



The Southern Of The Council of State Governments 2013 SLC STARS Selection Panel Instructions

SLC STARS PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Southern Legislative Conference, Southern Office of The Council of State Governments (CSG), has a long history of highlighting exceptional state government programs. The CSG Innovations Awards program recognized and promoted creative and successful state government programs and initiatives for nearly 40 years. Begun in 1975 as the Innovations Transfer Program, refined and renamed the CSG Innovations Awards in 1986, the program transitioned to the regional level in 2013. The SLC STARS Program is the Southern regional adaptation of the former, national CSG Innovations Awards program.

The STARS program seeks to identify and promote innovative ideas and programs from the Southern region's best problem solvers: the state, themselves. The SLC solicits applications from a wide array of state agencies, departments, and institutions operating within the executive, legislative, and judicial governmental branches. Following a review process, finalists are invited to present at the SLC annual meeting, and two exceptional programs are selected by a panel of experienced policy professionals as models of efficiency and effectiveness in state governments in the Southern region.

SOUTHERN LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE 2013 SLC STAR PROGRAM APPLICATION

Alabama's Right Sizing of Juvenile Justice Programs

Submitted by: State of Alabama Department of Youth Services

1. The Alabama Department of Youth Services (DYS) began making diversion grants to local juvenile courts for the fiscal year that began October 2010. These grants were substantially increased in October 2011, and continue for the current fiscal year.
2. a) This diversion grant program was created to address the growing number of commitments to DYS by the State's juvenile courts. In order to house these youth, more beds were added to the system, and more state dollars were being expended. This was an unsustainable trend, especially as Alabama faced huge budget short falls.

From the mid-1990's to 2006, the annual number of commitments to DYS more than doubled from 1,385 to 3,340. Residential placement bed space had increased from 400 to 1,200, and annual costs had grown from \$44 million to over \$85 million. Even though juvenile arrests for violent crime had decreased, the DYS was inundated with commitments for less serious property and drug offenses, and technical offenses such as violation of probation. With this steadily climbing population, the Department became a target for a number of lawsuits. These lawsuits were being brought or threatened against the agency as a result of detention waiting lists that often approached 200 youth. These youth who had been committed to by the juvenile courts to the Department were waiting for a bed space to become available. Scores of these youth were being held in overcrowded local juvenile detention centers.

The State's then Governor, Chief Justice of the State Supreme Court, and the Department of Youth Services Executive Director were deeply concerned with this trend. Not only were these commitments expensive; for many of these youth, more appropriate services could be provided in their home community. A new approach was required. Continuing to expand bed space was extremely costly and certainly not the best way to rehabilitate the majority of these youth.

b) Obviously, a creative and well defined planning process would be required to bring about desired change. At the recommendation of the DYS Executive Director, the Governor invited the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Strategic Consulting Group to help guide this process.

The most novel or unique aspect of the Department's efforts was to create better programming and services for troubled youth in their home communities at less cost than state residential placement. More effective and efficient services are often associated with additional costs, at least as an upfront expenditure. Secondly, this program was a coordinated effort between all three branches of state government. The executive branch, including DYS, worked with the judiciary to craft a concept that would be acceptable to the local juvenile courts. The Legislature recognized that even in extremely difficult budget times funding couldn't be slashed for juvenile programs even if fewer youth were in state custody. The key element was to maintain financial

support for local community programs who served the youth who otherwise would have been committed to DYS residential programs.

A new data based grant-making process was essential for the success of this effort. Although the Department had previously made a limited number of grants, programs had typically been boot camp type programs that lacked sufficient data analysis to measure their effectiveness. Others were group homes originally funded by Alabama's share of Federal Department of Justice OJJDP funds. Once these federal dollars had dried up, these group homes began receiving funding from DYS.

Under the new grant-making process, local jurisdictions followed a model developed by DYS and the Casey Group to conduct a thorough data analysis of the youth who were coming before the court, and then being committed to state custody. From this data analysis, the local community was able to tailor a grant proposal which met the specific needs of the youth who were being placed in state custody. Since these proposals were based upon actual data rather than assumptions, many communities determined that less costly non-residential programs were actually better suited for their youth than removal from the home and placement in a large residential program. Using a DYS web based tool, communities were encouraged to identify model evidence-based programs that would best fit their youth's needs.

Perhaps most significant of all in these challenging economic time for most states, these new community based diversion programs were accomplished with no additional cost to the State of Alabama. Over \$9 million was redirected from what had previously been spent on DYS residential placements.

c) Major activities required to implement this successful diversion grant program were as follows in the order in which they occurred:

- With the assistance of the Annie E. Casey Strategic Consulting Group a detailed analysis of multiple years of commitment data was conducted. A review of approximately 9,000 youth committed over three years identified that almost 40% of all commitments were for violations of probation and aftercare or misdemeanor property offenses. A large number of the violations were related to status offenses such as truancy or ungovernable behavior.
- DYS, the Administrative Office of Courts, and the Casey Foundation began a concentrated education program for juvenile court judges and probation staff. The goal of this education program was to convince judges that if the number of youth being committed to DYS was reduced, cost saving to DYS would be used to fund local programs to serve youth in their home communities.
- A data driven grant application and evaluation protocol was developed by Casey and DYS for use by the courts. Selected courts served as pilot projects to conduct a risk and needs analysis of the youth they had placed at DYS over the previous 12 months. Each completed grant application was based upon their data analysis of previous commitments; and targeted programs for these youth. Six counties; Baldwin, Dallas, DeKalb, Elmore, Marshall, and Sumter were selected as the pilots to receive funding.
- For fiscal year 2011 (beginning October 2010), these six counties received \$836,700 in grants ranging in amounts from \$37,300 to \$250,000. In turn, these courts agreed to reduce their commitments to DYS. The money saved by not providing residential placements for these youth would be used to fund their grants. During the year, the

pilot project's juvenile court judges and their probation staff aggressively helped to educate other courts that there were viable alternatives to sending youth to state custody. Essentially they conveyed the message that if we can do it, you can too; and get better outcomes for the youth and their families.

- Following the FY2011 pilot year, DYS opened the diversion grant application process to all 67 counties. Thirty-seven grant applications were received. Because some were joint applications for multiple counties, 47 counties participated in the process. DYS and the Casey Group staff evaluated each of these applications against the risk and needs assessments conducted by the potential grantees. Applications were identified as falling within three categories: suitable for funding as submitted, could be funded with some revisions, or not suitable for funding.
- Those needing revisions were asked to revise and resubmit their applications. Those deemed to be not suitable for funding as submitted were invited to attend a planning meeting to discuss other alternatives that would better meet the identified needs of the youth from that county. After the planning session, they were given the opportunity to resubmit a new program application more suitable to their situation.
- After intense budget negotiations to bring the total dollars requested in line with the projected available funds based upon the stated goal of reduced commitments, all programs that revised and resubmitted applications were funded. **\$9.2 million in diversion grants were made to the 37 programs serving 47 counties by the Department of Youth Services.**
- For the FY 2013 year, all 37 programs received continuation funding. Results had been positive with the majority, and others had made some program modifications to improve performance. Also, by offering continuation funding, all of the programs were able to have a minimum of 18 months of continuous operation. During those 18 months they were required to enter program data into a DYS developed web-based data base, and provide quarterly and annual written progress narratives to DYS.
- In May of this year, all current grantees were required to submit full applications for future diversion program funding. A requirement of these applications was a complete data analysis of the risks and needs of youth served by the program and an analysis of those youth that had been committed to DYS rather than diverted to the community program.
- DYS staff are currently reviewing and evaluating those applications. Criteria for continued funding will include: (1) meeting numerical goals for reducing commitments to DYS set in the original program applications met, (2) successful completion rates of youth assigned to the diversion programs, and (3) cost effectiveness of the program as compared to a State DYS commitment.
- For the 2014 fiscal year, based upon the above criteria; programs will receive continuing funding or funding from DYS will be discontinued. We expect to continue funding existing programs that met their stated goals. However, programs not meeting goals will not be funded. DYS will also solicit applications for new programs in additional sites.

d) Technology plays a supporting but critical role in this program. The DYS web site serves a major role in the overall process of applying for funding and the internal evaluation of applications. Data collection from the community diversion programs and analysis of this data are also a vital part of the process. The DYS web site was substantially modified and updated in 2010 in order to better accommodate the entire diversion grant development

and application process. The data collection tools, application, and full instructions for use were added to the site. In addition, an entire resource guide was created and added to assist the courts in selecting models for diversion programs. With the assistance of the Casey Foundation, model evidence-based programs were identified. A matrix for the website was created to describe the programs, including client characteristics, typical program cost, and providing contact information for those applicants desiring additional information.

The Department of Youth Services developed and maintains two SQL data bases critical to collecting and analyzing data related to the diversion grant program. The Student Information Management System (SIMS) captures a full array of demographic, placement, and case management information on all youth admitted to DYS custody. A Grant Information Management System (GIMS) was specifically developed to collect information on youth participating in the grant program. GIMS is a web based application that is accessible to all grantees through the internet, but has sufficient security measures to protect confidentiality of grant participants. Data fields include basic demographic information of participants and program outcomes.

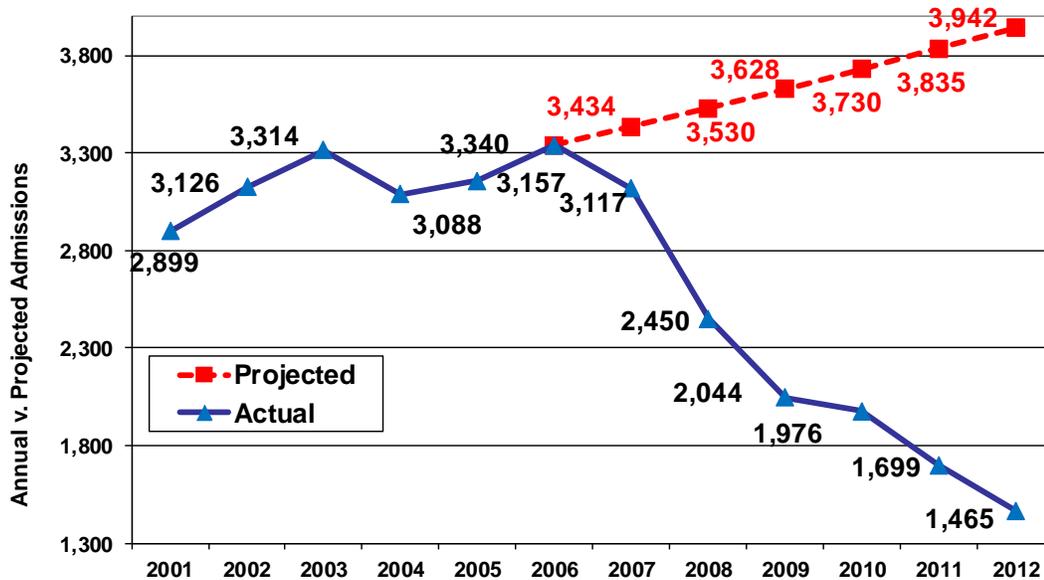
Utilization of both SIMS and GIMS are required to fully measure and evaluate the success of the diversion grant programs.

e) Diversion grants annual costs: FY 2011 - \$836,666, FY 2012 - \$9,197,682, and FY - \$9,258,000. The grants are funded through a combination of State and Federal funding sources. The largest amount of funding, \$3.9 million, is provided by a Legislative appropriation from the Children First Trust Fund, i.e. tobacco settlement monies. \$1.6 million is from the DYS Education Trust Fund appropriation, and \$3.7 million is from the DYS General Fund appropriation. In addition to the above funding, five programs are also currently recognized as DYS Medicaid Rehabilitation providers, and are therefore eligible for Medicaid reimbursement for qualified services.

f) The effectiveness of this effort was quick and apparent. If the Alabama juvenile justice system would have continued on the trend of five years ago, almost 4,000 youth would have likely been committed annually to State DYS custody. This number of commitments would have resulted in an average daily population of 1,500 youth. **With the diversion grants, only 1,465 youth were admitted to the Department in 2012 – 62 % lower than projected. And currently, the average daily population of youth in DYS residential custody is below 500. Also, disproportionate minority confinement has been reduced.**

The following graph provides a comparison between the projected number of admissions to the Department if commitment rates would have continued at the previous growth levels versus the actual number of annual admissions to the Department.

DYS Admissions, 2001-2012: Projected v. Actual



* Projected admissions rely on a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 2.80%, which was calculated from the actual increases in admissions from 1996 through 2006.

g) The most significant impact for the State of Alabama has been that costs for the juvenile corrections system have been contained while avoiding costly and unproductive law suits related to the treatment of youth in State custody. (See attached fact sheet.) For local communities, the impact has been both economic and social. New jobs have been created by many of the grant programs, and local programs tend to bring a sense of community pride in the sense that they are better serving local citizens. Most importantly, most youth are better served while remaining at home with their families than being placed in large state institutional settings.

Although impossible to qualitatively measure, we feel that this program has enhanced the reputation and national perception of the State of Alabama and Department of Youth Services. The diversion program has been recognized by the Harvard University Kennedy School of Government as a national Bright Idea for 2012. Also, the DYS Executive Director will be presenting a workshop on the diversion grant process in August at the American Correctional Association's 143rd Congress of Corrections.

- Although other states have provided various types of grants to local jurisdictions, to our knowledge, this particular design for juvenile justice grants is unique to the State of Alabama. **The leadership of all three branches of government worked in concert with one goal: to improve outcomes for Alabama's justice involved youth and make or entire State a safer place.** Although many people and entities came together to develop this process and contribute to its success, a major contribution to the long-term success of this project has been the effort of DYS staff and the commitment of DYS Executive Director J. Walter Wood, Jr., PO BOX 66, Mt. Meigs, AL 36057. He may be reached at (334) 215-3800 or walter.wood@dys.alabama.gov.

4. As stated above, it is not unique for a state to offer grants to local communities to assist in addressing local problems and issues. However, this program differs in several important ways. The application process is data driven, and focuses on the specific needs and risk factors of youth in a community. Based upon the results of this data analysis, the local juvenile court crafts a program tailored to their particular needs. Data is collected throughout the grant period, and this information is being used to evaluate outcomes and determine if funding will continue. The funding mechanism is the single most unique element of this project. Being able to fund millions of dollars in new grant programs without additional appropriations is extremely difficult and highly unlikely in most governmental settings.
5. The growth of the U.S. prison population, both juvenile and adult, has been a major public policy issue in this country for over two decades. Both state and local jurisdictions struggle to provide sufficient bed space to house the number of commitments to their facilities. In order to meet these requirements, in a Constitutional manner, greater and greater governmental financial resources are diverted from other areas such as education.

The Alabama DYS diversion grant program has the potential to be utilized by any state juvenile justice system that has a significant number of less serious offenders in residential placement. Cost savings from fewer residential programs create a funding pool for new grants to serve these youth in their home communities. Successful grant programs in one community have been replicated by courts in other communities when the youth's needs have been similar. Sadly, the biggest obstacle identified by many of the DYS grantees is the lack of parental involvement and support. However, we are encouraged by the numerous family support focused programs many grantees are choosing to use.

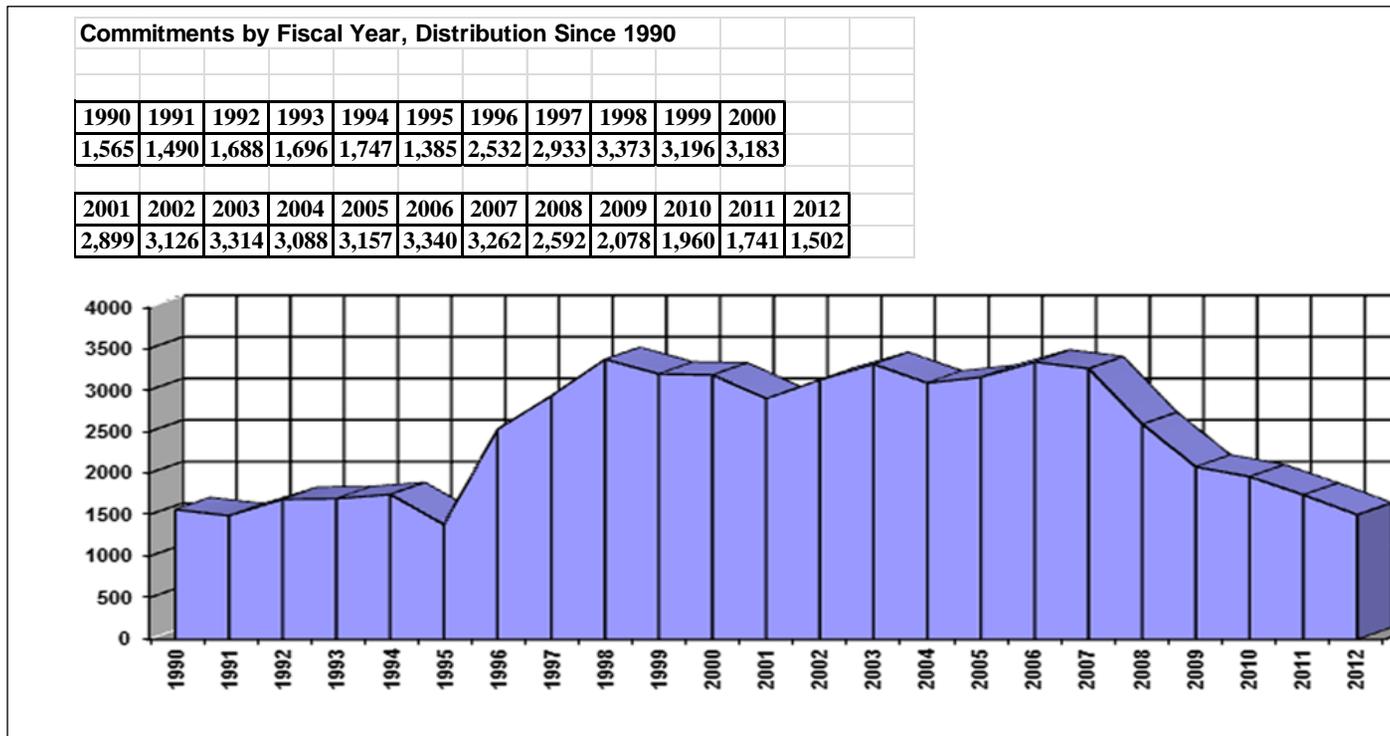
Positive considerations for other states include the fact that no additional expenditures were required in these difficult financial times, better results are being achieved and entire families are being given an opportunity to break the cycle of delinquency.

-----Department of Youth Services Strategy Saves Millions in State Funds-----

By emphasizing and supporting local diversion programs and supporting institutionalization as a last resort,

DYS has turned a \$9 million/year investment in local programs into \$54,750,000/year in savings.

Had these strategies not been in place, DYS would have needed an additional \$100 million over the last two years.



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A reduction of 2,000 commitments per year to state custody due to system reforms and DYS strategy

With annual commitments approaching 3500, the cost to provide the additional 1,000 beds to meet that need would have been \$54,750,000/year. Those clients and their families are now served by non-residential diversion programs in their home communities. Additionally, prior to implementing this strategy the juvenile detention center “waiting list” alone was a \$10 million liability to the state. The waiting list is now virtually nonexistent!