

SECTION II

METHOD FOR COMMUNITY FORUM

Phase III of the Adult Protective Services (APS) research project involved coordinating a Community Forum in which participants had the opportunity to hear research findings from Phase I and Phase II, and respond to preliminary recommendations. The premise for such a forum was the assumption that the true experts on Adult Protective Services are those individuals who function as caseworkers, supervisors, administrators, reporters and policy makers within the realm of the APS system, and the elderly residents who can potentially be served by the system. In keeping with this premise, community forum participants were asked to provide feedback on the preliminary recommendations that were developed based on the research findings from Phases I and II of the evaluation of the APS system. Input was also solicited from the participants as to which of the proposed recommendations were critical in improving the APS services in Ohio. The researcher, in consultation with the local and national consultants, developed the preliminary recommendations presented to the forum participants. The involvement of the APS professionals in the community forum provided a unique perspective on the potential impact of the recommendations, as well as an opportunity to validate the information gathered through multiple methods and sources. The importance of soliciting input from those who work most directly with the system cannot be underscored enough as they offer valuable first hand information.

A. Community Forum Methodology

A committee consisting of project staff, an Ohio Department of Aging (ODA) representative, and staff from Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) planned the community forum. The Community Forum was scheduled approximately six weeks following the deadline for completion of Phase

II. Participants consisted of APS professionals from the elder abuse service network, local and state human services administrators, legislators, community elders, and professionals who interact with the APS system. The city of Columbus was chosen as the site for holding the community forum, as this was a central location for guests from around Ohio. The Forum was held at the Fawcett Center on the Columbus campus of The Ohio State University.

The project staff was responsible for making all the arrangements for the event including developing brochures, mailing invitations, registration, arranging refreshments and facilitating the roundtable discussions at the forum. The investigator and consultants formulated the preliminary recommendations, which were then used for generating discussion and feedback from the forum participants. The forum was designed for both sharing findings and for obtaining written and oral feedback from the participants. The purpose of the discussion and the tasks at the forum was to obtain input on prioritizing the recommendations in order to facilitate implementation by the State.

i) Selection of Community Participants

The project staff generated a list of community agencies and governmental institutions from a variety of sources including web sites, yellow pages and resource guides provided by state and local governments. In consultation with the ODJFS and ODA staff, project staff designed a brochure and letter of invitation to advertise the forum and explain the purpose of the meeting. The forum agenda specified in the brochure that the first half of the day would be a presentation of project findings and recommendations, and the second half of the day would feature an opportunity for community feedback. There was no charge for the event, but advance reservations were required via phone or fax. (See Appendix B). Invitations were distributed in a mass mailing to various community agencies responsible for APS delivery directly or indirectly, and press releases were faxed to major media outlets throughout the state to inform the general public.

The ODJFS and the ODA agreed to utilize existing data bases to distribute letters of invitation and registration brochures to all Area Agencies on Aging, Ohio Council on Adult Protective Services, all agency directors and APS supervisors at County Departments of Job and Family Services (See Appendix C). In addition, project staff mailed invitations and registration brochures to the Ohio Association of Senior Centers, Ohio Alzheimer's Association Chapter Network, Ohio Association of Adult Day Services, Ohio Department of MR/DD, Ohio Department of Mental Health, Ohio Council for Home Care, and Senior Initiatives in the office of the Ohio Attorney General. A separate letter was mailed to all state senators and state representatives at their Columbus offices, inviting their participation as well (see Appendix C). To ensure participation by elderly residents, a letter was mailed to all the Senior Centers in Franklin County, encouraging center staffs to facilitate registration and transportation of elderly individuals who may have an interest in the future of the APS system (see Appendix C). Project staff conducted follow-up calls to local senior centers to confirm their receipt of the invitations and to request their participation. Finally, project staff composed and mailed a press release to major media outlets throughout the state including major newspapers in Columbus, Cleveland, and Cincinnati and many local papers, announcing the forum and inviting the public to participate (see Appendix B).

An estimated 185 people registered to attend the community forum. Most of the registrations were made via telephone and return mail. A total of 166 people attended the forum with a large percent of participants from the county APS systems (see Table - 1 in Section III).

ii) Community Forum Process

The forum was scheduled from 10:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. A meal was provided to forum attendees in appreciation for their willingness to spend a day working with project staff on developing and providing

input on recommendations. During the morning session, the Director of the Ohio Department of Aging and the Deputy Director of ODJFS= Office of Children and Families had the opportunity to welcome the participants, offer remarks on the importance of the APS evaluation and explain the role of their respective agencies in the delivery of APS in Ohio. This was followed by the Principal Investigator=s presentation of the major research findings and the consultant=s sharing of the preliminary recommendations.

Following the morning presentation, participants were invited to the dining room for a complimentary lunch. The seating arrangements were designed for round table discussion, thereby allowing a maximum of 10 persons per table. There were a total of 15 groups. As lunch drew to a close, participants were encouraged to examine a typed copy of the preliminary recommendations as distributed to each table. The participants were then asked to utilize the random seating arrangement of each table, and discuss personal perspectives on the recommendations. Staff provided each table with paper and asked a representative for each group to record any comments or feedback on discussion questions such as >which recommendations do you agree with,= >what additional recommendations should be included,= >what recommendations are unnecessary,= or >what suggestions do you have for implementing recommendations.=

Discussion groups used one hour to analyze and respond to recommendations with peers and colleagues at their tables. At the conclusion of one hour, participants from each table were asked to share a brief summary of their discussion and feedback. The project staff recorded the feedback, and the participants at each table were required to provide written documentation of their discussion, which was collected for later analysis.

In the final stage of the Community Forum, project staff distributed five red sticker-dots and five blue sticker-dots to each individual present. Participants were instructed to circulate throughout the dining room, where each of the recommendations (n = 22) was posted individually on poster paper hanging on the

walls. Participants were asked to designate the five most critical recommendations with a red sticker-dot, and similarly, to note the five >second-most-critical< recommendations with a blue sticker-dot. This technique allowed investigators to statistically evaluate which recommendations APS workers, community service providers, key stakeholders, and clients perceived to be most critical to improving the APS system. Forum attendees were then dismissed with appreciation for their participation.

B. Data Analysis

Responses to open-ended questions were content analyzed and coding schemes were developed. The open-ended responses from the group discussions were analyzed using the Nu*Dist software program which allows for coding and classification of qualitative data. The procedure employed for analysis had two aspects. First, the transcripts obtained from the forum participants= group discussions of the major discussion question (>what additional recommendations would you like to make to improve the current APS system<) were entered into the database and classified according to the frequency of scores for each statement by group numbers. The analysis entailed identifying themes and related categories for the major questions across the 15 discussion groups. Themes that emerged were similar to the ones proposed by the research staff. For example: the themes on training and education, APS structure, funding, APS statute, service delivery, and inter-agency coordination. There were also additional statements made under each of the categories, which reflected suggestions for best practices. Under each category, the statements that best describe the category were then clustered to reflect the component. Two independent reviewers examined the themes and categories generated from the analysis for consistency in the content. Duplicative statements, unclear items and vague responses were eliminated from the analysis. Second, the analysis involved quantifying the data by tallying the frequency of scored items on statements within categories. The composite scores on responses were used to construct tables within the framework of themes that emerged. To

quantify the structured close-ended responses the SPSS-PC software program was used. The data obtained on the ranking of the recommendations by the participants were subjected to univariate descriptive analysis. The results are presented in tables using frequency counts (see Appendix E and Section III).