

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A SYSTEM REVIEW OF THE VIRGINIA ALCOHOL SAFETY ACTION PROGRAM

by

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(The opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed in this
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In the research reported, the status of development of the Virginia Alcohol Safety Action Program (VASAP) was examined from several viewpoints. The relationship between the VASAP and the Virginia Department of Transportation Safety (VDTS) was examined because of the need to integrate the VASAP into the overall safety effort of the VDTS and because of the VASAP's need to make use of VDTS resources. Various aspects of the internal operations of the VASAP State Office were discussed, especially those dealing with interoffice communications and the allocation of staff resources to adequately reflect program priorities. Finally, the relationships of the State Office with its local programs and with other agencies were considered to examine the VASAP's vertical and horizontal lines of communications.

The conclusions and recommendations from the study are presented below.

Part I: Relationship Between the VASAP and the VDTS

Conclusions

The VASAP, because of its historical development, is not considered to be an integral part of the VDTS and as a result does not make extensive enough use of the VDTS resources. Too little of the responsibility for VASAP planning and decision making is being shared by the VDTS. The VDTS is also making insufficient use of very valuable VASAP resources in its overall transportation safety program.

Recommendations

The VDTs fiscal office should be included in the fiscal planning process for the State Office and the local ASAPs. The VASAP State Office should offer such services as providing accounting standards for local programs on a consulting basis, and thus use VDTs expertise to improve fiscal accountability at the local level.

The role of the area coordinators in the VASAP should be clarified and enforced by improving both VASAP and VDTs communications with these coordinators. One step toward this goal would be to ensure that the coordinators follow the procedures outlined in the memorandum of November 28, 1978, and in the Policies and Procedures Manual.

Through awareness of the semiautonomous nature of the VASAP, program personnel should encourage maximum interaction between the VASAP and the VDTs. The VASAP administrator and staff should encourage increased participation and responsibility on the part of VDTs staff persons in decision making and planning, especially in relation to incorporating VASAP planning into the overall VDTs planning process.

Part 2: Internal VASAP Operations

Conclusions

There is a conspicuous lack of both long- and short-term operational planning within the VASAP State Office. This lack is a result of and has promoted the crisis management style of problem solving being utilized by the VASAP, which obviously does not make best use of staff time and resources. This lack of planning can also result in staff confusion over priorities, unnecessary consultation with supervisors, and duplication of effort.

There are indications within the State Office that the current organizational structure is inappropriate and does not foster efficient operations. Organizational problems include: (1) a lack of comprehensive coverage of countermeasure areas, and (2) considerable variance in accountability among staff members (i.e., some countermeasure representatives report directly to the VASAP administrator, while others do not).

There is a need to improve coordination between the VDTs public information office and the VASAP public information and training office. It is clear that each has its own areas of

expertise and sources of information. However, the duties and responsibilities of each have not been clearly defined, and this lack of delineation has reduced the effectiveness of the alcohol related public information effort. The need to improve this effectiveness is essential, given the conspicuity of the public information function to the local programs.

From the advent of the management information system, there have been high expectations concerning its value on the part of the local programs, expectations which have been fostered by the VASAP State Office. The system, however, has not met these expectations, and its current failure to meet the basic needs of the local ASAPs is causing considerable animosity in the field.

Recommendations

The VASAP State Office should place the development of a management by objectives (MBO) type plan for the VASAP as its highest priority and possibly should enlist the services of a facilitator who is familiar with the planning process.

Input from the VASAP State Office and the Program Directors' Association (PDA) should be included, as well as input from VDTS personnel, to ensure that the VASAP plan is an integral part of VDTS planning.

To ensure comprehensive coverage of countermeasure areas and to further delineate duties and responsibilities in-house, staff positions should be organized on a countermeasure basis, with each staff member being made responsible for one countermeasure. Each countermeasure representative should be a member of the corresponding PDA committee. Cooperation among countermeasure representatives should be highly encouraged, especially in the areas of training and evaluation.

The State Office staff should be reorganized to (1) make all countermeasure representatives responsible directly to the VASAP administrator, (2) add a "new", reallocated position to the staff to provide supervision in the case management area, and (3) accurately reflect current office responsibilities by informally establishing an office manager/administrative assistant position.

The duties of the VASAP public information and training officer should include receiving feedback from both the local programs and the PDA, and drawing up an MBO type plan for VASAP public information efforts on a yearly basis. This plan should clearly (and measurably) state the prioritized goals and objectives

of the program and outline the type, number and purposes of the campaigns needed. The VDTs public information director should then be responsible for having these campaign materials developed, produced and delivered. Also, because of the economies of scale achievable and the need for the expertise in this area, regionalization of public information efforts among the local programs should be considered.

In relation to the management information system, additional planning is necessary to ensure its usefulness to all of its potential users. First, input from VDTs personnel, VASAP personnel, local program directors, liaisons in other agencies and legislative staff should be considered in preparing a list of system needs. The needs should then be prioritized according to both importance and urgency and be written into measurable objectives. Once documented, all of this information should be transmitted to officials at Management Analysis and Systems Development to allow them to design the whole management information system as an integral unit. Also, since the local programs judge the quality of VASAP State Office services largely on the basis of the management information system, close supervision of computer operations by the VASAP administrator is highly recommended.

Part 3: The Relationship Between VASAP and Local ASAPS

Conclusions

In the opinion of persons in the local programs (and it should be remembered that regardless of their validity, these perceptions can be just as deleterious to the VASAP as facts), there is too much correspondence from the State Office. In this abundance of written material, important correspondence is often indistinguishable from that relating to routine matters. The localities expressed an interest in receiving more evidence of "what they get for their 10%" and in receiving less nonessential materials. It is also clear that there is no adequate channel for feedback from the local ASAPS and, in some instances, State Office management styles reduce the probability of candid interaction between the State Office and the local programs.

The PDA, and more specifically the countermeasure related committees, are not being fully utilized by the VASAP staff. In fact, breakdowns in communications between the PDA and the VASAP have caused some animosity among the local programs.

Improved accounting and budgeting procedures are needed by the local ASAPS to improve handling of financial transactions and the transmittal of financial information to the State Office.

Additional training efforts have been requested and would be favorably received by the local ASAPs in the areas of budgeting, case management and general management. The State Office is cautioned that the local programs judge the State Office's utility at least in part on the basis of such training sessions; thus, the training should be of the highest quality possible.

Recommendations

The State Office staff should condense and capsulize (and possibly color code) general information transmitted to the ASAPs through more extensive use of the management memorandum format. Use of this format would reserve the individual correspondence format for important and specific information referring to each local program. A channel of communications between the ASAPs and the VASAP State Office should be established not only for anecdotal but also for statistical information and the ASAPs' comments on State Office endeavors.

In relation to the PDA, each countermeasure representative should be made a member of the appropriate PDA committee, and each should be encouraged to expend staff time on committee matters. Also, a formal channel of communications should be established between the PDA and the VASAP for the transmittal of information and committee products and for the oversight of communications between the two groups.

Again, several standard accounting packages designed for local ASAPs with differing administrative and cash flow agents should be prepared by the VASAP State Office staff in close conjunction with the VDTS fiscal administrator. These packages, if not exactly applicable to a locality, could be modified through consultation with the VDTS fiscal office. The need and mandate for these fiscal procedures should be written into the Policies and Procedures Manual. Also, since the localities have expressed some doubt as to the State Office's expertise in the area of finance and budgeting, efforts should be made to assure local program directors of the VASAP office's and fiscal office's competence.

Additional training, especially in the areas of budgeting and general management, should be offered to the local programs. Since these topics are very specific and in some instances rather complex, experts in each field should direct the central portion of the training, with the VASAP public information and training officer acting as a facilitator.

Part 4: The Relationship Between VASAP and Other AgenciesConclusions

Close and effective relations with other agencies having interests in the VASAP are essential to ensure continued VDTS oversight of the program and to ensure efficient operations. However, these liaisons have not been developed as extensively as is necessary, and in many cases have not been developed at the proper levels of management, although recently efforts have been made to remedy this situation.

Recommendations

In the areas of defendant diagnosis and treatment certification, the expertise at the Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation (MH/MR) have been underutilized in the past. The use of that Department's resources, because of its sensitive nature, should be conducted exclusively by the VASAP administrator.

Liaisons with the Department of State Police should be improved, especially in the area of enforcement. An effort should be made to convince the troopers and their management of the impact of the VASAP through the use of public information efforts and, perhaps, training.

As the central administrative body over all district courts, the Executive Secretary's Office of the Virginia Supreme Court should be consulted for assistance in judicial matters and for improving concentration on the judicial countermeasure.

An operational agreement similar to that negotiated with the Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation should be established with the Division of Probation and Parole. It should outline and clearly delineate the duties and responsibilities of Probation and Parole for the future.

Liaisons should be strengthened with Division of Motor Vehicles personnel to gain their assistance in evaluation and their expertise in managing a statewide program; with officials of the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board to obtain statistical information and public information assistance; with the Virginia Bar Association to enlist its assistance in enhancing the VASAP's relationship with Commonwealth and defense attorneys; and with related federal agencies.

As mentioned previously, the results of this study are expressed in negative terms, since it was the explicit purpose of the study to discover and pinpoint inadequacies and inefficiencies within the VASAP system. It should be noted, however, that the VASAP staff, and particularly the administrator, have been extremely open with the authors and have welcomed all of the results as being constructive. It is to their credit that considerable effort has already been expended in remedying problems mentioned in this report and that many of the recommendations presented are already being implemented.

1896