. regions. One of the most important outcomes of this project was the development of regional Latino networks addressing the needs of Latino groups in these regions.

across the country

- Engage faith and community based organizations as key partners in Esperanza Trabajando
- Build local collaboration across the workforce development system with faith and community based organizations. As faith-based organizations are not as familiar with the workforce development systems and opportunities in their communities, the project aimed to foster collaborations that will strengthen all parties involved, through identification of partners in all regions, networking with workforce development officials, and locating other organizational resources for the target population
- Increase local outreach and support for Latino adjudicated and at risk youths.

To assist faith and community based organizations in working with local Latino youths, the program planned to:

- Make significant program sub-awards to two partnering faith and community based organizations in each city
- Provide consultant-delivered technical assistance to sub-award recipients in case management and referral
- Assign a local Program Coordinator to each of the nine cities to work with faith and community based organizations and provide support, as needed
- Develop outreach materials in support of local program efforts of faith and community based organizations to recruit Latino adjudicated and at risk youths.
- Offer services for Latino adjudicated and at-risk youths in collaboration with local programs. While the intermediary organization initially focused strictly on capacity building, for this project, they added a direct service component, aiming to ultimately provide services to targeted youths between the ages of 18 and 34 through faith and community based sub-award recipients and other partners in each city.

The project worked with three organizational cohorts: Year-One cohort, with 9 participant organizations; Year-Two cohort, with 7 participant organizations; and Year-Three cohort, with 5 participant organizations. Three organizations were dropped off the program due to low performance and one withdrew. A total of 17 organizations actively participated in all project activities, and all performances were measured. All these organizations received training and technical assistance, directly catering to their own organizational needs, as identified by an initial organizational assessment.

In addition to training and technical assistance, sub-awards were given to all participants of faith and community based organizations in the nine cities to provide a base of resources for services to youths, including outreach, referral, case management, and placement assistance.

Direct service was based on individual case management focusing on providing assistance to youths in navigating the system to receive assessment, career planning, training, education, and support services em-

phasizing successful employability development. As an overall goal of Esperanza Trabajando, direct service component, the project aimed to enroll a minimum of 2,500 targeted youths in the program over the three year period of the project. Of these, it was expected that:

- i) A minimum of 2,100 (84%) will visit One-Stop Career Centers for assessment and preparation of an individual development plan.
- ii) Based on the abilities and interests of the youths, an estimated 1,680 (67%) will participate in career-oriented education and training services through their local workforce development systems.
- iii) A minimum of 1,512 (60%) participants will successfully gain employment or go for higher education.

The Esperanza Trabajando project was thus large in scope, aiming to have a direct impact on the communities being served. The long-term goal of the project was to contribute to the community reinstatement efforts, and decrease recidivism for the adjudicated population served, ensuring marketable jobs for participant youths, and developing the infrastructure and organizational support that will contribute to this ultimate goal.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND OUTCOME MEASUREMENT IN THE CURRENT CONTEXT**

There is increased recognition of the important role that faith-based organizations (FBOs) have played in delivering traditional social services as well as the more contemporary activities such as job training and community development. Evaluation of programs and projects initiated by FBOs are critical as their scope, scale, and range of services provided have expanded and as their dependence on government funding has increased (Hall, 2002). Assessment of the effectiveness of FBOs has also gained increased interest since the enactment of the Charitable Choice provision in 1996. Effectiveness of any organization is closely linked to the organizational capacity. Organizational capacity traditionally refers to the resources, knowledge, and processes employed by the organization such as a) staffing; b) infrastructure, technology, and financial resources; c) strategic leadership; d) program and process management; and e) networks and linkages with other organizations and groups (IDRC, n. d).

A review of literature related to the initiatives of faith-based organizations indicates that there are more studies describing the various undertakings of the organizations, challenges faced and recommendations rather than evaluations that measure successes or failures based on concrete outcomes. Literature related specifically to capacity building in FBOs also reflects a dearth of empirical studies. A study conducted under the aegis of ACF, DHHS (2007) aimed to provide some preliminary insight into the extent to which FBOs have succeeded in

utilizing Compassion Capital Fund (CCF), established by Congressional appropriation in 2002 resources to enhance their organizational and service delivery capacity (Fink and Sipe, 2008). Key findings from this study indicate that since the receipt of CCF, positive gains were made in fund development strategies, internal governance, long-term planning, financial management systems, access to technology, and developing systems to track outcomes.

Conceptualizing the outcomes of capacity building initiatives has also been complex. Outcomes related to capacity building could include achieving intermediate objectives such as improving management competencies or diversifying funding or achieving long-term outcomes such as increasing the number of clients served or improving sustainability (Connolly and Lukas, 2002). In another study, Letts et al. (1999) defined three levels of results of capacity building, including improving the capability of the organization to do what it already does (program delivery), improve their capacity to grow (program expansion) or to improve the organization's adaptive capacity to meet changing needs (Sobeck and Agius, 2007).

According to Ferguson et al. (2007), there is a lack of empirical research in outcome evaluation related to FBOs. They also point other methodological concerns such as the quality of data and research designs and methods. On conducting a systematic review Ferguson et al. (2007) found 29 studies related to program effectiveness in FBOs. In another study, Fagan and colleagues (2007) examine the concept of 'outcome-based evaluation' where organizations specifically define what success means for their programs and then measure to what degree they achieve these goals (Fagan et al., 2007). According to this study, this type of evaluation which begins by identifying the desired outcome ultimately measures an organization not by what it does, but by what its clients accomplish.

The Esperanza Trabajando program evaluation aims to address some of the questions raised in the current literature, and to assess effectiveness based on its outcomes, while also investigating process dynamics and client satisfaction rates.

### Participant regions and organizations

The project targeted 9 cities: goal that was exceeded by it establishing a presence in 10 cities with large concentration of Latino population (Table 1). Based on the baseline assessment data, all participant organizations started at an intermediate or advanced level of development. Over half of the participant organizations have a history in providing social services to youths in their communities (53% provided services for more than 5 years); while only 7% were start-up organizations that only provided services for 6 months or less at the beginning of this project. In terms of their expertise in working with the target population, in the area of job

development/community reinstatement, 38% considered they had adequate expertise when they started in the project, while 50% claimed high expertise in this field. About a quarter of these organizations identified themselves as church-based (24%), 43% identified themselves as faith-based and 33% as community-based organizations.

### EVALUATION METHODOLOGY AND TOOLS

The evaluation methodology we employed to assess the effectiveness of this project, and measure its impact on the community, included an outcome evaluation and a process evaluation component.

#### Outcome evaluation

A substantial component of the evaluation process was built around the project's objectives, and the extent to which they translate into expected outcomes or desired change. The outcome evaluation measures the success of the proposed project as reflected in reaching the desired goals. Thus, a successful project will have established the following elements of success:

- 1) Presence and visibility – based on the analysis of secondary data collected by the intermediary organization
- 2) Organizational capacity – based on the organizational assessment conducted to:

- i) Establish a baseline for all participant organizations, and identify the immediate needs for capacity building to informed training. The Organizational Assessment Tool (OAT-1), developed within the Hispanic Capacity Project (2002-2005) was administered to all participant organizations when they entered the Esperanza Trabajando project.
- ii) Measure effectiveness of training/technical assistance and organizational growth – re-administering the OAT (OAT-2) at the end of all training and technical assistance for each site.

- 3) Improved service capacity for participant organizations providing services to Latino adjudicated and at-risk youths was measured by:

- i) Baseline of service capacity (Service Capacity Survey - SCS-1) administered to all participant organizations at the beginning of the project. Indicators measured: Level of awareness of the problems faced by the target population; depth of knowledge on existing resources for the target population (current legislation and existing services for each site); networking capacity – existing local collaborations on service delivery/joined projects/participation in local taskforce groups, etc.
- ii) Growth of service capacity as a result of training and technical assistance measured by the Organizational Exit Survey administered to all participant organizations in the final year of the project;
- iii) Effectiveness of services measured by goal achievement – indicators measured: enrollment (number of youths enrolled in all target cities); continuing education (number of youths enrolled in training and education); job placement/employment rates (number of youths placed in employment); and retention (number of youths remaining in employment/higher education for at least three months after initial placement).

- 4) Network capacity – measured by established collaborations between the workforce development system and the participant organizations, manifested as active networking and participation. Indicators used: number of meetings facilitated by Esperanza

**Table 1.** Geographic distribution and representation of the Esperanza Trabajando project.

Region/State	City	Number of participant organizations	Number of organizations that dropped/withdrew	Total active participants
SOUTH: FL	Tampa	5	2	3
	Miami	3	0	3
WEST: CA	Santa Ana	3	0	3
SOUTH-WEST: AZ	Tucson	1	0	1
EAST: NY	New York City	2	1	1
	Philadelphia	1	1	0
PA	Bethlehem	1	0	1
NORTH-WEST: WA	Tacoma	1	0	1
MID-WEST: IL	Chicago	2	0	2
NORTH-EAST: MA	Boston	2	0	2
TOTAL = 8 regions	10 cities	21	4	17

Trabajando; number of participants from the workforce development system to these meetings; client assessments by One-Stop Centers – as recorded in ETO; type and number of activities aiming to establish local collaborations, initiated by participant Esperanza Trabajando organizations at each site.

5). Increased support for Latino adjudicated and at-risk youths, assessed through:

- i) Fund development capacity and its impact on the population served as shown by the number and impact of sub-awards distributed in the target cities. Indicators measured: number of sub-awards; level of development for organizations receiving the sub-awards; organizational profile indicators for organizations receiving the sub-awards, e.g. how many at-risk/adjudicated youths do they serve; how many collaborations with local workforce development officials do they establish during the three years of the project?;
- ii) Level of client satisfaction – measured by client satisfaction surveys.

#### Process evaluation

Besides measuring the effectiveness of the project in enhancing organizational capacity and creating a basis of resources for services to youths, we will consider the dynamics and relationships that can contribute to the overall success of the project in each region. The process evaluation includes:

**Monitoring the project management, at each stage of the project:** The degree of involvement and commitment of various program participants was monitored by conducting interviews with selected participant organizations, as well as focus groups with identified stakeholders.

- i) During the implementation stage, the process evaluation consists of monitoring each program by correlating document analysis with entry-exit surveys and annual focus groups with a representative group of the participating organizations and the regional project staff. A number of 5 focus groups and 3 organizational interviews have been conducted to measure process effectiveness for each site.
- ii) Interviews with regional coordinators (4) and the national management team (2) were conducted after the first year of the project, half way through the third year of the project, and at the end of all project activities.

**Evaluating the program components, and measuring consistency in design and delivery for all target areas:** As part of this process, we measured organization and client satisfaction for both participant organizations, and youths that benefit by the services provided as a result of the project. Core measurements and tools were:

- i) Training and technical assistance evaluation forms – distributed after each training/TA session
- ii) Entry/exit surveys with youths enrolled in the program at each site, measuring client satisfaction
- iii) Organizational exit surveys – administered at the conclusion of all project activities.

This evaluation component allows us to understand the process of reaching the expected outcomes, as well as overcoming identified obstacles, and dealing with unexpected consequences.

#### EVALUATION FINDINGS: EFFECTIVENESS

##### Presence and visibility

The project established a presence in 10 sites, exceeding the 9-sites initially targeted. 21 organizations were selected into the program during its lifetime; and 17 organizations remained active to the end of the project.

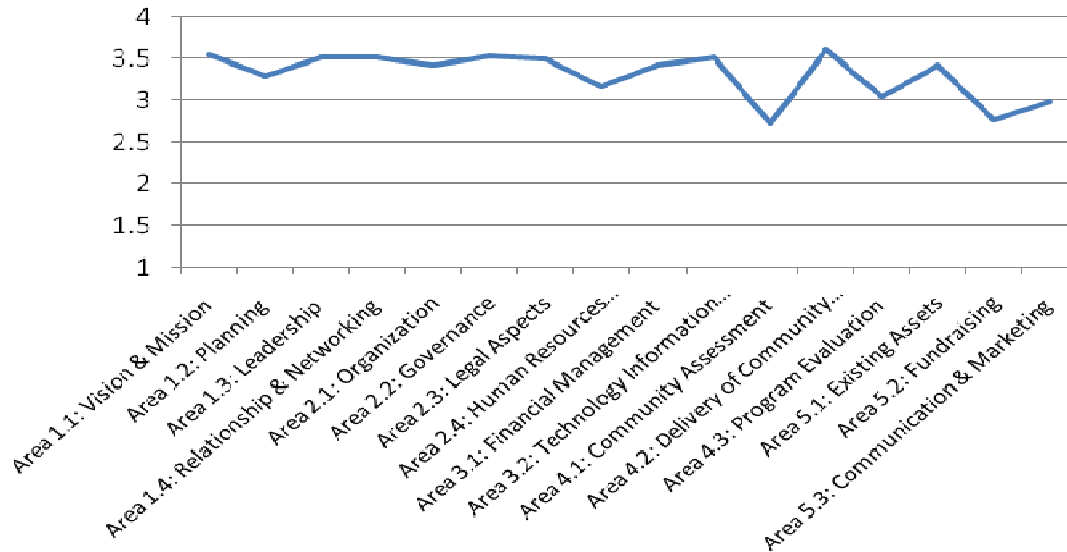
Through the work of Esperanza Trabajando, these 17 organizations established good working relationships with governmental workforce agencies in their regions, thus increasing visibility and positioning themselves for lucrative partnerships and future funding.

##### Organizational assessment and capacity development

Due to the highly specialized nature of this project, the organizations that were initially selected to participate started as well established nonprofit organizations, with some level of expertise in the area of job development for adjudicated and at risk youths. The baseline assessment positions most of the participant organizations at a level

**Table 2.** Baseline of organizational capacity.

	Level one	Level two	Level three	Level four
Participant organizations	1	4	2	10



**Figure 1.** Areas of organizational capacity for Esperanza Trabajando participants – baseline assessment.

three or above, on the continuum of development (Table 2).

However, there are some areas of development that scored lower in terms of organizational capacity at the beginning of the project: community assessment (area: 4.1); fundraising (area: 5.2); and communication/marketing (area: 5.3) (Figure 1). Based on the initial organizational assessment, and on individualized service capacity scores, the training curriculum provided by the Esperanza Trabajando project addressed the following areas: board development; strategic planning; fund development; community assessment/outcome evaluation; and communication/marketing. The final organizational assessment shows a steady increase in all organizational areas of capacity (Figure 2). However, the three areas that scored lowest at the beginning of the project remain the lowest areas of capacity (Figure 2).. A fourth area of concern is the area of program evaluation (area 4.3).

This finding is in agreement with other studies of faith-based and community-based projects/programs that confirm the difficulty of measuring effectiveness of such programs due to a lack of capacity and skills. This leads to consistent reporting and good marketing that would ensure financial sustainability.

At the end of the project, the growth dynamics (Table 3) indicate equal maturation and growth<sup>3</sup>: 6 organizations

<sup>3</sup> For the purpose of this evaluation, we defined organizational movement on the continuum as: (1) organizational growth = when organizational

matured within their initial levels of capacity (35%); and 6 grew to at least the next level of capacity (35%) See (Table 3). In some instances, we also notice a slight drop (stagnation) that is consistent with the increased awareness that leads to a more accurate self-assessment: five of the 17 organizations finished the project at a lower level of capacity than the level they initially assessed themselves to be (29%) Figure 3a.

When analyzing the organizational growth patterns it is important to consider each cohort's trends: Cohort one represents the first group of organizations enrolled in the project in year one (Figure 3b); cohort two represents the group of organizations recruited/enrolled in year two (Figure 3c); and cohort three represents the group of organizations recruited/enrolled in the project in year three (Figure 3d).

For year one and year two the pattern reveals a steadier maturation and growth trend. For cohort three, major growth shifts alternate with awareness increase that is characteristic of the learning curve (Figure 3d). And that is further validated by the goal achievement trends for all three cohorts.

capacity increases, and the organization moves up at least one level on the Continuum of Capacity; (2) organizational maturation = when organizational capacity improves, and the organization performs better within the same level of development; (3) stagnation = when the organization drops slightly within the same level of development; and (4) organizational drop = when the organization drops to a lower level of capacity, as compared to their baseline levels.

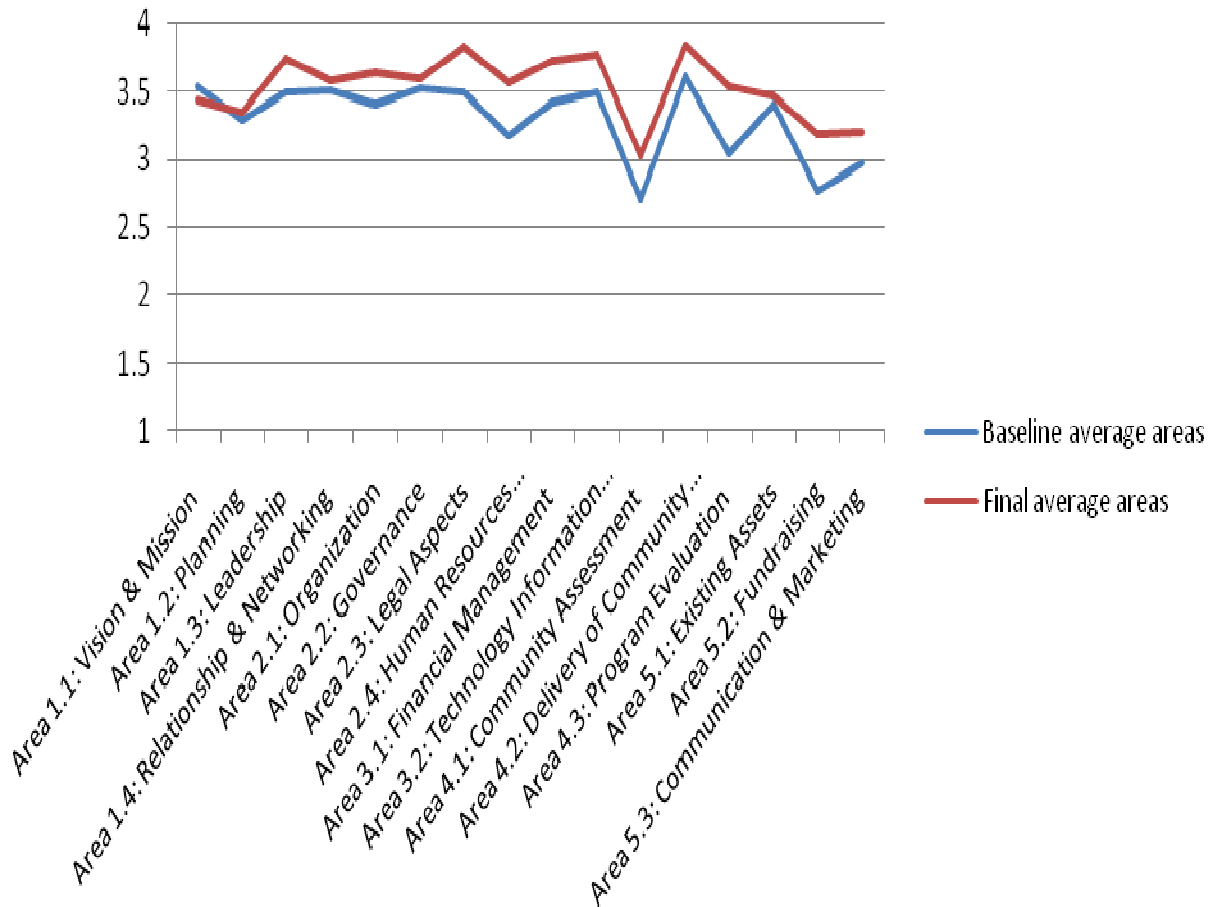


Figure 2. Areas of organizational capacity for Esperanza Trabajando participants – final assessment.

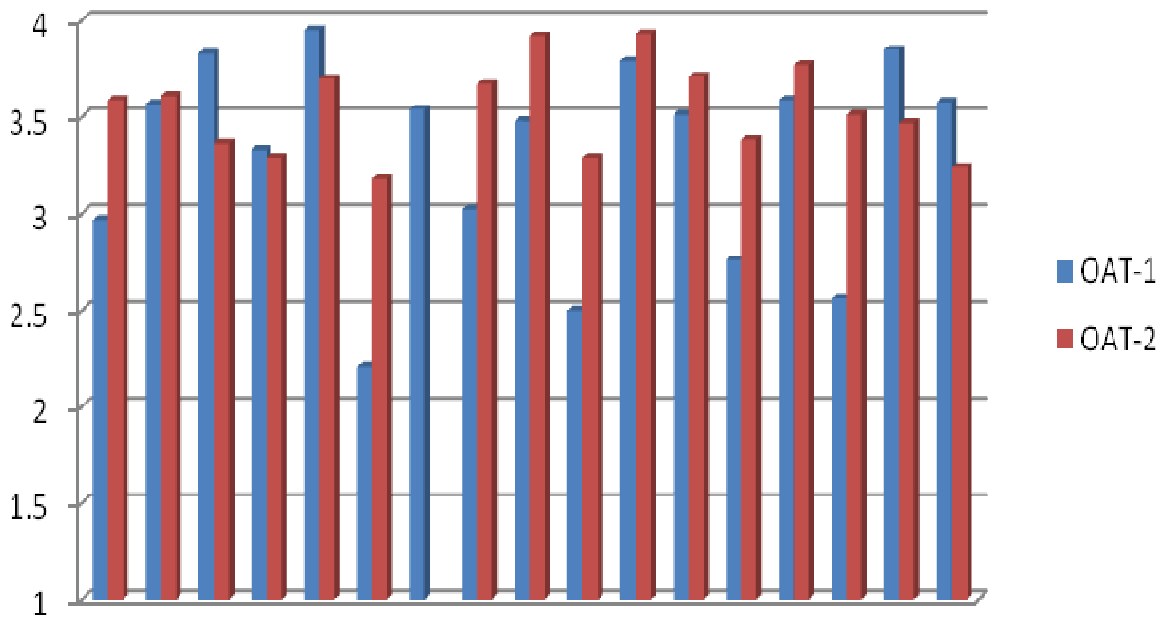


Figure 3a. Organizational growth.

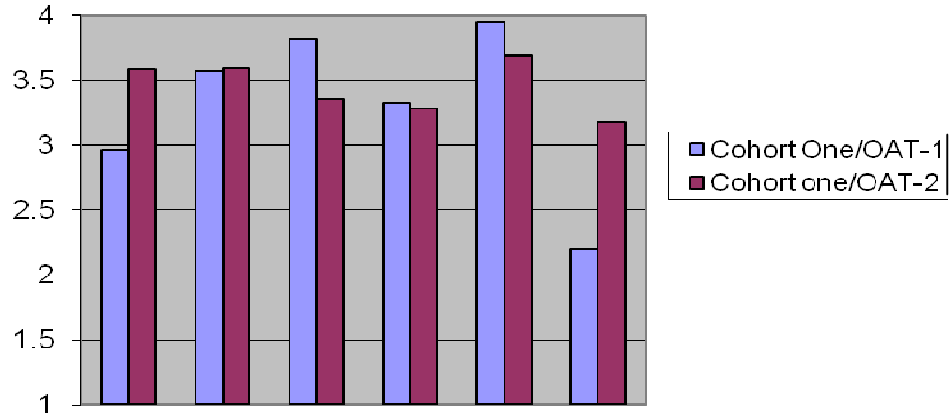


Figure 3b. Cohort one – organizational growth.

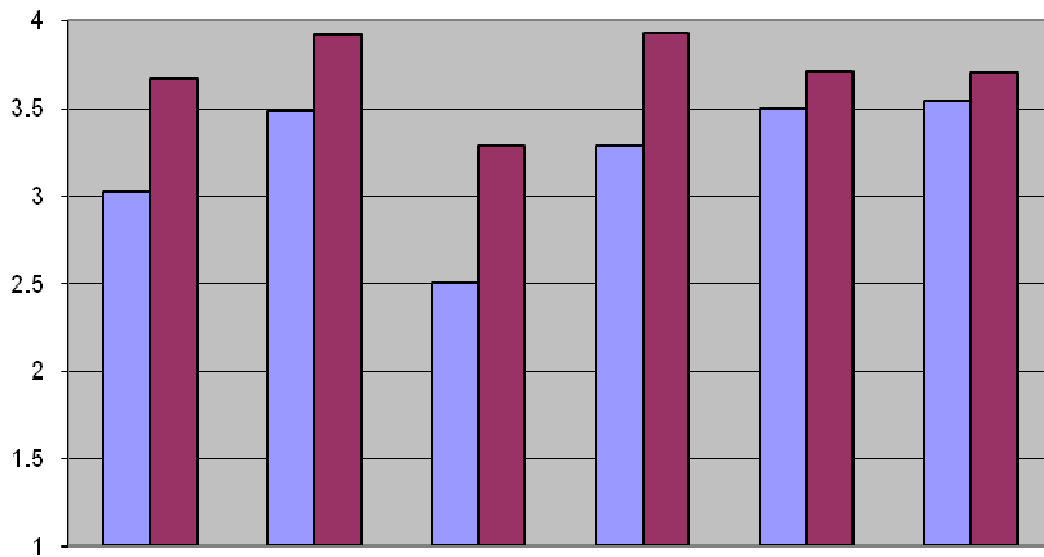


Figure 3c. Cohort two – organizational growth.

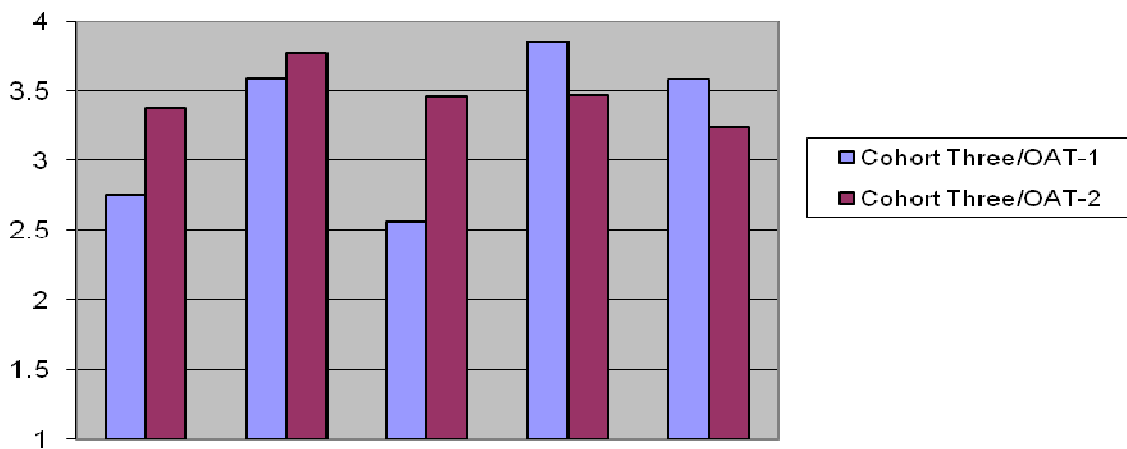


Figure 3d. Cohort three – organizational growth.

**Table 3.** Organizational growth for Esperanza Trabajando organizations.

Organizations	OAT-1	OAT-2	Growth dynamics
1	2.97 = L2	3.59 = L4	L2-L4 – Growth
2	3.57 = L4	3.61 = L4	L4 – Maturation
3	3.83 = L4	3.36 = L3	L4-L3 – Drop
4	3.33 = L3	3.29 = L3	L3 – Stagnation
5	3.95 = L4	3.70 = L4	L4 – Stagnation
6	2.21 = L1	3.18 = L3	L1-L3 – Growth
7*	3.54 = L4	N/A	<i>Maturation</i>
8	3.02 = L3	3.67 = L4	L3-L4 – Growth
9	3.48 = L4	3.92 = L4	L4 – Maturation
10	2.50 = L2	3.29 = L3	L2-L3 – Growth
11	3.79 = L4	3.93 = L4	L4 – Maturation
12	3.51 = L4	3.71 = L4	L4 – Maturation
13	2.76 = L2	3.38 = L3	L2-L3 – Growth
14	3.59 = L4	3.77 = L4	L4 – Maturation
15	2.56 = L2	3.51 = L4	L2-L4 – Growth
16	3.85 = L4	3.47 = L4	L4 – Stagnation
17	3.58 = L4	3.24 = L3	L4-L3 – Drop

\*This organization did not complete the final organizational assessment, due to some internal changes. Based on previous assessments/goal achievement, we consider it matured within its level of development.

## Service capacity and goal achievement

### Service capacity

Two surveys have been administered to all ET participants to measure their initial level of service capacity in the target area (SCS-1) and to establish any changes in their level of capacity as a direct result of training, technical assistance and immediate investment in service delivery (Organizational Exit Surveys). Based on the initial Service Capacity Survey (SCS-1), participant organizations have an adequate (38%) or high expertise (50%) in working with this population group. Initial reasons for entering this project varied from a sudden increase in the crime rate in their area (19%); and an opportunity to collaborate with other agencies providing similar services (19%); to church support (25%); availability of qualified staff (31%); training provided on specific issues concerning this population (38%); current needs identified by needs assessment studies (44%); and available funding (50%).

However, when asked about specifics related to service capacity required for job training, job development and community reinstatement of at-risk and adjudicated youths, the level of familiarity with intervention models, as well as general knowledge base was not absolutely high. Only 60% of all participant organizations were familiar with legal requirements as prescribed by the grant, in working with adjudicated youths, and a much lower percent (29%) had a reasonable knowledge of legal requirement pertaining to working with at-risk youths. The compassionate care and community preservation inter-

vention models were preferred by most of the participants (50%) – although little familiarity with the specific details of each model was demonstrated in the orientation workshop. The restorative justice approach was preferred by 38% of all participants, while the criminal justice approach was supported by only 6%.

The most prevalent indicators of success for this program, based on participant organizations' responses were: retention rates (79%), followed by program enrolment, employment, continuing education rates (each being defined as a primary success indicator by 64% of all participant organizations) and program participation rates (57%). Interestingly enough, the most difficult aspect of the work that participants initially indicated was post-placement follow-up (39%) and retention and placement (30%).

The Organizational Exit Survey was administered to all 17 active organizations at the end of the project. Thirteen organizations completed and returned the Organizational Exit Survey (response rate: 76%). According to the *Organizational Exit Survey*, 60% of all respondent organizations started new programs as a result of their participation in the project. More than half of all ET participants focus on adjudicated youths (55% serve between 25-100 adjudicated youths); while an almost equal percentage (54%) serve between 25-200 at-risk youths.

Fifty percent of all participant ET organizations developed joint initiatives (with other organizations and agencies in their region) during the past 12 months; an equal percentage (50%) of our respondents wrote at least one joint request for funding during the past 12 months.



Most of the ET organizations increased their referral networks by adding 1-5 new organizations (46%); 18% added up to 20 organizations to their networks, while another 18% added between 20-30 new organizations. Nine percent significantly increased their networks, adding in excess of 30 new organizations to their referral lists. The employer networks, directly supporting job development efforts, also increased significantly: 25% of the ET participants added 1-5 new employers to their current networks; 17% added 6-10 new employers; 8% added 11-20 new employers; 33% added between 21-30 new employers, while 17% added over 30 new employers – significantly increasing the employment opportunities for the youths served. One of the findings of the focus groups/interviews conducted with participant organizations mentioned that employer cultivation events/meetings were a priority for most of our participants, with the methods used to invite more employers and businesses to join their network varying from direct contact, to fund raising events, and job fairs organized by the ET participants.

Overall, 42% of the ET participants stated that the ET project contributed to improving their service capacity. 42% also noted that one of the core gains from their participation in the ET project is better service provided for the at-risk youths in their region; while 67% stated that they are now having the capacity to better serve the adjudicated youths. More detailed gains include: the use of a thorough community needs assessment for program development (17%); increased organizational capacity (33%); increased funding opportunities (17%); increased funding (25%); training opportunities for staff (42%). As a long-term gain, 58% of all participant organizations consider that the ET project created visibility and credibility for them among other nonprofit organizations serving the same target population; and 50% stated that they are now part of a better job development organizational network.

### Goal achievement

The Esperanza Trabajando project aimed to support faith-based and community-based organizations providing services to at-risk and adjudicated youths (age 18-34) toward a better reinstatement in their communities. Towards this end, the project aimed to enroll a minimum of 2,500 targeted youths in the program over the three year period of the project. Of these, it was expected that:

- i) A minimum of 2,100 (84%) will visit One-Stop Career Centers for assessment and preparation of an individual development plan.
- ii) Based on the abilities and interests of the youths, an estimated 1,680 (67%) will participate in career-oriented education and training services through their local workforce development systems.
- iii) A minimum of 1,512 (60%) participants will success-

gain employment or go for higher education.

The final results for the main success indicators (enrollment, job placement, job training and remedial education; and job retention) exceed the initial expectations. Based on the individualized benchmarks for each participant organizations, enrolment goals have been exceeded (109% achievement); and 91% of the people enrolled in the project received/participated in job training and remedial education. Although individualized benchmarks for job placement indicate a lower achievement rate (64% of all participants have been placed in employment), when compared to the initial federal benchmark, the results indicate 149% achievement, with 2,261 people securing employment, of which 1,938 (86%) retained employment for more than 90 days (Table 4).

The goal achievement trends are different by cohort and by time spent in the project. The goal achievement rates for each cohort reveal the fact that there is a 90-120 days learning curve that affects the immediate results for each organization on the core indicators – low achievement rates during the first 3-4 months in the project.

The Exit Organizational Survey also reveals a high rate of goal achievement, with 52% of all participants by the end of the project securing and maintaining employment for more than 6 months<sup>4</sup> (by the end of the project); and another 15% continuing their education. One additional indicator of success, that measures the impact of this program on the overall standard of living for the youths served, is the ability of ET participants to secure housing, although only 4 organizations of the 13 that completed and returned the Organizational Exit Survey did help their clients with securing housing (31% of all respondents). They provided housing for 133 participants, or 8.5% of the total number of youths currently served by the participant organizations.

## IMPACT ON POPULATION SERVED

### Client's perspective on project effectiveness

To better measure the effectiveness of this project, we asked project participants to share with us some of the expectations they have from the project (through an entry client survey). This entry survey was distributed to all ET organizations, and they were instructed to administer it to their clients, when they enter the program. However, a very limited number of surveys were completed and returned to the evaluators of the project (56 surveys returned). We will report the main findings from this initial survey, as it does provide a tentative baseline to further

<sup>4</sup> Job retention, by the federal grant standards, was measured at 3 months from the employment date. In the exit organizational survey, participant organizations were asked to indicate how many of their *current* clients are employed and maintained their jobs for a minimum of 6 months, thus establishing a higher standard than the one required by the federal grant definition.

**Table 4.** Goal achievement rates Y1-Y4.

	Cumulative Y1-Y2		Year Three		Year Four*		Cumulative Total		
	Number	% of benchmark	Number	% of benchmark	Number	% of benchmark	Nr	% of bench mark	% of federal benchmark
Enrolment	2018	106	1208	107	324	101	3550	109	142
One-Stop Assessment	1791	89	1180	98	310	96	3248	91	155
Job Training/Remedial ed.	1743	86	1143	95	318	98	3236	91	183
Job Placement	1299	64	736	61	228	70	2261	64	149
Job Retention	1089	84	610	83	183	80	1938	86	154

\*Six months extension was granted to the intermediary organization, due to previous delays and existing funding.

understand the impact of the project on the population served. The demographics of this initial group that completed the entry survey are presented in Table 5.

The majority of our respondents are male (59%), under 25 years old (71%); Hispanic/Latino (46%), having some high-school education (47%), and being employed at the time they filled out this survey (55%). However, when asked about their employment history, 95% of the respondents had a job in the past. This finding signals the significant increase in unemployment rates among our participants (a drop of 40% in employment status). The main obstacles they identified in keeping former jobs, and being able to find new ones appear to be closely linked to their criminal record, and accessibility of resources – lack of transportation, lack of health insurance/benefits, and low pay. When comparing the perception of clients with prior work experience on main obstacles, with the perceptions of the ones with no work experience, the findings are puzzling: only 6% of the clients with no prior employment history consider criminal record an obstacle, and only 8% identify transportation as a barrier. However, for this latter group, criminal record, lack of transportation and lack of proper education are the top identified bar-

riers. Four percent of the clients that were never employed did not see any job opportunities (most likely referring to jobs that provide benefits and a decent pay) (Table 6).

When asked why did they choose to participate in the Esperanza Trabajando programs, the main reasons listed by our respondents were closely linked to employment needs: 50% entered the project to find a job; 25% considered the opportunities for job training (learning interview skills) when entering the project; and 45% were pursuing help in continuing their education. Two percent were mandated to participate in the project by the Criminal Justice System. Fifty-nine percent considered this project as instrumental in becoming better persons.

For the exit client satisfaction survey each organization received 50 surveys for their respective participants (a total of 850 surveys). A number of 431 surveys have been returned (response rate: 51%). Main demographic data for the participant youths are included in Table 7.

At the time they completed the survey, most of the participant youths have been enrolled in the Esperanza Trabajando program for 6-12 months (43%); 28% were enrolled in the program for less than 6 months (making it difficult to discuss

retention); while 22% were enrolled in the program for 1-2 years. Only 5% of the respondents were enrolled in the program for more than 2 years.

In regards to their achievements while in this program, we categorized them as employment (employment related) and continuing education (Table 8).

Of the 156 total youths that applied for a job, 94 (60%) found a job. When considering the types of jobs that ET participants most frequently get (as revealed by the final data on types of jobs they), the most prevalent areas of employment are: general labor (18%) and service (15%). The types of jobs available to adjudicated and at-risk youths changed over the three years of the project, as presented in Table 9.

The findings indicate significant increase in the number of job placements/employment positions available for ET participants in year two, as well as significant increase in specific areas, such as sales and construction (positions double in year two); management (from 3 to 47 positions); service (from 11 to 63); customer service (from 9 to 26) and food industry (from 6 to 21). Clerical and contractual jobs declined in the second year, but clerical positions increased again in the third

**Table 5.** Entry survey – demographics (N = 56, 4 participant sites).

Demographics		Percentage
Gender	Male	59
	Female	41
Age	18-21	41
	22-25	30
	26-34	13
	No response	16
Ethnicity	Hispanic/Latino	46
	White/Non-Hispanic	18
	African-American	25
	Other	9
	No response	2
Education	Elementary (8 classes)	2
	Some high school	47
	High school diploma or equivalent	31
	Some college	16
	College diploma	2
	No response	2
Occupational status	Employed	55
	Unemployed	38
	No response	7

**Table 6.** Main obstacles to finding/maintaining employment for clients with prior work history as compared to clients with no work history entering the ET project.

Main obstacles in finding/maintaining employment	Percentage	
	Previous employment	No employment history
Language	2	0
Criminal record	20	6
Lack of qualifications/proper education	9	8
Lack of transportation	25	8
No benefits/health insurance	20	N/A
Low pay	45	N/A
Completing education/time constraints	N/A	2
No job opportunities	N/A	4

**Table 7.** Exit survey – demographics (N = 431; 9 participant sites).

Demographics		Percentage
Gender	Male	62
	Female	38
Age	18-21	44
	22-25	28
	26-34	25
	Age groups outside the project scope	3
Ethnicity	Hispanic/Latino	70
	White/Non-Hispanic	11
	African-American	9
	Other	7
	No response	3

**Table 7.** Contd.

Education	Elementary (8 classes)	2
	Some high school	41
	High school diploma or equivalent	34
	Some college	12
	College diploma	6
	Vocational training	4
	No response	1
Occupational status	Employed	59
	Unemployed	26
	Full time student	15

**Table 8.** Main achievements for youths participating in the Esperanza Trabajando program.

Main achievements	Percentage of respondents (%)
<b>Continuing education achievements</b>	
Enrolled in a GED program	20
Received a high school diploma	11
Enrolled in college	17
Admitted to a vocational program	7
<b>Preparing for/obtaining employment</b>	
Participated in a job training program	28
Applied for a job in the area	36
Got a job	51
Maintained employment for at least 6 months	17

**Table 9.** Dynamics of jobs employing and clients, over the three years of the project.

Types of jobs employing ET participants	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Sales	13	29	25
Construction	7	17	12
Packer-Mover/Stocker	22	29	32
Technician	5	12	8
Mechanic/Operations	11	27	27
Management	3	47	13
Cashier	4	19	9
Service	11	63	71
Maintenance	14	14	11
Customer Service	9	26	22
Apprentice	4	5	7
Labor	52	83	49
Food related	6	21	25
Medical Related	0	3	4
Clerical	14	8	19
Military/Security	1	3	17
Contractor	4	1	2
Production/Manufacturing	0	1	11
Other	5	19	4
Total	185	427	368

year of the project. The third year, overall, shows some significant decline in employment, with less people being hired in construction (data show a 30% decrease); in management (over 70% drop); as laborers (40% drop), or cashiers (over 50% drop). On the other hand, clerical positions, military and manufacturing positions show a significant increase (58% percent increase for clerical jobs; 82% increase in military positions and 91% increase in manufacturing jobs).

Beyond immediate employment achievements, when asked how they would characterize the overall services provided by the project, 53% of clients found the services excellent; 32% found it very good; and 13% found it good. In determining what are the main factors affecting client satisfaction, we explored potential correlations between gender and levels of satisfaction. When opinion about quality of services was examined by gender, it was found that among those clients who found the quality of services excellent, 54% were male; among those who found the quality very good, 75% were male; and among those who found the quality good, 63% were male. These differences by gender were statistically significant (Table 10).

We further analyzed levels of satisfaction with project coordinators. 54% of the clients characterized the relationships they had with the project coordinators as excellent. 31% stated that the relationship was very good and 14% stated that the relationship was good. When opinion about quality of relationship with project management coordinators was examined by gender, it was found that among those clients who found the quality of relationship excellent, 56% were male; among those who found the quality very good, 72% were male; and among those who found the quality good, 61% were male. These differences by gender were statistically significant (Table 11).

As job development programs depend on the networks developed by service providers, and the coordination of these services, we also asked participants to rate their relationship with government workforce officials. Although the one-on-one interviews with selected participants did identify governmental workforce agencies as difficult to relate to, and at times hindering their community reinstatement, in the client satisfaction surveys, 29% of the clients described the type of relationship established with government workforce officials as a direct result of their participation in this project as excellent; 35% found it very good and 29% found it good.

When opinion about quality of services was examined by gender, it was found that among those clients who found the quality of services excellent, 58 percent were male; among those who found the quality very good, 65 percent were male; and among those who found the quality good, 72% were male (Table 12).

In assessing the overall clients' satisfaction, we also measured clients' perception on the extent to which the

project met their individual goals. Fifty percent of the clients perceived a 100% completion of individual goals as linked to their participation in the program; and another 37% considered the project instrumental in achieving over three-thirds of their goals (75%).

However, for thirteen percent of the clients, the project was perceived as only contributing to the achievement of half or less than half of their individual goals (Table 13).

Our respondents identified a number of barriers as affecting their capacity to achieve the initial goals and complete successfully the community reinsertion program Table 14. The predominance of dead-end jobs, temporary positions, as well as seasonal contracts as potential employment for this group was considered one of the main barriers by over 25% of our respondents. Fifteen percent identified language barriers as significantly affecting their chances, while 11% identified a general lack of trust in this population, with a direct impact on employers' willingness to hire them, and work with them to ensure job retention and further individual development. An overall lack of genuine interest in this group was signaled by our respondents that identified the discrepancy between the needs of this population and the job training provided (8%) as well as by the lack of collaboration and support between service providers and government workforce officials, to best serve these clients (Table 14).

At the time the clients' satisfaction survey was completed, the employment status of our respondents varied between secure employment (for more than 3 months) – 47%; and unemployment with no immediate plans (3%). It is encouraging, however, to notice that from the 431 participants that completed the survey, more than half were employed (51%); another 12% were in the process of being employed; and 37% were enrolled in some form of continuing education. Approximately, 14% were completing a job training program, to increase their employment potential/marketability (Table 15).

When achievement (got a job) was examined by gender, it was found that male clients fared better than women. 64% of clients who found jobs were male. This difference by gender is not statistically significant. When this achievement was examined by education of clients, it was found that among those who found jobs, 39% were clients who had a high school diploma, and 38% had some high school education. The differences in this achievement by education were not statistically significant.

### **Reinsertion and recidivism rates for Esperanza Trabajando participants**

One of the most significant outcomes of this project is the successful reintegration of adjudicated and at-risk youths in their communities. One indicator of success is a low recidivism rate, with fewer youths reentering the criminal

**Table 10.** Quality of overall services by gender.

Quality of overall ET services	% of all respondents	Affirmative response by gender	
		Women (%)	Men (%)
Excellent	53	46	54
Very good	32	25	75
Good	13	37	63
Fair	1	0	100
Poor	1	0	100

**Table 11.** Quality of relationship with project coordinators by gender.

Quality of relationship with project coordinators	% of all responses	Affirmative response by gender	
		Women (%)	Men (%)
Excellent	54	45	55
Very good	31	27	73
Good	14	39	61
Fair	<1	50	50
Poor	<1	0	100

**Table 12.** Quality of relationships with government workforce officials, by gender.

Quality of relationship with government workforce officials	% of all responses	Affirmative response by gender	
		Women (%)	Men (%)
Excellent	29	42	58
Very good	35	35	65
Good	29	28	72
Fair	5	56	44
Poor	2	17	83

**Table 13.** Extent to which the Project met Client Goals.

Level of goal achievement	Percent of clients
Total (100% goal achievement)	50
To a great extent (75% goal achievement)	37
Partial (50% goal achievement)	10
Low (25% goal achievement)	2.7
Very low (Less than 5% goal achievement)	<1

justice system, as they start working and developing personal responsibility and improved life skills. When looking at recidivism rates for the youths enrolled in Esperanza Trabajando programs, these rates are significantly lower than the national averages for similar population groups. We do see a progression from 3.3% in year one/two, to 4.67% in year three, and a cumulative rate of 6.44% - yet all these rates are low, speaking to the success of the Esperanza Trabajando programs Table 16.

Based on the Organizational Exit Survey, of the 13 organizations that completed the survey ten reported re-

cidivism data (Table 16). The recidivism rates for the reporting organizations varied between 0-2 and 32%. However, the average recidivism rate for all respondents is 7% - very close to the recidivism rate as reflected by the data based on all participant organizations and the youths they served (6.44%). We can therefore conclude that although for some organizations keeping youths employed and out of the criminal justice system, overall the service capacity developed by the Esperanza Trabajando project allowed participant organizations to decrease recidivism and create an optimal environment

**Table 14.** Main barriers identified by clients.

<b>Barriers</b>	<b>Participants identifying these barriers (%)</b>
Language Barriers	14.6
Cultural Barriers	7
Lack of real job opportunities	25
Lack of trust	11.4
Type of training provided did not address personal needs	8.4
Lack of collaboration from governmental agencies and other employment organizations	8
Other	11

**Table 15.** Status of clients.

<b>Current status</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
Securely employed for more than 3 month	47
Securely employed for less than 3 month	3.7
In the process of being employed	11.6
Continuing my education to secure a high school diploma	3.7
Continuing my education to secure a GED	9
Enrolled in college level classes towards an associate degree (2-year college degree)	13
Enrolled in college (4-year college degree)	7
In the process of going back to school (interviewing with local educational institutions)	4.6
Completing a job training program	13.7
No employment or continuing education plans in place	3
Other	4.9

**Table 16.** Recidivism rates for adjudicated youth enrolled in the ET programs.

	<b>Cumulative Y1-Y2</b>	<b>Year three</b>	<b>Year four</b>	<b>Cumulative total</b>
Recidivism	3.3%	4.67%	1.56%	6.44%

for community reinstatement.

Recidivism rates together with job retention rates represent the best indicator of long-term success. However, we can only infer immediate success based on these findings, as further longitudinal monitoring of recidivism and job retention rates is needed for more accurate impact evaluation.

### **IMPACT ON PARTICIPANT ORGANIZATIONS**

To measure the impact of the Esperanza Trabajando project on participant organizations, we used both quantitative and qualitative tools. Participants were asked to evaluate each training session (training evaluation forms

were distributed at each training session/event); selected participants were invited to reflect on the impact of the project on their own organizational success (a total of 6 focus groups and 5 extensive interviews were conducted during the three years of the project); and all participant organizations were invited to fill out an organizational exit survey, that allowed them to evaluate various aspects of the project, as they pertained to their own organization/work.

The three main provisions of this project for all its participants were: training; technical assistance and funding. We will discuss the participants' satisfaction with training and technical assistance, the impact of funding on fund diversification and development, and the overall recommendations participants provided for future similar

projects.

### Satisfaction with training

Over the duration of the project, participant organizations were provided with 50 different training sessions (events), for a total of 355 training hours. The training sessions were overall rated high by all participants (satisfaction levels vary between 80 and 95% for very satisfied).

For the first year, the training topics were chosen based on the OAT results and on the specifics of the grant; in the second and third year, participants' feedback contributed to selecting the topics for training and technical assistance. One training that was offered as a response to participant organizations' demand for support in working with the grant-specific target population was the training on case management, that prepared program participants to work with each individual case, and record and monitor cases in accordance with the requirement of the grant. For year one, a total of 49 representatives from the 21 organizations participated in this training; 32 returned the completed training evaluation forms (response rate: 65%), including 11 program directors (34.4%); 11 case managers (34.4%); 4 job developers (12.5%) and 6 other program staff – recruiters, trainers, intake workers (18.5%). This particular training session was perceived as relevant or highly relevant by 75% of all participants, with the other 25% appreciating the training as somewhat effective. Group discussions as well as applied examples were mentioned as potentially improving similar future trainings. Informed by the training evaluations, the case management training was added to the ET curriculum for year-two and year-three.

Two other notable training experiences for ET participants were: the national training events, focusing on advocacy and outcome measurement (12 h over three years); as well as the Esperanza Capacity Institute (ECI), that added a training option for more advanced/specialized organizations on networking and coalition building. This intensive 2-day training provided more advanced ET participants with 7.5 h of training exploring networking and social capital and the importance of collaboration for fund development and diversification of services. The other two tracks offered at the ECI provided basic training in strategic planning and organizational development (6 h); and fund development (7.5 h) plus an option of a specialized program development session on 6 different topics.

Besides these 355 h of training provided for all ET participants, each site benefited of customized technical assistance sessions aiming to provide individual support for organizational development and program development/service capacity building. Monthly support was provided to all participant organizations, both by regional consultants, and by the national management team. Regional consultants provided both on-site (4 h/month) and phone consultation (2 h/month). A total of 10,183 h of

technical assistance was provided to the 17 sites during the 4 years of the project – which represents an average of 3,395 h per project year.

### Participant organizations' evaluation of the Esperanza Trabajando project

A number of 10 focus groups and 5 interviews with ET participants were conducted over the project's 3-year time span. The participants' feedback can be grouped in three major categories:

- 1) Feedback on the grant requirements
- 2) Feedback on communication and support provided as part of the project;
- 3) Feedback and recommendations on ways to strengthen and improve similar projects.

1) Grant requirements were seen as somewhat disconnected from the reality of the target population. The following aspects were common in most of the participants' comments on this matter:

- The definition of success tended to favor full time employment – ignoring other achievements that are notable steps towards independence and autonomy for this population group – continuing education; part time jobs, as well as vocational training.
- The employment benchmark did not take into account the economic stringencies, therefore setting some organizations and their clients up for failure.
- Retention rates measured at 90 days do not actually measure success. For this population group, retention should be measured over an extended period of time, with follow-up at 6 months, one year and three years.
- The focus being on job development, other important aspects involved in community reinsertion and reintegration were overlooked – little emphasis being given to substance abuse issues, recovery programs, housing and child care needs, although these are aspect that could impair overall reinstatement and employment efforts.
- The amount of recording and reporting required was unrealistic and disproportionate with the amount of support provided for these organizations.

### Communication and support provided to all project participants

The feedback on communication and support varied from one region to another. As each region was assigned a regional consultant, much of the participants' feedback actually relates back to the specific consultant for their area. One recurrent theme is related to the change in approach (from the intermediary organization) from a supportive, team-based model, to a more demanding, grant-lead model.



However, regionally this aspect changes – from appreciating the continuous support and hand-holding provided by the intermediary organization, through the regional consultant; to expressing frustration with the evident lack of response from both consultant and national management, in regards to identified areas of weakness for specific organizations.

### **Feedback and recommendations provided by project participants**

Based on all our focus group discussions, at the end of the project, the following recommendations have been provided by program participants:

- Less emphasis on quantitative indicators of success (employment and retention rates) and more emphasis on the training and reinstatement process needed by this specific population group. It is worth mentioning here that in the Organizational Exit Survey, the quantitative approach/definition of success was identified by more than a third of our respondents as the main obstacle to a more effective approach to job development, in their organizations (36%).
- More rigorous monitoring and follow-up by regional coordinators, once areas of weakness/struggle have been identified. One participant mentioned that it became clear they are facing lots of challenges in placing their participants in full-time jobs – yet nothing specifically was done by the regional coordinator to help them with this specific challenge.
- More organization-specific indicators of success should be considered in measuring effectiveness: one organization discussed their low achievement – as determined by the grant-based definition (full-time employment with a minimum of 3 months retention) and compared it with high achievement rates in other areas such as part-time job placement for longer than 90 days (which, in turn creates work experience and further positions the participants for better employment opportunities); and continuing education (a majority of their participants were taking GED classes, were enrolled in vocational programs, and even in some college-level classes). However, based on the strict grant requirements, these elements of capacity building they were really successful with, did not count in analyzing their overall effectiveness in job development for the target population.
- Better connection between such projects and other support programs for substance abuse; housing; transportation; child care; and life skills training. Due to the specific characteristics of the population targeted by this project, better support services are needed to empower the youths and ensure long-term, sustainable success through employment and education. As one participant enrolled in the ET program noticed: “We are expected to get a job, be there on time, never miss a day of work, and

all these should somehow come naturally... Yet I never had anyone around me holding a stable job... I don't know how to do that.” (Client interview, 2007)

- Consistent communication between the intermediary organization/national management team and the ET participants. It was noticed that although initially some of the organizations considered this grant as an opportunity to further collaborate with the intermediary organization and affect policy changes, no dialogue on policy issues affecting the population served has been initiated at any point during the three years of the project. Including panel discussions and roundtables that will allow participant organizations to share their experiences, challenges and best practices in job development and community reinstatement for adjudicated and at-risk youths will have added tremendously to the long-term benefits of this project.
- Combining federal funding with state and local funding to provide better staff support – for most of the organizations, staffing resources as well as training/development constitutes a major concern. One full-time coordinator of the ET project at each site was not enough for the magnitude of the project and the stringent reporting requirements. One great resource, recognized as such by all participant organizations, was the reporting/IT coordinator who provided hands-on support and follow-up to all case managers/project coordinators as they recorded their progress using the ETO software.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Esperanza Trabajando project achieved high rates of success, with over 100% goal achievement in program enrollment rates, over 60% goal achievement in job placement rates, and over 80% goal achievement in job retention rates, when considering the self-established benchmarks of the project. When considering the federal benchmarks established for this grant, the success rates are even higher, with all major indicators achieved above expected rates.

The grant set up to (1) build organizational capacity for the project participants, through training, technical assistance and funding; (2) increase service capacity, in the area of job training and job development for at-risk (18-24 years old) and adjudicated (18-34 years old) youths; and (3) positively affect community reinstatement, while decreasing recidivism rates.

The organizational capacity increased significantly, with all participant organizations operating at level-three or above on the Continuum of Capacity, by the end of the project. The organizational assessment informed training and technical assistance, targeting weaker organizational areas and allowing for individualized organizational support. The service capacity increased as well, with all participant organizations becoming well-established job development service providers in their respective regions. The client satisfaction survey shows high rates of satis-

faction with services provided, proving intangible levels of success and high quality of service. Of the participant organizations, one is actively involved in policy formulation in the area of job development and community reinsertion programs; two organizations became regional mentors, providing a model of best practice for other start-up organizations in the region; one organization emerged as a solid job development program in the faith-based sector, achieving high levels of credibility and visibility among all service providers in the area; and four well-established job development agencies expanded their scope and developed new programs for their target population. The impact of the project is best seen in the low rates of recidivism for the youths served – significantly lower than national rates for similar population groups.

Some of the limitations of this project appear in the predominantly quantitative definitions of success, as well as rigid time constraints placed by the grant. Measuring job retention at 90 days for this particular population group (adjudicated and at-risk youths) is not a safe indicator of success, as job loss can occur after the initial 90 days. No funding for additional follow-up was accessible for this project. Additional longitudinal studies will allow a more accurate measurement of the degree of community reinstatement as compared to recidivism rates over a three-year follow-up time period.

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