

# **Texas Food Stamp Employment and Training/JOBS Conformance Demonstration:**

## **Process Evaluation Final Report Executive Summary**

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Center for the Study  
of Human Resources



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Center for the Study of Human Resources (CHR) of the LBJ School of Public Affairs at The University of Texas at Austin is conducting a multi-year evaluation (FY 1993 thru FY 1995) for the Texas Department of Human Services (DHS) of the Texas Food Stamp Employment and Training (E&T)/Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) Program Conformance Demonstration, sponsored by the Food and Nutrition Service of U.S. Department of Agriculture. The evaluation is designed to describe and monitor policies and practices developed and implemented for the demonstration, and to assess their preliminary impacts on service delivery, participation, and outcomes. Research results may be used to refine the demonstration model for direct program improvements and for possibly extending the model to other counties in Texas.

DHS staff designed the demonstration, known locally as BOND (Better Opportunities for New Directions), to test the conformance compatibility between the E&T and JOBS programs. The demonstration was conducted in McLennan County; Smith County served as a comparison site. JOBS policies and procedures were applied to eligible Food Stamp recipients; staff serving the two client groups were merged; and activities and support services provided to JOBS and E&T participants, with few exceptions, became identical.

This report presents the results from the process evaluation, one of four complementary research approaches used to evaluate the BOND demonstration. The four research approaches are:<sup>1</sup>

- A process evaluation of E&T program operations at the demonstration (McLennan County) and the comparison (Smith County) sites
- A longitudinal survey of E&T program participants in McLennan County
- An impact study that includes statistical analyses using measures designed by DHS and CHR staff and program data from the demonstration and comparison sites
- A cost analysis of the demonstration project.

The process evaluation had primary responsibility for analyzing demonstration design and implementation features; identifying staff roles and procedures at key steps in service delivery; and describing activities and support services provided to participants.

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<sup>1</sup>The *BOND Participant Survey Final Report* was completed in November 1995. Results from the impact and cost studies will be available in October 1996.

CHR researchers monitored E&T program operations statewide, in McLennan County, and in Smith County, as well as JOBS program operations statewide and in McLennan County. Researchers conducting the process evaluation issued interim reports beginning with the pre-demonstration year (FY 1993) and continuing for the first two years of the demonstration (FY 1994, FY 1995). In addition to providing pre-/post- and cross-site analyses of program operations, the process evaluation identified changes at the state or local level that affected quantitative and fiscal data collected by CHR for the impact and cost studies.

### **Process Evaluation Results**

#### *The Process Evaluation Final Report:*

- 1) Presents prominent features of the Texas Food Stamp E&T program, noting changes in the program during the evaluation period.
- 2) Describes principal design features of the BOND demonstration.
- 3) Discusses implementation of the demonstration and identifies accomplishments, barriers, and lessons derived from these experiences.
- 4) Provides a descriptive analysis of BOND program operations.
- 5) Presents insights and observations regarding key aspects of the conformance demonstration and its statewide applicability.

#### **The key features of the BOND design were:**

- **Conformance.** JOBS policies and procedures replaced E&T policies and procedures regarding resource targeting, sanctions, exemptions, volunteers and case management. Food Stamp and AFDC recipients were served as a single client group at all steps in the service delivery process.
- **Collaboration.** BOND modified roles and required more intensive participation of collaborating agencies. Providers of non-contracted components in particular were expected to make a more significant contribution to the employability efforts of E&T participants in the BOND model than they had formally made to participants in the regular E&T program prior to the demonstration.
- **Activities and Services.** BOND provided regular access to an expanded range of activities and support services for clients. By design, the demonstration provided more education, training, and work experience options than the regular E&T program which had been largely confined to the provision of basic job search and job readiness activities.

**Initial implementation of the demonstration was supported by:**

- **Planning.** State and local staff from DHS and TEC participated in advance planning and design sessions that refined the BOND model from December 1992 through September 1993.
- **Staff Training.** Joint staff training sessions for local delivery staff from TEC and DHS held prior to the demonstration introduced the local staff to the purpose, goals, and procedures of the demonstration.
- **Automation.** DHS modified the Texas JOBS System database to accommodate E&T participants in McLennan County which enabled DHS to monitor service delivery and to issue management reports for E&T participants in BOND at the same level of detail as was available for JOBS participants.
- **Forms/Procedures.** DHS consolidated forms and reporting procedures for the two programs including those used for sanction requests, employment entries, changes in client status, transportation and child care authorization, and client rights and responsibilities.
- **Co-location/ Site development.** TEC and DHS developed the Wooded Acres office site to deliver Job Readiness/Job Search components to E&T and JOBS participants in BOND and to provide a shared office environment for TEC facilitators and DHS group case managers. Case managers were also assigned to local postsecondary institutions and high schools.

**Few barriers were encountered during initial implementation.**

Challenges that did arise included: balancing case manager caseloads between E&T and JOBS participants; early turnover in case manager positions; low enrollments of less job-ready clients, particularly in adult education and other pre-employment components; limitations in the automation system regarding participant status (which affected outreach procedures); and low outreach response rates. BOND staff strongly recommended more and better marketing of program activities and support services.

**BOND influenced participation patterns among the E&T population.<sup>2</sup>**

- **Duration.** BOND required clients to commit to more hours per day over a longer period of time than had been required of participants in the regular E&T program. The overall enrollment period could extend up to two years in BOND and clients were scheduled for a minimum of twenty hours per week. The design of contracted components in E&T prior to the demonstration period embraced a five week participation spell, most of which was dedicated to a largely self-directed job search that required minimal client effort and minimal client/staff contact.

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<sup>2</sup>The impact study will quantify changes in participation patterns.

- **Gender.** Females in the E&T population appeared to have been participating in BOND at a higher proportionate rate than males. In the pre-demonstration period, E&T participants in McLennan County were mostly male.
- **Volunteers.** Previously, exempt work-registrants could not participate in E&T. BOND removed that barrier and 30-40 percent of all participants may have been volunteers.
- **Program Effects/Opportunity Costs.** BOND may have affected Food Stamps benefits and employment in unexpected ways. Some clients reportedly preferred having their benefits reduced, rather than participating; others reported increased income from work efforts. Together these suggest program effects related to more demanding participation requirements. Clients who were marginally dependent on Food Stamps may have viewed participation unfavorably when measured against their opportunity costs.

**BOND expanded the range of activities and services available to E&T clients.**

BOND not only immediately provided access to a wider range of reimbursable Job Readiness and Job Search components than previously found statewide in E&T, but also regularly provided an array of non-reimbursable activities including adult, secondary, and postsecondary education, and unpaid work experience. Except for transitional medical and transitional child care benefits, differences between the support services provided to JOBS participants and those provided to E&T participants were eliminated in BOND.

- **Job Search.** In line with ongoing statewide changes in E&T, BOND intensified job search activities by increasing the number of employer contacts from six to ten per week, extending job search from four to six weeks, and adding GEMS, a weekly group job search activity.
- **Job Readiness.** Also as part of ongoing statewide changes in E&T, BOND replaced the one-week, twenty-hour Job Search Skills Training seminar with Job Preparation and Life Skills Training seminars. Each seminar provide forty hours of job readiness activity over a two-week period.
- **Adult Education.** In the McLennan County E&T program during the seven-month baseline period prior to the demonstration, 14 individuals received 24 hours of adult education instruction in an average month. During BOND, the average monthly number E&T participants in adult education initially dropped to 11 in the first year, but rose to 27 during the second year. However, the average participant in both years received over 50 hours of instruction per month. BOND facilitated access to adult education for a total of 56 participants in the first year and 113 participants in the second year of the demonstration .
- **Postsecondary Education.** BOND provided case management and support services to 98 and 156 postsecondary students in an average month during the first and second years of the demonstration. The annual total number of postsecondary students for these years was 243 and 374, respectively. In the baseline period prior to BOND, no enrollment in postsecondary education was reported.

- **Work Experience.** The BOND program provided and steadily increased the enrollment of E&T clients in the Unpaid Work Experience (UWE) component. During the demonstration, the average monthly number of participants in work experience rose from five to ten individuals from year one to year two of the demonstration, and the average participant received 60 or more hours of work experience per month. Prior to BOND, only one E&T client in McLennan County participated in a work experience activity.
- **Employment Services.** BOND regularly provided Job Development and Job Placement services to E&T participants. Staff used TEC's job matching system to identify openings for participants, and invited local employers to speak to and recruit participants in Job Readiness seminars. Although facilitators had been available daily to provide employment assistance to E&T participants in the pre-demonstration period, few participants had used these services.
- **Job Skills Training/On-the-Job Training.** Few opportunities for long-term Job Skills Training and OJT were available to participants. Staff considered the lack of training opportunities for non-college bound participants to be a weakness of the BOND program. Individuals were rarely active in either of these components during the first two years of the demonstration—enrollment averaged about three individuals per month.
- **Child Care Assistance.** BOND increased funding locally for E&T child care in order to enable participants with young children to partake of longer and more intensive education and training activities. Demand was high and the services may have been disproportionately consumed by postsecondary students. The absence of transitional child care for E&T participants in BOND was controversial among participants and staff.
- **Other Support Services.** BOND upwardly adjusted the transportation reimbursement, exceeding the federally-matched cap. Conforming transportation policy and payments was part of the statewide effort to bring purchased services for E&T and JOBS in line statewide. Staff could authorize one-time, work-related expense payments to participants for specific purchases up to \$65 per year. Since FY 1993, DHS has also authorized the payment of GED testing and certificate fees for JOBS and E&T participants statewide, if requested.

**BOND was relatively successful in attaining its objectives and expectations.<sup>3</sup>**

BOND was designed in part to:

- Provide expanded and enhanced activities and support services for E&T participants
- Improve participation through a stronger sanction policy
- Target resources based on participant need

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<sup>3</sup>These assessments are based on the process evaluation. The impact study will provide quantitative measure of program objectives and outcomes.

- Provide continuity of services delivered to E&T and JOBS participants who experience a change in program eligibility while participating
- Increase efficiency and reduce program costs through common administrative processes, support materials, staff training, and a single service delivery system
- More effectively move participants toward self-sufficiency
- **Activities and Support Services.** BOND successfully expanded the range and intensity of activity components and support services available to E&T participants.
- **Sanctions.** Staff were equivocal about the effects of stronger sanctions on E&T participants in BOND. Most E&T sanction requests were due to failure to respond to outreach; active clients were motivated by perceived benefits derived from participation. According to staff, the stronger sanction policy was a catalyst to improved participation for JOBS participants, whose Food Stamps as well as AFDC benefits were affected by non-compliance.
- **Resource Targeting.** BOND targeted resources based upon participant need much more accurately than regular E&T had prior to the demonstration. BOND provided clients more component options per service level, individualized attention from case managers/facilitators, and the opportunity to volunteer to get support for employment objectives. However, there were individuals for whom recommended activities were inappropriate.
- **Inter-program Continuity.** E&T and JOBS participants who experienced a change in program eligibility while participating in BOND could remain in an education, training, or employment-related activity, despite those changes.
- **Streamlined Service Delivery.** In the demonstration, a single set of policies, procedures, and forms streamlined program operations. Staff who served both populations acknowledged the benefits of conforming program features to serve the two populations. Conformance also sent a consistent message of mutual obligation to public assistance recipients that they had a personal obligation to prepare for and find employment and that through BOND the state provided a pathway to help them do so.
- **Self-Sufficiency.** BOND probably helped some participants more than others along the road to self-sufficiency. Some participants had health and disability problems that limited their labor market viability. Clients in postsecondary education and training faced more favorable labor markets and higher wages.

**BOND staff stimulated several other observations during the process evaluation.**

- **Access/Equity.** BOND increased the equity and the continuity of access to a wider range of education, job skills training, job readiness/job search activities and support services for working and non-working, individuals and families who were receiving public assistance.
- **Tangible/Less-tangible Client Benefits.** Although employment was the primary client objective, intangible benefits, such as self-esteem and motivation, were valued by staff and participants.



- **Staff Benefits.** Staff almost universally claimed personal benefit from the BOND experience. They took pride in their perceived capacity to actually help make a substantive difference in the lives of the clients that they served.
- **Service Delivery.** The largest single challenge faced by staff was to convert initially resistant E&T and JOBS clients into willing participants. Most staff addressed this challenge by articulating potential benefits of BOND in which they themselves clearly believed. TEC facilitators encouraged open communication and peer learning based on personal and common experiences in the core seminars. This reportedly stimulated a process of client-staff, client-client "bonding."
- **Staff Development.** Staff recognized that not all workers have the personal capacity to work with groups as diverse as the E&T and JOBS populations. "People-person" skills are required.
- **Child Care.** The cost and allocation of child care persisted as an issue in BOND and will continue to do so in integrated workforce development initiatives. Providing extended child care to postsecondary students absorbed a high share of program resources, yet will likely yield better results in terms of income and wages. Providing transitional child care to AFDC but not Food Stamp recipients caused tensions.
- **Labor Markets.** Although unemployment rates declined in McLennan County, job openings with livable wages and benefits were very competitive. Clients with weak work histories, no skills, or personal health problems were less likely to obtain the better jobs.

**Several features of the BOND demonstration are appealing on a statewide basis.**

Program staff strongly supported expansion of the BOND model to other Texas counties. Policymakers might note beneficial features of BOND, particularly in light of the emergent statewide interest in integrated workforce development under the guidance of the new Texas Workforce Commission and the local Workforce Development Boards.

- **Service Delivery Continuum.** BOND has shown that two major programs serving low and no-income, working and non-working populations can be merged to provide a continuum of activities and support services designed to increase the employment prospects of individuals who may have little education and few job skills.
- **Collaboration.** Through the additional resources made available to the demonstration, BOND helped the Waco community to strengthen local collaboration and to address recognized mutual needs. By providing case management and support services, BOND was able to leverage non-reimbursable education and training opportunities supported by JTPA at community colleges. BOND also enabled students to enroll in GED and other classes offered by the local Adult Education Cooperative. The local CCMS started a fundraising initiative among private and public sources to increase income-eligible child care in McLennan County.
- **Co-location.** On-site case management at several service delivery locations enabled DHS staff to work closely with TEC staff at the Wooded Acres site, instructors at local high schools, local JTPA staff, and staff at local community colleges, including employees of the Women's Resource Center, the Texas Rehabilitation Commission and the financial aid offices.

- **Pre-employment Screening.** Participation in Job Readiness and Job Search activities served as a pre-employment screening mechanism for private sector jobs. Facilitators and clients were better able to match client needs and interests with job listings. Private sector employers were better served by TEC referrals of clients who had successfully met participation requirements, had reviewed personal communication and work place behavioral expectations, and were willing to work.
- **Postsecondary Education/ High Skill Training.** The fact that 35 to 45 percent of all E&T participants in BOND were enrolled in a technical or community college should interest state policymakers and program administrators. Access to advanced education and training is increasingly considered a prerequisite for wage and income security among workers in Texas. Staff at TSTC and MCC expected wages of postsecondary students to range from \$8 to \$25 per hour.

#### **Ongoing constraints remain to expanding the BOND model.**

Higher costs per participant associated with extended activities and support services, the shortage of job skills training for non-college participants, and the availability of child care for low-income workers are among the challenges that remain to statewide adoption of the BOND model.

#### **Final Comment**

The Texas Food Stamp E&T/JOBS conformance demonstration has indicated some beneficial pathways to deliver employment and training services for working and non-working individuals and families in need of public assistance. The results from the process evaluation collectively suggest that the BOND program has successfully achieved most of its objectives, and that these achievements may be replicable in other areas of the state. In BOND, policymakers and program administrators were willing to support higher initial costs to achieve potentially better outcomes. The central question to workforce development initiatives remains whether government, business, and communities of people can work together to orchestrate access to sources of continuous livelihood for the majority of the current and projected domestic workforce in the shifting global economy.