

**Strategic Planning
in the
Office of Child Support Enforcement**

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Strategic Planning in the Office of Child Support Enforcement

Contributors

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Previous to the request for a case study, OCSE contracted with the Center for Support of Children to write a report on the GPRA pilot project. **Wendy Gray** of the Center for Support of Children developed an extremely valuable strategic planning chronology -- portions of which were incorporated into the case study.

The Government Accomplishment and Accountability Task Force of the American Society of Public Administration (ASPA) deserves credit for coordinating the effort to develop GPRA case studies and for asking OCSE to share its experience with other Federal agencies.

Key Points

This case study of the Office of Child Support Enforcement's GPRA pilot project highlights the need for partnership between Federal programs and their State agency counterparts. GPRA will not be fully implemented unless Federal grantees -- those that actually administer the programs and deliver services that achieve results -- are included in planning, goal-setting, and performance measurement activities.

Federal agencies that achieve their missions through State and local government and other grantees should find this case study useful.

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Context

The Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) was, in many ways, well-suited for piloting the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) of 1993. OCSE began with the enactment of title IV-D of the Social Security Act, in 1975, for the purpose of "establishing and enforcing the support obligations owed by noncustodial parents to their children and the spouse of former spouse with whom the children may be living."¹ The program is primarily federally funded, but administered by States and local governments and, as such, is a true Federal/State partnership. The legislation authorized the States' use of federal funds for enforcing support obligations owed by noncustodial parents, locating absent parents, establishing paternity, and obtaining child and spousal support. The States were given responsibility for administering the child support enforcement (CSE) program while the federal government's role was to fund, monitor, evaluate and provide technical assistance and policy direction.

The traditional OCSE-State relationship can be described as typical of Federal-State relationships. Federal legislation helped create a directive office that saw its role as funder, regulator and auditor. With exceptions related below, generally States were not "partners" and were not consulted on initiatives, policy or requirements. Today, much more communication, consultation and joint projects are undertaken. Two examples of the closer working relationship are development of performance indicators and GPRA unfunded State and local pilots.

Since 1975, OCSE has experienced varied organizational settings in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. OCSE was placed in an operating division that was to become the Administration for Children and Families in 1991. The Assistant Secretary for Children and Families is the statutory OCSE Director, while the Deputy Director has immediate responsibility for carrying out OCSE's mission. ACF's 10 Regional Offices perform various CSE functions with the States and coordinate activities with OCSE while reporting to a Regional Administrator. Another ACF office provides technical assistance and certification for state automated child support systems. During FY 1996 the CSE Central and Regional Office program and systems

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¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families Office of Child Support Enforcement, Eighteenth Annual Report to Congress, September 30, 1993, p.iii.

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staff consisted of 227 full-time equivalent staff while the administrative budget amounted to approximately \$23.5 million. The projected budget for Federal reimbursement of State costs is expected to be approximately \$2.0 billion.

According to its Eighteenth Annual Report to Congress, for the fiscal year ending September 30, 1993, the child support enforcement program established paternity for over half a million children and collected nearly \$9 billion in child support.² In FY 1993, the IV-D child support enforcement caseload consisted of more than 17 million cases.³ Certain Child Support Enforcement goals such as paternities established and dollars collected are clear and easily quantified; given available data, success in achieving these goals can be easily determined. It was clear that child support enforcement had measurable outputs that could be counted with greater ease than many other programs.

There had been at least two previous attempts at strategic planning at OCSE since the late 1980s. These were top-down efforts directed by the Department of Health and Human Services or the parent agency. While much OCSE staff time was expended to fulfill the reporting requirements that emanated from the plans, there was little ownership of these documents. These previous plans were formulated on the Federal level without consulting State child support enforcement programs.

The more recent strategic planning process in the current parent agency, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), produced a broad vision of empowering families and communities that was incorporated into the National Child Support Enforcement Strategic Plan. In contrast to previous attempts at planning, the current ACF strategic planning process included input from all agency programs and employees at all levels and did not require detailed periodic reporting. The ACF strategic plan was completed in April 1996.

There were several events that occurred around the time of the passage of the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) that made OCSE ideally suited to participate as a pilot

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² Ibid.

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³ Ibid., p.6.

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project. By August 1993, when GPRA was signed into law, there were already ongoing attempts at performance measurement and focusing on results within the agency and the States. By becoming a GPRA pilot, OCSE found an opportunity to build on those efforts.

OCSE had been working with its State partners in the Measuring Excellence Through Statistics (METS) initiative. This was an attempt by OCSE and the States to improve the quality of the States' data collection efforts. Progress had been made on proposed data definitions, revised reporting forms and instructions. OCSE welcomed GPRA as an opportunity to build on these partnership efforts.

Additionally, there was already a change occurring in the audit function at OCSE. Audits of State programs were required by law to determine compliance with Federal requirements. While there was statutory authority for other audits, program compliance audits were explicitly required and resources did not allow for many discretionary administrative cost or other results-oriented audits. However, since 1984 as a part of the mandated compliance audits, selected program performance elements have been measured through audits of state program cost effectiveness. During this time, widespread agreement developed that the focus needed to change from looking at process to looking at results. OCSE anticipated GPRA and the auditors began conducting reviews of State reporting systems in order to assess data quality. This shift fit neatly into the GPRA framework.

OCSE faced a new world with new leadership that emphasized the concepts of strategic planning, team-building, coordination, partnership and putting children first. The Federal-State relationship had been evolving. The pace and scale of change would undoubtedly increase. This coupled with the National Performance Review, GPRA, potential Welfare Reform, and a Presidential executive order on Regulatory Reinvention which focused on partnership and increased flexibility, helped convince OCSE and its partners that a new direction was needed.

There was an assumption in the agency that there would be welfare reform in the coming months. The knowledge that legislation would be proposed which might change the welfare system generally and the child support enforcement program specifically in fundamental ways gave an added immediacy to the task of developing a strategic plan and performance measures. The proposed legislation included a new focus on measuring the results of the child support enforcement program. Incentive funding for the States would be increasingly tied to State

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performance.

This potential legislative mandate of linking incentive funding to program performance motivated partners to develop a strategic plan and indicators. At the same time, however, the anticipation of rewards and penalties based on reports of State performance delayed the development of performance indicators. Partners quickly recognized that their program funding would be based on reports of program performance, thus increasing anxiety levels and creating the need for careful consideration in performance indicator development. While the goals of child support enforcement are clear and universal among State programs, reaching agreement on indicators was no easy task. Since agreement on performance measures was impeding consensus on the strategic plan, the partners agreed to postpone development of indicators until after there was consensus on the strategic plan.

Strategic Planning Process

Those who were working on the pilot project at OCSE knew that any project would have to include their State "partners." Focusing the GPRA effort only at the Federal level would make little sense because it is the States that implement child support enforcement and provide almost all of the direct services to the public. Only by working with the States could OCSE have an impact on the program's performance results. Likewise, OCSE recognized the critical role of Federal Regional Office CSE staff as providers of technical assistance and liaison to the States. Regional representatives participated in drafting the strategic plan as partners on the Core Team. Various Central Office functions such as policy, audit and program operations were represented on the Core Team and throughout deliberations as well. Drafts of the emerging plan were shared with stakeholders such as national advocacy groups.

OCSE made strategic plan development a priority and involved high-level officials at very beginning. In late March, 1994, Judge David Gray Ross, OCSE's Deputy Director, sent a "Dear Colleague" letter to the State child support enforcement (IV-D) directors. In this letter, he announced that OCSE was designated a GPRA pilot and he asked for their help on performance plans and development of performance indicators.

At first, Federal staff thought it best to draft an initial strategic plan so that State partners would have something to react to. Efforts to start designing a strategic planning document for the

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agency began at the end of April, 1994, when a group of participants from OCSE's Central Office met with Mike English and Hap Hadd, of the HHS Assistant Secretary for Management and Budget (ASMB) staff. Mike English and Hap Hadd would assist OCSE by acting as consultants and facilitators throughout the GPRA pilot.⁴ ACF Regional Office program managers were connected to this meeting via conference call. The group met and developed a first draft of a Strategic Plan. This first draft was distributed and discussed with State IV-D directors at their annual meeting in Virginia Beach, Virginia in early May.

Comments the OCSE staff received at the annual meeting made it clear that the strategic planning effort should go no further without including State partners in the process. Judge Ross, therefore, sent a letter to the IV-D directors to ask for their help in developing a strategic plan for the agency, solicit from them proposals for two-year GPRA pilot projects in their States, and ask the directors to circulate the strategic plan in their States and get feedback from other interested parties.

OCSE creatively used every opportunity to involve partners and stakeholders in the formation of the strategic plan. Regional and national conferences were used to get input and spread the word about the developing plan and partnership. Focus groups with advocates for children and both parents were held. Teleconferencing and videoconferencing was also employed to build bridges of communication between partners.

Consensus was achieved on the final version of the Strategic Plan during a national videoconference of State IV-D and Federal OCSE leaders on February 28, 1995 originating from Washington D.C. More than 20 State CSE programs were represented and over 100 people participated in the videoconference. Plan consensus was the culmination of over ten months of intensive work and communication. The resulting Strategic Plan is testament to both the efforts of the partnership and the time-consuming nature of planning between Federal and State partners.

Possible performance indicators had been included in the December version of the Plan. As discussed earlier, in order to get final consensus on the Strategic Plan, it became clear to the OCSE staff that the indicators or performance measures needed to be separated from the Plan.

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The decision to use ASMB expertise on GPRA, strategic planning, and performance measurement made sense because it was high quality and offered at no charge to OCSE. These facilitators did not have any preconceived notion of the child support enforcement program, but they were motivated to see that GPRA was implemented successfully. OCSE, on the other hand, felt strongly that GPRA, long-range planning, and results measures must be developed in program, as opposed to staff offices. The relationship between ASMB staff and OCSE was mutually beneficial.

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Consensus on and acceptance of the Strategic Plan by the partners would be the first step and, then, the development of the performance measures would be a second and separate step in the implementation of GPRA.

The immediate benefit to dropping the measures from the Plan was a focus on the major goals and objectives, resulting in consensus. In retrospect, developing a separate effort on performance measures was advisable as it can be more difficult than strategic planning. Technical details are critical to measurement and this is where the differences among State programs are magnified. State practice is governed in large part by State domestic relations law. Differences in case processing procedures as well as data definitions make consistency difficult.

One drawback to having a separate effort to develop measures is that the passage of time and key players can create a disconnect between the strategic plan and its performance indicators. This is probably unavoidable, however, given the prolonged evolutionary nature of this process and partnership, in general. Developing indicators can raise problems with the goal or objective being measured and there is a temptation to revise goals and objectives to fit the measure, rather than the other way around. However, OCSE and its partners resisted this temptation and the Strategic Plan has been strongly defended against change resulting from indicator development.

Consensus. Final edits were made on the Plan producing a consensus version dated February 28, 1995. In accepting the National Child Support Enforcement Strategic Plan as a working blueprint for the child support enforcement program over the next five years, all participating IV-D partners signalled their agreement on the goals and objectives for the program.⁵ For those who participated in the videoconference, agreement on the Strategic Plan felt like a truly historic moment. The accomplishment of consensus drew spontaneous applause from the group of 25 attending the videoconference in Washington. Cecelia Burke, president of the National Child Support Enforcement Administrators Association, acknowledged the event as a milestone in Federal-State relations in the CSE program, saying, "For the first time ever, we have a Strategic

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⁵ "Consensus Reached on National Strategic Plan for CSE," Child Support Report, March 23, 1995.

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Plan for the whole program. I feel we are moving into a new realm with OCSE, when you consider the magnitude of what we have just accomplished here."⁶

Key People. OCSE sought both high level and widespread support for implementing GPRA. Assistant Secretary for Children and Families, and statutory OCSE Director Mary Jo Bane watched the GPRA pilot closely and was very supportive of its progress. Assistant Secretary Bane participated in three performance measures meetings and provided some valuable input on developing outcome indicators for the CSE program. The Assistant Secretary's involvement showed high level interest and commitment to partners and reaffirmed the Administration's support for implementing GPRA. OCSE Deputy Director David Gray Ross was an enthusiastic believer in the GPRA pilot effort and really cultivated State interest in the process. In addition, a former State IV-D director, Anne Donovan, was hired to head the GPRA Task Force. Her ability to relate to the States and work closely with Federal managers was very important to expanding communication between Federal and State partners.

Consultation with Congress and the Office of Management and Budget. State and Federal partners felt it was best to reach out to partners and stakeholders within the child support enforcement community before meeting the GPRA requirement of consulting with Congress. Presentation of a plan to appropriation and authorizing committees that had not achieved full consensus among partners was considered premature. Later, as more HHS programs began to develop strategic plans, the Department would decide to avoid multiple contacts with Congress and favor a unified consultation made through a comprehensive HHS Strategic Plan.

As a pilot, OCSE reported on its activities to OMB and shared its consensus strategic plan and draft performance measures with OMB Income Maintenance staff. OMB strategic planning guidance to all agencies was not considered by partners as it was issued several months after Plan consensus in February, 1995. Following plan consensus, OMB staff also attended meetings of the State/Federal Performance Measures Workgroup. OCSE considered and responded to OMB comments on the draft measures.

The mission, vision, goals and objectives of the strategic plan received full consensus from State and Federal partners. ACF and the Department have certainly reviewed the Strategic Plan and

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⁶ Ibid.

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praised it. Higher levels have respected the results of the partnership that was forged through strategic planning.

Participants and Observers. OCSE recognized the benefit of involving and educating those outside the program during the development of the plan and measures. Focus groups were held with advocates and various interest groups. ACF planning staff that were involved in urging OCSE to become a pilot observed strategic planning meetings. During the performance measures development effort since February, 1995, OCSE welcomed special participants and guests to working meetings of the partnership. Individuals from HHS and ACF planning, evaluation and budget staff offices, the General Accounting Office and the Office of Management and Budget attended meetings. Involvement of these stakeholders in the process would help ensure their support for the final product.

Federal Leadership. The Federal office recognized the GPRA process as an opportunity to build trust, improve working relationships, and forge a partnership with the state child support offices. The unenthusiastic State reaction to the initial draft strategic plan developed solely by the Federal office underscored the importance of State involvement. OCSE proactively reached out and demonstrated its intention for partnership with invitations to States to get involved. The Federal office maintained a leadership role by staffing the activity and making it a national priority for child support enforcement. The Federal office was committed to responding to partners' concerns through constant consultation, inclusion and co-responsibility. While the expectations of State child support offices may still differ in terms of what the Federal-State partnership should be, the process appears to have improved communications and enhanced the working relationship between the States and OCSE.

Strategic Plan Summary

Mission. The Child Support Enforcement Program is authorized and defined by statute, title IV-D of the Social Security Act. The purpose and the mission of the Program are derived from the Act:

To assure that assistance in obtaining support (both financial and medical) is available to children through locating parents, establishing paternity and support obligations, and enforcing those obligations.

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Vision. The National Child Support Enforcement Strategic Plan articulates the following vision:

The Child Support Enforcement Program will put children first by helping parents assume responsibility for the economic and social well-being, health and stability of their children. We recognize the value of improved relationships with both parents.

Reinventing what it means to provide child support enforcement was integral to the development of the strategic plan, and necessary for its success.

Traditionally, government services reflected the strong adversarial nature of child support enforcement. Many CSE programs saw themselves as advocates for custodial parents, creating an adversarial relationship between the child support agency, and non-custodial parents, some advocacy groups, and in some case, state legislatures. This adversarial role was exacerbated by the widely held notion of child support agencies as merely collection and enforcement agents -- minimizing their efforts to uncover, and attempt to resolve, the reasons behind non-payment of support, e.g. unemployment or lack of education or job skills.

The Strategic Plan was used as a vehicle to chart a new course for the program. Reflecting recognition of the evolution occurring in the public arena and as part of welfare reform, the plan very deliberately moves away from child support as an adversarial program and redefines the program in the interest of children and families. For example, the program goals identify children, rather than parents, as the primary customers and beneficiaries of the program. No State or advocacy group, whether representing custodial or noncustodial parents, could argue with putting children first. In addition, the Vision recognizes the broader social contribution of child support enforcement beyond a collection and enforcement agency, by "helping parents assume responsibility." The vision also diffuses the adversarial nature of the program in its treatment of noncustodial parents "by recognizing the value of improved relationships with both parents." Increased involvement, financial or otherwise, of the noncustodial parent with the family may bring benefits that are difficult to measure.

The Federal office developed and widely publicized the phrase "Children First" to promote the evolving image of the child support enforcement program. To illustrate that Federal leadership was on board with the new message, OCSE Deputy Director David Gray Ross put a large "Children First" sign over his door, where it remains today. The use of simple, symbolic phrase played an important role in forming consensus on the Strategic Plan and in changing the adversarial image of child support enforcement.

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Goals and Objectives. The Federal partnership with States is not only evident in the strategic planning *process*, but also present in the content of the goals and objectives of the Strategic Plan itself. The Strategic Plan's goals and objectives are for the entire breadth of the Program and not simply Federal activities. The following goals and objectives are contained in the National Child Support Enforcement Strategic Plan:

GOAL 1: ALL CHILDREN HAVE PARENTAGE ESTABLISHED

Objective:

- a. **To Increase Establishment of Paternities, Particularly Those Established within One Year of Birth**

GOAL 2: ALL CHILDREN IN IV-D CASES HAVE FINANCIAL AND MEDICAL SUPPORT ORDERS

Objectives:

- a. **To Increase the Percentage of IV-D Cases with Orders for Financial Support**
- b. **To Increase the Percentage of Cases With Orders for Medical Support**

GOAL 3: ALL CHILDREN IN IV-D CASES RECEIVE FINANCIAL AND MEDICAL SUPPORT FROM BOTH PARENTS

Objectives:

- a. **To Increase the Collection Rate**

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- b. **To Increase the Percentage of Cases Where Health Insurance Coverage Is Obtained After Being Ordered**
- c. **To Increase the Percentage of Cases with Appropriate and Up-to-date Support Orders**
- d. **To Make the Process More Efficient and Responsive**

Early in Strategic Plan development efforts, specific activities and approaches needed to achieve the goals above were included. However, partners thought such details were more appropriate to annual performance plans and would vary greatly among individual State programs. State programs are at different stages and levels of progress and State as well as Federal annual performance plans may focus on more limited, specific areas of concentration for program improvements.

Partners recognized that to achieve broad satisfactory results for children, the States and Federal Central and Regional Office partners need to work closely together and strike a balance between uniformity and flexibility to allow for innovation in program operations.

Therefore, the Strategic Plan includes a statement entitled "Overall Approach" which stresses a continued focus on achieving results focused on children. Specific approaches include improving consistency and uniformity in service delivery and eliminating conflicting program policies. OCSE and the States will work together to identify activities, such as in the interstate and international arenas and data collection, where uniform approaches yield the best results.

Greater flexibility and encouraging innovation will also be a major operating principle for the partnership. The outcomes require that the experience and creative talents of all partners in the program must be used. Constant effort to stimulate, celebrate, and disseminate innovation and creativity is the essence of the approach to successful accomplishment of the Plan's goals and objectives. In agreement with the principles of creativity and innovation, both OCSE and its partners committed to operating in a continuously improving and empowering environment -- supported by opportunities for development, modern management practices, and maximum use of technology.

Performance Reporting. Two interim performance indicators --paternities established and child support collections-- were selected while State and Federal partners jointly developed an array of measures that indicate success in achieving each goal and objective of the Strategic Plan. In the

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future, national performance targets will be set by program partners with individualized State performance agreements and compacts being negotiated between States and ACF Regional Office child support enforcement units.

Resources. Achievement of targets depends on resources. The projected budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 1996 for State child support administrative costs is \$2.9 billion. Federal Financial Participation (FFP) is set at 66% of those State costs; 90% Federal funding is also available for certain automated systems costs and paternity laboratory costs that States incur; however with incentive payments to the States, the effective FFP rate is really 83%. These State costs do not include salaries and expenses for the cost of approximately 227 Federal staff in Central and Regional Offices or the cost of operating the Federal Parent Locator Service.

External Factors. There are key external factors that could significantly affect the achievement of the Strategic Plan goals and objectives. A number of these key variables could affect achievement of long-term objectives and goals. The major factors can be summarized as follows:

- **Legislation:** Additional child support enforcement legislation on the Federal and State levels could improve program performance. Welfare Reform child support provisions contain many of the proven enforcement and management tools needed for improved child support enforcement. New legislation may also cause initial disruption and could create widely varying State public assistance programs which could impact achievement of goals and objectives.

At the same time without changes in the explicit funding, incentives, reporting, audit and penalty provisions of current law, GPRA may have little real impact on State programs

- **Funding:** Reduced funding on the State and Federal levels would hamper efforts to deal with growing child support caseloads.

- **Economy:** An ever-changing economy with wage downturns and unemployment may impact child support collections.

- **Trends:** Social and demographic trends such as non-marital births and population gains at certain age ranges can create ever-increasing challenges for child support enforcement.

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- **Culture:** Continuing cultural attitudes that permit parents to escape responsibility for children leave child support agencies with limited tools to overcome a social obstacle.

Uses and Impact of Strategic Planning

Benefits. The greatest benefit of the strategic planning process so far has been the forging of a true partnership between States and Federal Central and Regional Offices. Communication between partners has increased both in quantity and quality. Consulting States before taking action on major initiatives is now standard practice. The process of developing the Strategic Plan helped Federal and State government partners to focus on the basic mission and desired outcomes of child support enforcement programs. The planning process created a consensus which all partners could endorse: putting children first. Identifying children as the primary customer moved the debate beyond the traditional mindset which takes sides between custodial and non-custodial parents. The planning process also generated enthusiasm, interest and involvement from States, as well as the beginning of trust and the belief that we are all in this together.

Organizational Restructuring. Traditionally, when organizations engage in strategic planning, organizational restructuring often results. In the shared responsibility for child support enforcement that exists between State and Federal governments, it was primarily the relationship that was restructured. However, some restructuring did occur in the Federal Central Office. A GPRA Task Force of Central and Regional Office staff was created to provide overall coordination of the pilot and technical assistance to State volunteer projects. A Special Initiatives staff was developed to assist States with international and military cases, Native American issues, and provide liaison with stakeholder groups such as employers and the law enforcement community. A division of Consumer Services was created and a division of State and Local Assistance is planned.

State Impact. The Plan was a statement of a powerful consensus in the child support enforcement community that helped to set a threshold for program direction. The basic goals and mission of the program did not have to be revisited. For some States, the Strategic Plan helped spur planning and performance measurement efforts of their own. The Plan was used as an important reference, portions of which were incorporated into State plans.

GPRA Demonstrations. On March 8, 1995, OCSE issued a program grant announcement under Section 1115 of the Social Security Act. The announcement requested applications from State

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and local offices for demonstration projects as part of the GPRA pilot. Six projects, totaling over \$606,000, have been selected for cooperative agreements lasting up to seventeen months. The demonstrations include the following results-oriented projects:

- Evaluation of performance-based contracting in Michigan;
- Analysis of performance indicators in Arizona;
- Study of non-compliant child support obligors in order to support strategic planning efforts in Minnesota;
- Restructuring and privatization of services in Wyoming;
- Improved child support/welfare interface in Virginia; and,
- Community-based paternity establishment in Delaware.

The purpose of these cooperative agreements is to both support the GPRA pilot and apply its concepts on a level closer to program customers. A number of States have results-oriented management initiatives with strategic planning and performance measurement elements. These projects will support this on-going activity and stimulate a focus on outcomes in States that may have just started. Results from these projects will be widely disseminated to educate program managers about how to implement similar initiatives and their potential impact on achievement of goals.

GPRA sparked a major effort to invite States, local programs and regions to pilot results orientation, customer service, strategic planning and performance measurement. Approximately 30 diverse unfunded pilot projects were accepted. This aspect of OCSE's pilot was not required by GPRA but did much to spread the spirit of GPRA to the States. Through these unfunded pilots, enthusiasm for GPRA expanded and State and Federal linkages increased.

One of the most successful pilots to date has been a new interface between the Federal Parent Locator Service and the Social Security Administration's Enumeration Verification System (EVS). Eight States participated by submitting the names of individuals sought for paternity establishment or enforcement of support. Social Security Numbers (SSNs) were identified for

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approximately 190,000 cases for a 28% match rate. SSNs are required as unique identifiers for automated matching. Approximately 30,000 of these cases were submitted for Internal Revenue Service (IRS) tax refund offset. Preliminary data for the 1995 tax year indicates \$1.6 million has been collected thus far through IRS tax refund offset. EVS is now used on a nationwide basis.

Ohio has also been successful in laying the foundation for a results-oriented child support enforcement program. Its voluntary GPRA pilot has focused on identifying strategic plan program goals, objectives and performance indicators. Progress has been made on establishing performance agreements between the State Department of Human Services and county-level child support offices. Ohio also intends to revise its county funding scheme to reward performance.

Federal Impact. The Strategic Plan has been used to guide workplans and staff performance appraisal systems in a number of units in the Federal Central and Regional Offices. Many States have signed individual performance agreements or region-wide compacts with ACF Regional Offices. It should be noted that neither of these activities was mandated but evolved from the strategic planning and partnership experience. In order to extend GPRA techniques to States' training staff, the FY 1996 Training Conference agenda is being designed around strategic planning and performance measurement on the State and Federal level.

Plan Dissemination. The Plan has been shared with advocacy groups, all State IV-D programs, posted on the modem-accessible ACF electronic bulletin board (1-800-627-8886 or 202-401-5800), OCSE's home page on the World Wide Web (<http://www.acf.dhhs.gov>), included as part of training conference reference materials, and written up in a child support newsletter which is distributed to thousands of state and local child support workers. The Plan was shared around the agency and OCSE's GPRA experience has been related to various Federal agencies. Performance measures which have been agreed on and implemented should indicate the level of success in achieving Plan goals and objectives.

Legislation. Becoming a GPRA pilot did not offer immediate opportunities to change laws that governed aspects of the program. Partners have worked together in providing assistance to modify proposed legislation. In the future, partners will explore proposing needed legislation that will assist in implementing GPRA more fully. For example, legislation that would modify data reporting requirements, and better align the strategic plan goals, performance measures and the audit function would bring statutory requirements up-to-date with Federal and State partnership activities.

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Costs

The GPRA pilot and specifically the strategic planning effort has had huge benefits with minimal financial costs. There have been a few staff added, and there was some travel required during the planning stage. OCSE and its partners have learned to accomplish more with fewer resources. Closer cooperation results in sharing of resources and smoother implementation. A greater range of ideas and perspectives is available to tap. The partnership has created a climate where some States are able to assist others with national initiatives while Federal staff facilitate, act as a clearinghouse for information, or staff out a project.

Lessons Learned

OCSE and its partners knew that GPRA would be imposed on the program eventually. This fact created an incentive to get a head start and do it right the first time. Below are some lessons learned from OCSE's GPRA pilot to date:

- **Mistake:** Initially, OCSE drafted a strategic plan without consulting States so that discussion could start with something on the table.

Lesson: Don't take pen to paper until your partners are at the table.

- **Mistake:** OCSE set initial performance targets without consulting partners.

Lesson: Unless you set targets together, they are your targets and not your partners'.

- **Mistake:** Trying to take people where they don't want to go. For example, trying to convince certain partners that to improve our success, we must recognize and work to resolve obstacles that affect noncustodial parents' ability to meet their responsibilities (noncustodial parents are our customers too).

Lesson: Find something all can agree on. For OCSE and its partners it was: put children first.

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- **Lesson:** Involve stakeholders, advocates, interest groups, other Federal agencies or offices early on to ensure their support for the ultimate decisions made with your partners.
- **Lesson:** Federal staff should be prepared to do most of the work. GPRA is a priority for Federal agencies; otherwise, work may not get done.
- **Lesson:** Be smart, be honest, be patient. Start with something you can be objective about. Get help from others such as experts, facilitators, partners. Be honest and admit you don't have all the answers and you're making it up as you go along. Be patient and listen with an open mind; your way isn't the only way.
- **Lesson:** Be quiet. Let State partners do the talking. Often the reasoning of peers is more convincing to States than arguments from Washington.
- **Lesson:** Consensus doesn't necessarily mean that everyone agrees; it means that everyone has had a chance to participate and contribute to a decision that partners can accept and support. Consensus decision-making does not employ voting.
- **Lesson:** Partnership is hard and time-consuming -- don't expect miracles. The plan you create is living and can be changed. Partnership and planning is a continuous, long-term process and cascades to operational levels. Open and frequent communication among partners is key.

Next Steps

Plan Implementation. OCSE considers the Strategic Plan as the foundation for results-oriented management. In the future, States and the national program will be judged on success in achieving the goals and objectives, given external factors. Many States started results-oriented management initiatives before GPRA. It is hoped that the Plan will influence more States to follow this trend. Individual actions and strategies will necessarily differ from State to State. Ultimately, the Plan and its indicators will result in driving the program to improve outcomes for

children and lead to a rational investment of resources based on performance-based budgeting.

Performance Indicators. Partners tentatively agreed to a set of performance indicators at a meeting in Bethesda, Maryland, on July 17-18, 1996. Performance measures will be piloted in order to assess difficulty in collecting data, reprogramming automated systems, etc.

Welfare Reform. Should Welfare Reform legislation be passed by Congress and signed by the President, program partners will have to consider its impact on the Strategic Plan, data reporting, performance indicators, and Federal funding. Ultimately, the performance indicators could be the basis of proposed legislation that will revise current data reporting requirements. The legislation should leave flexibility for program partners to make appropriate changes in the indicators and in data reporting as needed. Data definitions, reporting forms and instructions will have to be revised. State partners have to complete their automated systems and other data gathering systems.

Performance Agreements. While many States preceded Federal GPRA implementation with their own efforts at strategic planning and performance measurement, others are just beginning to react to these trends. Performance or Partnership Agreements were developed voluntarily between many States and Federal Regional Offices. These agreements will continue to evolve. Discussions are now taking place which may suggest a standardized approach to this effort. However, a large amount of flexibility will remain in order to accommodate diversity among the States and Regional Offices.

Audit. Currently, State compliance with detailed Federal requirements is audited in accordance with statute. Welfare Reform is needed to release auditors from reviewing States for detailed program compliance to looking at the results achieved by State child support enforcement programs. In the future, one of the primary roles of the Division of Audit will be reviewing the validity of data reported by States.

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Attachment A

Development of Case Study

OCSE retained all records (electronic and hardcopy) from the start of its GPRA pilot. OCSE also employed a vendor to develop a brief history or chronology of its pilot. The vendor worked during the Fall and Winter of 1995-96 to review archival files and reconstruct the process OCSE and its State partners went through to develop a strategic plan. The vendor conducted numerous interviews with Federal and State staff (listed below). Drafts of the vendor's report were reviewed several times and feedback was provided.

In responding to the Case Study Outline questions, OCSE used the vendor's report as a key reference and incorporated portions where appropriate. The case study was developed by **Tom Killmurray**, with contributions by **Anne Donovan**, **Gaile Maller**, and **Elizabeth C. Matheson**, **Robert C. Harris**, and **Keith E. Bassett**. Tom Killmurray began working for OCSE at the time of strategic plan development. Later, he was reassigned to work directly in GPRA pilot activities at the stage just before strategic plan consensus. Mr. Killmurray also served as the project officer for the vendor writing the GPRA history and he was able to participate in some of the interviews the vendor conducted.

Both the GPRA pilot archival files and the vendor's pilot history are available for review by contacting OCSE.

References

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National Council of State CSE Administrators memorandum on OCSE Strategic Planning, July 6, 1994.

DRAFT Child Support Enforcement Strategic Plan, FY 1995-1999, August 10, 1994.

DRAFT Child Support Enforcement Strategic Plan, FY 1995-1999, December 5, 1994.

Child Support Enforcement Strategic Plan, FY 1995-1999, February 28, 1995.

"Consensus Reached on National Strategic Plan for CSE," Child Support Report, March 23, 1995.

Interviews Conducted by Wendy Gray (Titles at the time of interview)

Robert C. Harris, Associate Deputy Director, OCSE

Donna Bonar, Director, Division of Program Operations, OCSE

Keith Bassett, Director, Division of Audit, OCSE

Myles Schlank, GPRA Core Team Leader, OCSE

David Gray Ross, Deputy Director, OCSE

Elizabeth C. Matheson, Director, Division of Policy and Planning (DPP), OCSE

Gaile Maller, Chief, Planning and Evaluation Branch (PEB), DPP, OCSE

Tom Killmurray, Program Analyst, PEB, DPP, OCSE

Jerry Fay, Deputy Commissioner, Child Support Enforcement Division,
Department of Revenue, Massachusetts

Nancy Long, Child Support Enforcement Program Manager, Region VII, Kansas City
Regional
Office,
ACF

Cecelia Burke, Director, Child Support Division, Office of the Attorney General, Texas and
President, National Council of State Child Support Enforcement Administrators

Wilma Hill, Child Support Enforcement Program Manager, Region II, New York City
Regional Office, ACF

Barry Morrisroe, Child Support Enforcement Program Manager,

Strategic Planning in the Office of Child Support Enforcement

Region X, Seattle Regional Office, ACF

Mike English, Senior Management Analyst, Assistant Secretary for
Management and Budget,

DHHS

Hap Hadd, Senior Management Analyst, Assistant Secretary for
Management and Budget,

DHHS