

Briefing Paper

Pierce County
Youth Violence Prevention Program

Performance Audit Committee
and
Public Safety and Human Services Committee

by

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April 26, 2007

Table of Contents

	<u>Page</u>
A. Program Description	1
1. Funding	1
2. Program Foundation	2
3. Program Purposes and Funding Priorities	3
B. Review Questions and Methodology	4
C. Program Effectiveness in Addressing Youth Violence	5
1. Outcome Based Evaluation	5
2. Basic Policy Question	6
D. Allocation Process	7
1. Scoring and Ranking	7
2. Funding Priorities	8
3. Ineligible Applications	8
4. Program Monitoring	9
E. Recommendations	9



Pierce County

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April 26, 2007

To: Performance Audit Committee
Public Safety & Human Services Committee

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Re: Youth Violence Prevention Program

Under a companion ordinance to the 2007 county budget,¹ the Director of Community Services is required to meet jointly with the Performance Audit Committee and the Public Safety and Human Services Committee “to examine the requirements, policies, and content” of a 2001 ordinance that created the Allocation Advisory Committee on Youth Violence Prevention.

To prepare for today’s joint meeting, staff has briefly reviewed the program history and current operations. This memo reflects our understanding of the Youth Violence Prevention Program after studying various materials and the 2007 funding allocations.

The staff review was not a performance audit but rather a brief planning study to gather basic information about the program and get a sense of whether a performance audit is needed. Our general conclusion is that the review raised significant issues, but the problems can be handled internally and a performance audit is not needed at this time. Our recommendations appear on page 9 below.

A. Program Description

1. *Funding*

The program under review provides grant funding to local organizations for services related to youth violence prevention, including after-school activities, homeless teen drop-in programs, early childhood day care, domestic violence support services, educational

¹ Section 10 of Ordinance No. 2006-115s.

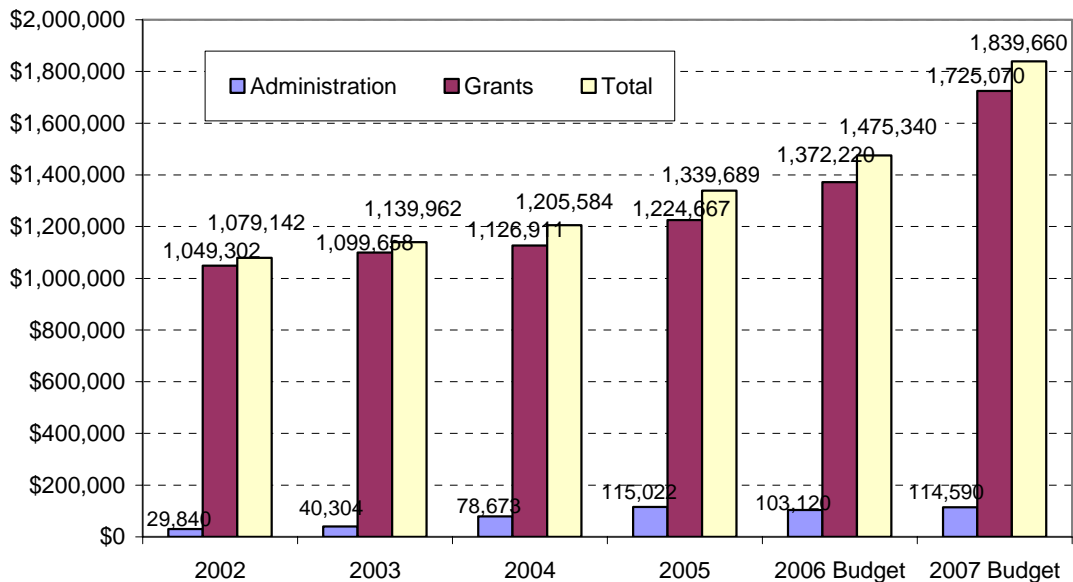
program for homeless mothers, family support of various kinds, educational outreach, and a service provider conference.

In 2007, based on a Request for Proposals (RFP) process discussed later, 24 programs are funded, including four programs added by the County Council in the budget process. Annual funding for these programs ranges from \$7,000 to \$439,200. In addition, eight “youth-driven” projects (run by teenagers) receive funding in amounts up to \$2,500 each.

Total program funding in 2007, including grants and administration, will be up to \$1,839,660. Program administration is budgeted at \$114,590, or 6.5% of the total grant amounts. Community Services maintains that the actual cost of administration is higher. *Exhibit 1* shows the program funding since 2002.

Exhibit

Youth Violence Prevention Program: Funding since 2002



2. Program Foundation

Prevention program funding comes from a criminal justice local tax that became law in 1993 and added one-tenth of one percent to the sales and use tax in Pierce County (PCC 4.28.100 and 110). Rather than funneling all the new tax revenue into jail beds or law enforcement, the County Council passed legislation in 1993 which requires that at least 25 percent of this revenue collected in unincorporated Pierce County must be spent on “prevention and related preventative children’s services” (PCC 4.28.120).

In the 1990s, a 40-member Commission on Children, Youth and Their Families, known as the Children’s Commission, administered the RFP process and recommended funding allocations to the County Council. Over time, concerns were raised about excessive

staffing, budget problems, and use of prevention funding for lobbying, planning, and other administrative costs.

In 2001, the County Council abolished the Children's Commission and later that year created the Allocation Advisory Committee for Prevention Programs to make recommendations on funding and monitoring the prevention programs. The Allocation Advisory Committee is to include nine to 15 members who are geographically representative of the unincorporated county and have a wide range of expertise and perspectives on prevention strategies and services. (Ordinance No. 2001-82, section 3.) The current committee has 14 members. They serve as volunteers.

The 2001 ordinance also designated the Community Services Department to coordinate and staff the Allocation Advisory Committee with 0.5 FTE staff. (Ordinance No. 2001-82, section 5.) The ordinance leaves open the issue of whether the committee is an advisory committee located within Community Services or whether it is a separate entity that has independent authority.

3. Program Purposes and Funding Priorities

Although Ordinance No. 2001-82 was not codified, section 4 of that legislation sets forth funding priorities for youth violence prevention programs.

- Programs are to serve unincorporated areas of the county.
- Programs should create a long-term reduction in violence, not just a transitory benefit while an individual or family is participating in the program.
- Programs should include cooperation and coordination between agencies, municipalities, and clients.
- "The focus of programs to be funded should, to the greatest extent possible, be on the prevention or elimination of violent behavior in, among, or towards children and youth." The program objective "must in some direct and demonstrable manner result in the elimination or reduction of violence and violent behavior."
- "Applicants for funding must be able to demonstrate in a clear and concise manner that the program is accomplishing the goals and objectives it has established for itself, and specifically, the elimination or reduction of violence or violent behavior. To that end, the County utilizes an 'outcomes-based evaluation' process for monitoring the effectiveness of its social service programs."

In 2005, the County Council amended the 2001 ordinance to expand the range of eligible programs: "Prevention programs may include those directed at individual skill development, community involvement, and leadership, parenting and peer influence, and other strategies." (Ordinance No. 2005-49).

Besides the funding criteria listed above, the application process considers the five “promises to youth” contained in Resolution R2003-89 (although the resolution does not mention youth violence and does not have the force of law). Funded programs must address at least one of the five promises:

- Ongoing relationships with caring adults such as parents, mentors, tutors, or coaches
- A safe place with structured activities during non-school hours
- A healthy start for a healthy future
- Marketable skills through effective education
- Opportunities to give back through community service.

B. Review Questions and Methodology

This staff review addressed the following questions:

1. How well do the funded programs address youth violence prevention?
 - How effective is the overall program?
 - Is the money being well spent?
 - Should some or all of the funding be used to hire more deputy sheriffs?
2. Does the Allocation Advisory Committee have a good process for evaluating applications and recommending funding allocations?
3. Does the allocation process adequately consider the funding priorities established in Ordinance 2001-82?

The work included:

- Review of the program ordinances, funding allocations since 2001, application instructions, and other basic program materials.
- Review of 20 applications for 2007 funding considered by the Allocation Advisory Committee (March - May 2006), including scoring materials, rankings, and meeting minutes.
- Phone interviews with seven of the 14 current members of the Allocation Advisory Committee.
- Interviews with the Director of Community Services and the current program manager, plus contacts with the program planner and the contract officer.

Community Services staff turnover occurred in both 2005 and 2006, and the current program manager and the current planner are new to the program in 2007. Staff turnover means that these staff members have no direct knowledge of what occurred in previous funding cycles. This factor tended to limit our review because a number of questions about what occurred in the past had to be left unanswered.

C. Program Effectiveness in Addressing Youth Violence

It is difficult to state clearly the relationship between the funded programs and the reduction or prevention of youth violence, in part because this is an inherent problem when analyzing social service programs and trying to determine outcomes, results, impacts, or effectiveness. However, in our opinion, administrative issues have added to the problem:

- Application materials and monitoring reports often do not contain clear evidence about the success of the funded programs.
- During our review, Community Services did not have available summary materials that indicate what the funded programs have accomplished.

However, after our review took place, the department prepared a report on 2006 Program Funding Highlights for the April 26 joint meeting. That report is in your packet of meeting materials.

1. Outcome Based Evaluation

Pierce County Community Services uses a system of Outcome Based Evaluation (OBE) to evaluate the extent to which a program has achieved its intended goals. With some exceptions, OBE material is required on the application form and in monitoring reports. The City of Tacoma and the City of Lakewood also use this OBE system. We were told that United Way previously had the same OBE requirements but recently dropped them in favor of a simpler application form.

The OBE material in the Pierce County youth violence prevention program is of three kinds:

1. All applicants requesting funding of \$10,000 and up must identify two outcome measures and at least two indicators for each measure, discuss the data collection system to be used, and discuss the validity and reliability of data. In our opinion, this is a tall order for many organizations, and much of this information provided on applications has limited usefulness.
2. As part of the application, most programs that have received funding in the past must report on Outcomes Achievement Data, Criteria Changes, and Internal and External Factors that may have affected the achievement data for the previous year.

3. In addition, all funded programs are to provide outcome-based evaluation reports in June and December. These reports appear to vary considerably in the amount and quality of information provided.

For all three kinds of OBE material, it is not clear what Community Services or the Allocation Advisory Committee does with the outcome information after it is received.

Some members of the Allocation Advisory Committee reported in interviews they are uncomfortable scoring the Outcome Based Evaluation parts of the application because they consider the material confusing, not well done, or not appropriate for a grant application.

The number of applications has declined over the years, which may reflect the complexity of OBE and its rising importance in the application process. We were told OBE used to count for 10% or 15% of the total score. In this year's process, it comprises 35%.

Interviews with committee members yielded three suggestions or opinions about Outcome Based Evaluation:

1. Keep things as they are, but provide better training to applicants and committee members on outcome issues and how to handle that part of the application.
2. Drop the OBE parts of the application, since OBE discourages applications and tends to work against the smaller organizations that, by definition, do not have experienced grant writers.
3. Introduce a two-tiered system in which the OBE application material is required only of organizations that receive a large amount of funding, e.g., over \$100,000 per year (as opposed to the current threshold of \$10,000).

2. Basic Policy Question

A basic policy behind the program is that 25 percent of the one-tenth of one percent local criminal justice tax is dedicated to programs that reduce or prevent youth violence.

In interviews, we inquired of committee members whether some or all of the prevention funding should be shifted to general public safety and used, for example, to hire more deputy sheriffs. This question received emphatically negative answers from all seven committee members who were interviewed, including those who were critical of how the program is being administered.

D. Allocation Process

The funding process includes a Request for Proposals (RFP), evaluation of the proposals by the Allocation Advisory Committee, recommendations by the committee to the Executive and the Council, and appropriations in the county budget. For example, an RFP was issued in January 2006, and community organizations submitted proposals in March. The Allocation Advisory Committee evaluated the proposals in April and May 2006 and then made its recommendations in June for 2007 funding.

In interviews, we asked committee members about their view of the allocation process (evaluating applications, ranking them, and deciding the committee's recommendations). Most of the seven interviewed members gave positive comments. It is clear that the members take their work seriously and are committed to doing the best work possible. However, we have the following concerns.

1. Scoring and Ranking

This issue concerns scoring of the applications and how the scores are recorded, as a basis for reaching the committee's recommended funding allocations. We reviewed the process used in April-May 2006 (for 2007 funding) and found that the process lacked adequate documentation.

- ❑ We reviewed the available score sheets (from 7 of the 14 committee members) and found inconsistencies and errors in how applications were scored, how the scores were recorded, and how averages were calculated.
- ❑ Community Services staff members appear not to have collected all score sheets, or collected the sheets but did not retain them in the program files. Score sheets are not available for half of the 2006 committee members.

Given these documentation problems, it was not possible in our review to verify the ranking of applications adopted by the Allocation Advisory Committee in May 2006.

In interviews, staff and members of the Allocation Advisory Committee acknowledged the scoring problems, but they also maintained that the errors and documentation problems did not have significant financial consequences for any applicants. One committee member with extensive allocation experience maintained that although there were problems with the numbers, the evaluation process was fair and resulted in good decisions for the benefit of the community.

In an interview with performance audit staff, the Director of Community Services agreed to resolve the scoring problems in this year's evaluation process.

2. Funding Priorities

In our review of the applications received in 2006 (for 2007 funding), we found that the application does reflect the funding priorities in the 2001 legislation (listed above on p. 3). However, it was not clear how well the scoring of applications related to the official priorities.

Reviewing the applications, we found the following:

- All funded programs appear to meet the requirement to serve unincorporated areas.
- Only three applications out of 20, in our opinion, adequately addressed whether the program created a “sustainable” (long-term) reduction in violence. Most applicants misunderstood this question and wrote about the long-term stability of the agency.
- Most applicants tried hard to explain how their programs would address youth violence, but this is a difficult topic. While all applicants responded to the questions about program outcomes and measurable objectives, only four or five of the 20 applications identified what we consider to be outcomes (as opposed to outputs, inputs, service units, client contacts, etc.).

Staff has two suggestions in this area. First, it may be advisable to review the priorities contained in the 2001 ordinance, consider how they can be better reflected in the scoring, and develop and possibly codify new guidelines or priorities for funding.

Second, if the joint or individual committees want further review of this program, we also suggest a focus on whether Outcome Based Evaluation should be required, and to what extent. (On page 6 above, we list some preliminary choices about OBE suggested by Allocation Advisory Committee members.)

3. Ineligible Applications

A related issue is whether Community Services staff or the Allocation Advisory Committee should determine that applications are ineligible. The issue was disputed at two committee meetings in 2006 after staff had ruled certain applications not eligible, without allowing committee members to see the applications.

A similar issue could exist this year as applications are evaluated for 2008 funding. Staff has determined that five of the current applications are not eligible and will not be scored by the committee. We inquired about the five disallowed applications and were told that staff ruled them ineligible for the following reasons:

1. Did not answer Question 4 d-1. [Applicant did not check boxes that indicate to which organization in the Funders Group the applicant is required to submit an OBE report.]

2. Question 6 f, Monitoring and Evaluation. [Applicant did not fill out a table indicating month by month service expectations (outputs) for performance criteria.]
3. Question 6 f: Ditto.
4. Did not answer questions 4 f, 4 f-1, 4 f-2 (Outcome Achievement Data) and 4 g-2, 4 g-3, 4 g-4 (Outcome/Criteria Changes, Program Design/Service Delivery Changes, and Internal and External Factors Impacting Achievement Percentage).
5. Application is hand written (contrary to instructions).

As shown above, most of the reasons for disqualification relate to Outcome Based Evaluation.

4. Program Monitoring

The Allocation Advisory Committee has played no role in program monitoring, even though the founding legislation says the committee is to “make recommendations on funding and monitoring projects” (Ordinance No. 2001-82, section 2).

In interviews, some committee members expressed a desire to get involved in monitoring because it would help them gain a better appreciation of the applications they have recommended for funding. The committee minutes of May 23, 2006 indicate that committee members “requested to see the results of project monitoring throughout the year. [Community Services] Staff agreed to schedule additional meetings.” However, no further meetings were held in 2006.

We agree with the committee members who believe that monitoring projects is a vital part of the allocation duties. We also agree with those who suggested in interviews that the committee could pay more attention to identifying what type of violence prevention programs are needed rather than simply reacting year after year to whatever applications are received.

E. Recommendations

1. Community Services should prepare summary materials that indicate the accomplishments of the funded programs and how they relate to violence prevention, and provide the materials on a regular basis to the Public Safety and Human Services Committee.
2. The joint committees should establish a process to evaluate the Youth Violence Prevention Program, including (a) the priorities in the 2001 ordinance and whether new funding guidelines should be developed and codified; and (b) the role of Outcome Based Evaluation, including whether OBE should be required and to what extent. The process should include recommendations to the Council by October 1, 2007.

3. Community Services should ensure that the allocation process includes sufficient documentation of individual scoring, accurate recording of scores, retention of scoring materials, and appropriate documentation of committee rankings with back-up materials. The Performance Audit Committee should review the documentation after the current allocation process has taken place.