

## CHAPTER II

### OVERVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE ON ONE-STOP SERVICE CENTERS

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In recent years, states and communities have begun to implement and test a variety of strategies designed to increase low-income families' access to work supports. There has been a focus on increasing access to employment and supportive services through increased coordination across service delivery systems, such as workforce development systems and welfare programs (U.S. General Accounting Office 2002b). In particular, many states have made an effort to co-locate and coordinate services through One-Stop career centers established under the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA). Co-locating a broad range of services and benefit programs in One-Stops may increase convenience for customers, because the customers can apply for multiple programs in a single visit, rather than having to travel to the offices of several agencies. Customers also may be able to access information about various programs more easily in One-Stops and thus may learn about services and programs that they would not have otherwise known about. Moreover, when services are coordinated across programs, customers may be more readily linked to the range of services they need. For example, states have reported efforts to coordinate services in One-Stop centers that include (1) formal linkages (for example, memoranda of understanding), (2) informal linkages (such as referrals), (3) coordinated planning, (4) shared intake and enrollment, (5) integrated case management, (6) shared customer tracking, (7) and shared performance measurement (U.S. General Accounting Office 2002b).

This chapter provides an overview of findings from selected previous studies about the major barriers to integrating services through WIA One-Stop centers.<sup>7</sup> It also examines strategies that may be useful for enhancing service integration in these centers. To provide a backdrop for understanding the experiences of the four CERCs discussed in this report, particular emphasis is placed on challenges to, and strategies for, co-locating service

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<sup>7</sup>Fieldwork for some of the reviewed studies was conducted before WIA had been fully implemented.

providers and integrating services to increase access to the Food Stamp Program (FSP) and other work supports. The first section describes the challenges to increasing access to programs and services through One-Stop centers, while the second suggests promising strategies for improving access.

Research indicates that rural residents face significant barriers to accessing employment and services because they must travel farther than urban residents to reach agency offices or worksites, and public transportation is often not available (Duncan et al. 2002; and Fletcher et al. 2002). Because service co-location and integration are often seen as having the potential to ease barriers faced by low-income families in rural communities, such as those in which the CERCs are located, where appropriate, we highlight specific challenges and strategies that are relevant to rural settings.

## **CHALLENGES TO INCREASING ACCESS TO FOOD STAMPS AND OTHER WORK SUPPORTS THROUGH ONE-STOP CENTERS**

Prior research has identified factors that may influence participation in the FSP, Medicaid, and other work support programs (Dion and Pavetti 2000; Gleason et al. 2001; Rosso 2001; Schirm and Castner 2002; and U.S. General Accounting Office 1999). In addition, a growing body of research has examined the difficulties involved in providing coordinated services to low-income individuals through One-Stop centers—that is, through physical co-location of service providers. Building on research in both these areas, this section explores some of the challenges to increasing low-income families' access to food stamps and other work supports through the use of One-Stop centers. First, we describe barriers to service co-location. We then we discuss several barriers to service integration within One-Stop centers, including logistical and philosophical constraints; differences in the missions of co-located service providers; differences across programs in performance standards, funding streams, and reporting requirements; and the lack of compatible information systems.

### **Agencies face logistical and philosophical barriers to co-location.**

Agencies that seek to co-locate services in a One-Stop center face the logistical challenges of relocating various partnering agencies and housing them in one office building. In some cases, the facility in which a One-Stop center is located does not have adequate space to accommodate all partners at one time (Pindus et al. 2000; and U.S. General Accounting Office 2002a). In addition, some partnering agencies may have long-term lease contracts that are costly to break, thus making the cost of relocation relatively high for the agency. Alternative strategies to co-location—such as outstationing staff from one agency to another agency on a rotating basis—have been adopted in some cases in which full-time co-location was not an option (U.S. General Accounting Office 2002a). These alternatives have been implemented primarily in collaborations involving the welfare and workforce development agencies. Outstationing staff to One-Stop centers could become increasingly complex and challenging to implement if more partners are added.

Differences in geographic service areas, distances between One-Stop centers and welfare offices, and the location of these offices all pose logistical barriers (U.S. General Accounting Office 2002a). For example, some social service agencies in West Virginia reported a reluctance to coordinate Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) services with One-Stop centers, because of differences in the geographic boundaries of the welfare offices and the One-Stop centers. In some cases, welfare officials were not sure which One-Stop centers had a service area that included the area served by the welfare agency (U.S. General Accounting Office 2002a). In other states, welfare agency officials felt that there was an insufficient number of One-Stop centers to accommodate all TANF customers, or that customers would have to travel long distances to reach the centers. For example, in Alabama, officials reported that there were welfare agency offices, but not One-Stop centers, in every county.

In addition to logistical barriers, some agencies do not want to co-locate their services because they believe they can more effectively serve customers at their own office (U.S. General Accounting Office 2002a). Staff may think that each agency has expertise in its own service area, and that these services can best be provided in separate locations. For example, in some cases, officials from agencies that provide TANF have been reluctant to integrate services with workforce development agencies because they fear that those agencies will not give sufficient priority to addressing the multiple barriers to employment that some TANF recipients face (U.S. General Accounting Office 2002a). Moreover, because of TANF's work requirements and many states' work-first approach to serving TANF customers, few TANF customers may be eligible for training through the workforce development system.

Research indicates, as well, that concerns over "turf" have made collaboration between TANF providers and workforce development staff difficult (Pindus et al. 2000). Such issues also can stem from distrust of other agencies and from the fear of losing agency autonomy. Staff at each agency may resist co-location because they perceive it as a threat to their job security, fearing that their services will no longer be needed. Such fears about job security have been exacerbated in recent years by the decline in TANF caseloads and by the fact that many workforce development services can now be provided through on-line and automated systems (Pindus et al. 2000).

### **Differences in mission among co-located agencies may hamper efforts to integrate services.**

In the absence of a common mission, One-Stop partner agencies may have very different philosophies about how best to serve their customers. For example, an early study of One-Stop centers that have combined TANF and workforce development services prior to enactment of WIA have found that, while welfare reform has been guided by a "work-first" strategy, workforce development staff place greater value on longer-term strategies, such as improving job skills and increasing wages (Pindus et al. 2000). Consequently, workforce development agencies sometimes feel that TANF customers are placed in employment before they have developed the job skills needed to be successful in the labor market. By extension, one can imagine that in a One-Stop setting in which the primary focus is on providing employment services, assessing customers' need for supportive

services (or for basic money to live on) may not receive sufficient attention. Given the competing demands on caseworkers' time, some agencies may be tempted to focus on providing the services that support the mission of their agency and on which the agency's performance will be assessed.

In addition, when One-Stop centers have not implemented a shared-intake system or when the intake process is not comprehensive, each agency participating in the One-Stop is likely to assess customers for the needs that must be met to accomplish its own goals. For example, employment and training service providers are likely to focus on assessing employment-related needs but may not ask customers about their needs for food stamps, medical insurance, and other support services. Moreover, earlier research indicates that even in the welfare office setting, caseworkers do not always provide information and determine eligibility for all the programs for which individuals may qualify (Quint and Widom 2001; and Pavetti et al. 2002). Instead, they may choose to determine eligibility only for the programs for which participants express the greatest need (Quint and Widom 2001). Yet, focus groups reveal that, although customers may not think they have a need for such services as food stamps, they still may be engaging in practices that would suggest otherwise (for example, cutting back on meal portions or eating at other people's homes) (McConnell and Ponza 1999). In a One-Stop setting with no central intake function, customers may not articulate their need for supportive services, such as food assistance or help with transportation, to caseworkers from agencies that focus on, say, employment or education services.

**Differences in funding streams, procedures, performance standards, and reporting requirements across agencies pose barriers to service integration.**

Differences in how program services are defined, funding is allocated, performance is measured, and outcomes are reported can hinder efforts to coordinate services across agencies (Pindus et al. 2000; and U.S. General Accounting Office 2002a). Program rules and requirements often are determined by legislation and may not allow for a great deal of flexibility at the local level. In such cases, coordination may be difficult, since each agency likely will define "success" differently (U.S. General Accounting Office 2002a). For example, co-located programs may have different eligibility criteria, which can pose a challenge to service coordination, because public agencies may be required to reimburse the funding agency if they serve customers who are ineligible for their programs (Pindus et al. 2000). Similarly, agencies that receive funding based on their ability to meet certain performance standards may be less inclined to refer customers to other agencies or to accept referrals if they cannot be assured of positive outcomes on certain measures (Pindus et al. 2000). Reporting requirements may cause agencies to be reluctant to refer customers to other service providers unless they can be sure of receiving the outcome data that must be reported to funders in a timely way. Research suggests that keeping track of performance indicators for multiple programs in a One-Stop setting can be overwhelming for agency staff and can even foster competition among programs (U.S. General Accounting Office 2002b).

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**Incompatible information systems can hinder agencies' efforts to share information.**

Agency policies that restrict information sharing due to customer confidentiality rules may hamper coordination by creating barriers to sharing customer records through information systems (Pindus et al. 2000). In the absence of these barriers, partnering agencies could use shared information systems to access customer information from other agencies' databases—for identifying customer needs, determining eligibility, or verifying participation in program activities (Pindus et al. 2000; and U.S. General Accounting Office 2002a). In this way, customers would not have to reproduce the same documentation and verification multiple times when they apply for more than one service or benefit program. In addition, shared information can facilitate discussion of specific cases across agencies and thus enable staff to work together to resolve issues that customers may be facing (Pindus et al. 2000).

However, the experiences of One-Stops that aim to coordinate service delivery between TANF and workforce development service providers suggest that, often, each agency has developed paperwork and information systems that are unique to its data collection needs (Pindus et al. 2000). In some cases, partnering agencies have made efforts to use common forms and paperwork, but differences between agencies in federal and state reporting requirements often preclude them from further coordination (Pindus et al. 2000; and U.S. General Accounting Office 2002a). Without shared information systems, One-Stop centers are not likely to relieve the burden on customers associated with application processes, because customers may still be required to go through lengthy application processes and provide documentation and verification separately for each program. Moreover, at the same time, agency policies that restrict information sharing due to customer confidentiality rules may impede coordination by creating barriers to sharing customer records through information systems—thus making it difficult to discuss and resolve issues related to individual customers (Pindus et al. 2000).

**STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING ACCESS TO WORK SUPPORTS THROUGH ONE-STOP CENTERS**

Recent research on service integration and participation in work support programs indicates that several strategies may be useful for increasing access to work supports through One-Stop centers. This section discusses the following strategies: (1) developing integrated information systems, (2) providing integrated case management, and (3) using innovative strategies to simplify the application and recertification processes.

**Develop information systems that avoid duplication of effort and ease the burden on customers.**

One-Stop centers that develop integrated information systems in order to determine eligibility for various programs and to verify customer information can reduce duplication of effort across agencies and ease the burden on customers of applying for multiple work supports. For example, a recent study found that sophisticated information systems can aid

the application process for food stamp and Medicaid programs by (1) reducing the burden on customers and staff, and (2) reducing the potential for error on the part of staff (Pavetti et al. 2002). Thus, partner agencies that want to increase program access may also want to develop information systems that either are integrated or interface with one another.

Sophisticated, automated systems that determine eligibility for various programs can help ensure that customer needs are met, even when they are not identified through a thorough needs assessment. One such promising practice is the use of an information system that automatically determines eligibility for all programs for which customers might qualify, without depending on the customers to inform caseworkers of their needs (Pavetti et al. 2002). Subsequently, customers are able to enroll in each of the programs for which the system finds them eligible. Such a system could be particularly beneficial in a One-Stop setting, because caseworkers often are responsible for identifying needs and for linking customers to a broad array of programs and services but face competing demands on their time.

Partnering agencies in One-Stop centers can integrate their information systems so as to automatically identify customers' eligibility for a number of programs and services, all at the same time. The experiences of programs that have fully integrated their eligibility determination systems for the Food Stamp and Medicaid programs demonstrate how sophisticated information management systems can be used to increase access to, and participation in, programs, even when individuals have not sought out the program for which eligibility is determined (Pavetti et al. 2002). For example, some offices have developed their systems in such a way that, when information is entered with which to determine an individual's eligibility for Medicaid, the system will automatically consider that person's eligibility for food stamps, or it may prompt the caseworker to do so.

Another strategy that partnering agencies may use is to allow their information systems to interface with other databases. This strategy would likely work particularly well when full system integration is cost-prohibitive or infeasible due to different reporting requirements, or when partnering agencies wish to supplement an integrated system. For example, some state agencies have allowed their databases to interface with those of departments of vital statistics, labor, and motor vehicles, in order to verify information on customer age, citizenship status, income, and value of assets (Pavetti et al. 2002). Similarly, other states have automated eligibility systems that interface with the child support collection system and the unemployment insurance system; they can determine whether a customer receives income from child support or has experienced recent changes in earnings or employment status, respectively. By sharing access to customer records across agencies, One-Stop partners can reduce the burden on customers of having to verify information multiple times. In this way, agencies can ensure that the benefits of participation in various work support programs outweigh the costs of the application and recertification process.

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**Provide integrated case management to ensure a more efficient approach to service delivery.**

One-Stop centers can use comprehensive needs assessments and integrated case management to provide a more efficient approach to service delivery. Two approaches to integrated case management explored here are (1) training caseworkers to be “generalists,” and (2) organizing services by function.

One-Stops that conduct a comprehensive assessment of customer needs at a single access point not only may provide customers with a more seamless approach to service delivery, but also may reduce the frustrations caused by a complex system with numerous overlapping services and requirements. Historically, customers seeking services through multiple agencies have felt frustrated by the challenges of navigating a complex system that has multiple programs, varying access points, and separate intake and assessment procedures for each program (Pindus et al. 2000; and U.S. General Accounting Office 2002b). Families often find it both difficult and confusing to deal with multiple caseworkers; their frustrations could partially be alleviated if caseworkers shared information with one another through regular communication or through effective management information systems (Pavetti et al. 2002). This problem may also be resolved through the use of a “primary case manager” who is responsible for helping customers navigate the system and coordinate service delivery (U.S. General Accounting Office 2002b).

One approach to providing integrated case management is to train caseworkers as generalists, so that they are able to determine eligibility for all the programs offered. Some agencies that have implemented such an approach find that it promotes program participation and may even give caseworkers more time to devote to other responsibilities, such as follow-up phone calls (Pavetti et al. 2002). Training caseworkers at One-Stop centers to be generalists is likely to be difficult, given the broad array of programs and services about which they would need to be knowledgeable. Nonetheless, there is some precedent for this; a One-Stop in Connecticut cross-trains caseworkers to provide both TANF and WIA services (U.S. General Accounting Office 2002b).

As an alternative to training caseworkers to be well versed in all the programs offered through the One-Stop, staff can be organized in groups with representatives from other agencies that provide similar services. In this way, services would be organized according to function, rather than affiliation or funding source. For example, a One-Stop center in Ohio has taken staff from different agencies and created integrated work teams that share common caseloads, goals, and outcomes. These teams use mutually agreed-on protocols for case management (John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development 2002). By using this approach, One-Stop partners may, to some extent, be able to avoid the unnecessary duplication of effort that results when multiple service providers conduct interviews with customers only to extract the same information (Pindus et al. 2000).

**Use innovative approaches to simplify the application and recertification processes.**

The issue of applicant burden is especially relevant when it come to increasing access to benefit programs and other work supports (supports that sometimes require completion of lengthy applications) and for rural settings (where customers face transportation barriers). Research indicates that the customer burden created by application processes for food stamps and Medicaid may discourage eligible applicants from accessing services (McConnell and Ponza 1999; and Pavetti et al. 2002). Application processes typically include mandatory face-to-face interviews with caseworkers, as well as extensive documentation of applicants' personal income and assets (Pavetti et al. 2002). Moreover, because the application processes and documentation requirements for some work supports may require multiple appointments to complete the applications, reducing applicant burden may increase participation in work support programs, especially in rural settings.

Innovative approaches to service delivery that simplify the application process can be used to reduce the burdens of application and periodic certification. Among these strategies are (1) implementing state options and waivers in the FSP; (2) determining eligibility or accepting applications by mail or fax, through call centers, or over the Internet; and (3) developing "common access applications" for use across multiple programs and service providers in One-Stops. Such strategies can minimize the amount of time and money customers have to spend making trips to partner agencies' main offices, especially in rural communities. The strategies may be particularly useful in One-Stop centers where formidable barriers to co-location exist, since they can make it easier for applicants to complete the application or eligibility determination process without necessarily having to meet with an agency representative.

In the case of the FSP, simplification could be achieved through the implementation of various options states have at their disposal. In general, these options fall into one of three categories: (1) granting longer certification periods—that is, the period of time that elapses before recipients are required to reapply for benefits; (2) requiring fewer face-to-face interviews with staff in the local food stamp office; or (3) requiring fewer and less frequent reports of changes in income and circumstances (Rosenbaum 2000).<sup>8</sup> In addition, the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 gives states the option of excluding certain types of income that are not counted under the state's TANF or Medicaid programs when determining eligibility for the FSP.

Similarly, the use of technology could allow application and eligibility determination to be conducted through One-Stop centers by making it easier for individuals to complete applications online, through the mail, or over the telephone. On-line applications typically

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<sup>8</sup>Under the "hardship exemption," states must waive the face-to-face interview if the interview would present a hardship for the applicant. Instead, these applicants are interviewed over the telephone or through visits to their homes (Rosenbaum 2000; see also *Federal Register*, vol. 65, no. 40, p. 10865).

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are short so as to reduce the burden of initiating the eligibility determination process (Pavetti et al. 2002). These forms usually can capture enough information to determine whether individuals or households may qualify for a program; typically, however, applicants are required to complete the eligibility determination through a face-to-face interview. Because traveling to these interviews can be burdensome for residents in rural areas, one county in Minnesota is planning to use an innovative approach to technology, by allowing food stamp applicants to conduct their mandatory face-to-face interviews through video telephones stationed at two community-based offices (a university extension office and a local assistance office) (U.S. Department of Agriculture 2003).

Another strategy that could be particularly useful for One-Stop centers is the development of a “common access application,” which would allow individuals to apply for a variety of programs at once. For example, the Georgia Common Access Application was created by a workgroup made up of several state agencies (U.S. Department of Agriculture 2003). The form consolidated a total of 64 pages of individual program applications into an eight-page document that allowed applicants to simultaneously apply for food stamps, Supplemental Security Income, welfare, Medicaid, housing assistance, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children.