



Challenges and Opportunities in Responding to Farmworker Youth Needs: Some Issues to Consider

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Discussion with AFOP Board of Directors

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My Discussion Today

- Looks at AFOP member organizations' roles more broadly than just as employment training providers: a focus on lifelong learning, long-term upward career mobility, social, civic, and political equity for MSFW's.
- Inspired by emerging new policy and program orientation at ETA/DOL, U.S. Department of Education
- Based on ongoing discussion/collaboration with binational activists and researchers who see issues defined in the US as "farmworker policy" to be inevitably transnational—relating to migrantes
- Provoked by, but not based on, our 2008–2009 strategic review for NFJP (draft report is being reviewed by ETA/DOL) and incorporating insights on MSFW communities from our USDA-funded 2001–2006 New Pluralism Study
- Drawing on an emerging international literature (mostly from the World Bank but, also, USAID and OECD) in the economics of education as part of developing countries' economic development. These analyses are applicable at a community and regional level to the rural US.

ETA Policy and National Stakeholders' Vision

- Principle 7, ETA Final Rule, WIA (2000) Improved youth programs linked more closely to local labor market needs and community youth programs and services, and with strong connections between academic and occupational learning. Youth programs include activities that promote youth development and citizenship, such as leadership development through voluntary community service opportunities; adult mentoring and followup; and targeted opportunities for youth living in high poverty areas.
- Corporation for a Skilled Workforce, “Building Tomorrow’s Workforce” (May, 2007)–A Clear and Focused Commitment to Harness the Potential of Working Immigrants is Required!
- ETA FY 2010 Performance Agreement: Help Low-Skilled and Low-Earning Workers Find a Path to a Middle Class Job...by... “implementing Pathways out of Poverty strategies that enable the most disadvantaged populations to gain access to education and skill development leading to entry into the labor market and career advancement”
- ETA ARRA Research Conference (September, 2009) New administration emphasizes on integrating work training and education, learning via community service, career laddering, career navigation and lifelong learning

A Constantly–Changing MSFW Population with Implications for Policy and Program Design

- Immediately after passage of IRCA about 10% of MSFW's remained without legal status (CAW); currently more than half are unauthorized (NAWS).
- In 2005–2007, about one out of five MSFW's was of indigenous Mexican or Guatemalan origin (Gabbard et al—AAPOR 2008). The proportion of indigenous MSFW's will continue to increase.
- There are very substantial numbers of solo male migrants in the US farm labor force; they are more peripheral to the local labor force, more disadvantaged, and migrate more than farmworker families.
- However, it appears that increasing numbers of young couples are migrating together—as communities learn about the consequences of divided families (Garcia, Mines, personal communication)
- The “Latinization” of the rural US first stressed by Mines and NAWS analysts in the early 1990's has continued through the 1990's (Bump, Pew Hispanic Center, Kissam and Griffith, Kandel/ERS)—new destinations, new needs for community adaptation

MSFW Youth: Education, Human Capital, and Career Prospects

- About one in five current US farmworkers is a 14–21 year old—about 300,000 MSFW youth working mostly in the fields (NAWS; Kissam et al 2000).
- As with the overall farm labor force, most MSFW youth are foreign-born; and the overwhelming majority of foreign born youth and young adults lack legal status.
- International educational assessment of Mexican 15 year-olds (PISA) suggests current youth migrants' basic skills in reading, math, and science are weak (especially those from indigenous areas)
- However immigrant youth attending US rural schools do not perform much better in math, science, and reading—the foundation skills for careers in STEM occupations.
- Mexico has the same problems with adolescents dropping out of school that the US does—many, but not all, of the MSFW recently-arrived youth probably dropped out of school (Educacion Media/Superior) before coming north.
- Youth and young adults from MSFW families living in the US who are bilingual and have solid basic literacy and numeracy skills can find employment and even upward career pathways in supervisory roles in agricultural production.

Designing Programs to Explicitly Address Youth Career Development Needs

- As well as attending academically marginal schools, few of the MSFW teenagers growing up in the U.S. have opportunities to bona fide career counseling—only exhortations to “finish high school” and go to college.
- With no awareness of career options, it should be no surprise that dropout rates among MSFW youth remain high
- Standard WIA adult program performance indicators provide disincentives to providing services oriented toward career development
- Even the WIA youth indicators (getting a GED or increased CASAS or BESST scores) are questionable as correlates of career preparation.
- Learning opportunities for the recently-arrived teenage transnational migrants who know no English are virtually non-existent
- Career navigation resources available in rural areas cannot easily be used by those who need them and the available counselors unprepared (e.g. unaware of issues of skills transfer, emerging occupations, emerging industries)

Can One-Stop Services Address MSFW Youth (and adult) Employment Needs?

- No! The 1-Stop vision, logic model, services and available resources are not strategically appropriate or adequate.
- Better support is needed to help MSFW clients use online resources; facilities are not always easily accessible or welcoming.
- Clients with little schooling (MSFW's and others) need first to learn how to use available information resources and engage in analytic thinking and planning.
- Well-formatted resumes, for example, are not very helpful for job applicants without diverse job experience.
- VESL and remedial literacy courses designed to build functional communication competencies in English are crucial—no adequate stand-alone online resources exist.
- Basic remediation in oral and written English communication skills is a crucial element in MSFW employment training (even for US-educated bilingual youth)

Comprehensive Attention to Youth Development as a Foundation for Effective Service Delivery

- After more than two decades of research and analysis of the functional competencies needed for 21st century personal and career advancement (SCANS, EFF, O*Net, 21st Century Partnership for Job Skills) few rural high schools and youth program providers “get it”.
- Enhancing MSFW youth employability requires a strong foundation skills component—but middle and high school fail to provide these.
- In particular, Migrant Education programs do not yet have the organizational capacity to orient MSFW youth to careers other than traditional ones although many emerging occupations pay well.
- Because Migrant Education program priorities are shaped by local and county school administrators with a narrow vision of education, WIA 167–Migrant Education collaboration is bound to be difficult.
- However, there seems to be a new commitment to collaboration between ETA and US Dept. of Education (Asst. Secretary Jane Oates and Undersecretary Martha Kanter and ARRA conference) and Dept of Ed. concerns about low-literate adults

Legal Status and Lack of Innovative Program Design Blocks Working MSFW Youth Access to Services

- MSFW youth who work in the fields typically speak little or no English, because most are recently-arrived from Mexico or Guatemala
- As Mexico-US migration patterns shift toward drawing migrants more from extremely rural indigenous communities the previous patterns of increasing background education have changed and new arrivals have less schooling and have attended more marginal schools (e.g. recent concerns re problems with telesecundaria)
- While receipt of adult education (and Migrant Education) services is not conditioned on legal status, adult learning opportunities remain inaccessible to working MSFW youth due to lack of imaginative recruitment and proactive design
- A key issue is who will take leadership in being responsive to MSFW “community needs”—AFOP member organizations based on their OEO origins? Legal services? Local institutions or organizations? Worker organizations?

MSFW Youth Eligibility for Career Development Services

- Our study for DOL analyzes current NFJP regulations and the WIA statute but I cannot discuss our conclusions until the report is released.
- In the 21st century context of lifelong learning the arguments put forward by the court in Plyer v. Doe regarding the social imperative of affording all students access to K-12 education apply equally to lifelong learning opportunities offered by employment training providers.
- The slogan “Aqui estamos, no nos vamos” is a reality. If employment training system objectives include enhancement of youth career development and lifelong earnings, it would be good social policy to allow and even encourage enrollment of any MSFW youth in the targeted age and income range. WIA reauthorization obviously might be one venue to address this.
- MSFW advocates (as well as other Latino advocacy groups such as MALDEF, NCLR) have been remiss in failing to examine issues related to immigration status and service access as a basis for advocating on behalf of MSFW youth. Who needs “anytime, anyplace” lifelong learning opportunities more than migrants?

Program Management and Funding Issues for the New Administration to Consider

- How to reliably assess prospective NFJP grantees' ability to respond innovatively and effectively to the distinctive learning needs, personal and social context, and career developments needs of MSFW youth?
- The issue of “client mix” as an element in performance measurement, using a slightly richer dataset of variables than currently in the common measures as independent variables and a substantially enriched set of dependent variables (outcome indicators of “value added”)?
- NFJP—a relatively small program serving a highly-disadvantaged population as a testbed for piloting newly-created assessments of youth (and perhaps adult) employability indicators based on the 21st Century Job Skills Partnership analytic framework?
- Given likely immigration reform by 2011, analysis of best available data on MSFW population distribution so as to move rapidly toward allocating available funding as needed to respond to post-legalization MSFW demand for services—for DREAM Act, AgJobs, and comprehensive immigration reform scenarios, and for several scenarios of the impact of “earned legalization” provisions on demand and implication for program design?

Key Employment Training Policy Issues Re Service to MSFW Youth to Address in WIA Reauthorization

- Should employment training programs focus on immediate job placement or on long-term skills development and employability enhancement? What level of investments would be needed to yield long-term impacts and what would be the ROI for various alternatives?
- To what extent should employment training providers be the first-line in providing educationally disadvantaged clients “learning to learn” and “career navigation” skills (and if not employment training providers, what sorts of institutions—community colleges? High schools?) How can individual and family resiliency be assessed and intervention impact be measured? Is the cost of monitoring/evaluating performance provider performance justified?
- To what extent is reliance on One-Stop Centers (with their characteristic “short-order” menu of services) as primary mechanism for service delivery a de facto replication of the type of service delivery network which led to the inequities addressed in NAACP v. Brennan?

Pressing Program Design Challenges for NFJP Grantees

- To develop innovative program designs to strengthen MSFW youth in “learning to learn” skills and building on their current cultural capital to navigate a multi-cultural labor market—here in the US and in Mexico and Latin America. (Demand is strong among multi-national firms)
- To build program participants’ versatility in acquiring, evaluating, and organizing information from different sources—the basis for resiliency in a turbulent labor market, and for leadership and management skills.
- To broaden and deepen MSFW youths’ English-language skills—for oral, multi-media, and diverse genres of written communication. Innovative peer-based approaches and community service projects have promise.
- To better use available applied research on lifelong learning—the SCANS report, the Equipped for the Future curriculum framework, the 21st Century Job Skills Partnership, the O*Net Entrepreneurship and industry-specific models to craft program designs to provide MSFW youth sustainable upward mobility, not just access to employment.
- Further exploration of community-level strategies to build “bridging” social capital to improve MSFW’s access to local employer networks. Community service training components have huge promise here.

And Yet More Programmatic Strands to Pursue

- Fully integrating workers' rights and occupational health awareness into NFJP-funded employment training. Including "action projects" where workers explore and assess local workplace conditions
- Integrating community service into program design as a means to build skills in teamwork, leadership, communication, dealing with cultural diversity, analytic thinking, and an entrepreneurial mindset.
- Designing programs to rely more on peer interactions (collaborative learning) to accelerate learning and assist participants solidify newly-discovered skills. In reality mentors benefit as much as those they help.
- Collaborating with agribusiness and community colleges to develop "ag upgrade" training programs which guarantee participants real upward mobility into a range of supervisory and management positions.
- Collaborating with local high schools to develop "career academies" which recognize and build on MSFW youth's skills (e.g. preparatory programs for court and medical interpreters).

Immediate Opportunities: DREAM Act

- The DREAM Act may be enacted by winter of 2009–2010. NFJP grantees could play a key role in helping eligible MSFW's adjust their status
- The legislation would allow immigrants who came to the US <16 years of age, who lived in the U.S. continuously, and who are <35 years of age to apply for conditional residence. This would become permanent if, within 6 years, they complete high school, a GED, or 2 years of college.
- NFJP grantees can and should play a major role in assisting the large numbers of MSFW's whose best route to legal permanent residency would be via the Spanish-language GED. This is, of course, a chance to consider going on to community college or university training also.
- The DREAM Act provides a “win-win” chance for NFJP grantees to strengthen existing partnerships with community colleges and explore new ones (see Gonzales report to College Board Advocacy 2009).
- ETA can help with guidance encouraging provision of career exploration, GED preparation, workforce→college transition support.

Medium-Term Challenges and Opportunities: AgJobs and Comprehensive Immigration Reform

- AgJobs may be on a relatively fast track toward enactment although comprehensive immigration reform is now not expected until 2011.
- NFJP grantees (and other community-based organizations) are currently unprepared to help the 1–2 million MSFW’s and dependents who will need help with legalization.
- AFOP could, for example, partner with advocacy groups such as Farmworker Justice in a national effort to secure foundation funding for initiatives to provide initial help with legalization.
- “Earned” legalization provisions suggest that legalization providers will need to maintain solid ties with MSFW clients for a period of 3–5 years after legalization. This provides an opportunity for ongoing work helping newly-legalized MSFW’s along the pathway to citizenship
- Strategic planning, organizational capacity-building, and coordinated initiatives to secure start-up funding for legalization assistance and followup to foster civic integration need to begin immediately.

After Immigration Reform--Changes in MSFW Training Needs and Programmatic Implications

- Currently standard ESL is not crucial for MSFW clients but VESL and “customized” English–strengthening is needed.
- However, after legalization, standard ESL will be in high demand a crucial investment in non–English speaking MSFWs’ career mobility (and civic integration).
- MSFW employment training demand can be expected to at least double. Sound social policy will require using this one–time opportunity to systematically work toward social and civic integration of immigrants. NFJP provides a good test–bed for “comprehensive” approaches to follow up on comprehensive immigration reform.
- Legalization will broaden MSFW’s employment options—but “earned legalization” provisions means keeping on in agriculture. NFJP will need to help its clients in learning to skillfully juggle multiple jobs
- In the post–legalization context of “earned legalization” requiring slow transitions from farmwork to other occupations, training programs for upward career pathways in agriculture could play a valuable role.

Challenges Faced by NFJP Grantees as they Evolve

- How to recapture the original War on Poverty vision of grassroots networks of poor people taking charge in confronting a broad spectrum of local problems?
- How to best to transform pro-forma “case management” and EDP preparation into empowerment allowing MSFW youth (and adults) to more thoroughly explore their career options and potential?
- How to strengthen their local governance and understanding of MSFW diversity from local area to local area as NFJP grantees become large regional corporations? How to rebuild relationships with the majority of MSFW’s they cannot currently serve due to eligibility guidelines?
- How to overcome the institutionalized narrowly-framed objectives in federally-funded program guidelines which impede collaboration among MSFW-serving organizations?
- How to work effectively transnationally (e.g. with CONAVyT, the Plazas Comunitarias, with clubes de oriundos, and educational institutions in migrant-sending states)?