Research Report

DESIGN, IMPLEMENTATION, AND ADMINISTRATION OF INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT ACCOUNT PROGRAMS

**Downpayments on the American Dream Policy Demonstration:
A National Demonstration of Individual Development Accounts**

Deborah Page-Adams

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Center for Social Development

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George Warren Brown School of Social Work

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A National Demonstration of Individual Development Accounts**

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Executive Summary

Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) are dedicated savings accounts designed to help people build assets for long-term economic security. Low-income and low-wealth account holders receive matching funds to help them save for purposes such as buying a first home, going to a college, or starting a small business. IDA programs provide economic education classes, and sometimes other services, for participants in addition to the matched savings accounts.

This study of IDA design, implementation, and administration was conducted during the first two years of a national policy demonstration called the "American Dream Demonstration" (ADD). The demonstration is designed to test the efficacy of asset building initiatives for low-wealth individuals, households, and communities. The evaluation of ADD is a six-year multi-method study (1997 to 2003) of IDAs at 13 sponsoring organizations around the country.

The central question of the implementation assessment is: What lessons about design, implementation, and administration of IDAs can be learned from the collective experience of 13 asset building programs that are part of ADD? Qualitative methods are used to gather systematic, multi-site case study data from (1) program documents (2) guided narratives and (3) in-depth interviews with IDA staff from each of 13 ADD programs. Pattern matching strategies are used in data analysis.

Despite a great deal of diversity among the 13 IDA programs in terms of geographic locations, larger community settings, sponsoring organizations, and target participant groups, staff members report many of the same experiences in the earliest stages of getting asset building initiatives up and running. Central IDA implementation tasks involve designing the program, recruiting the participants, and striking a balance between economic development and social service efforts in the first phase of IDA program implementation. During this time:

- Enthusiasm of staff for IDAs is tempered by realistic concerns about the challenges involved in designing new programs, developing best IDA practices, and confronting the "devil in the detail."

- Recruitment of IDA participants is initially slower than expected, but then increases rapidly as early account holders share information with friends and neighbors.

- Both economic development strategies and social service approaches are needed to successfully implement IDA programs.

At the end of the first year of the ADD demonstration, three programs emerged as front-runners in getting IDAs up and running. Characteristics of these front-runners are:

- Large, stable sponsoring organizations with (1) histories of effective work in low-wealth communities and (2) local funding for IDAs from the beginning of the demonstration.

- The equivalent of two to three full-time IDA staff members, hired early and with minimal turnover during the first year.

- IDA program designs that include (1) one-on-one work with participants and (2) simultaneous economic education classes and saving.

While the front-runners experienced early design and implementation successes, it is important to note that participants in all 13 programs were enrolled and saving in IDAs as the ADD demonstration entered its second year. Given the diversity among the 13 IDA programs, the economic disadvantages of their participants, and the inherent challenges of introducing a program based on a new asset building paradigm, the fact that all 13 programs were helping people save money for long-term economic security within the first year of the demonstration is perhaps one of the most important findings of this study.

During the second year of the demonstration, some programs that had not been front-runners began to demonstrate steady, and sometimes rapid, progress toward their IDA program implementation goals. In fact, three programs exhibited "quick study" characteristics, and implemented strategies that eventually helped them surpass the front-runners in establishing their IDA programs. Staff members in IDA programs that made steady and rapid implementation progress in the second year of the ADD demonstration:

- Learned from the experiences of front-runners and made program changes quickly and efficiently.

- Simplified or streamlined program designs, enrollment processes, account structures, staffing patterns, and requirements for economic education.

- Brought key components of the IDA program including economic education and one-on-one work with participants "in house."

The IDA programs that were identified as "quick studies" made program changes on the basis of what they had learned from the experiences of front-runners at semi-annual ADD meetings. Further, the strategic changes that IDA programs made in order to replicate the success of the front-runners often involved simplifying or streamlining program design, enrollment processes, account structures, staffing patterns, and requirements for economic education. A final, and related, strategy that seems to be important in making rapid IDA program improvements was to bring important components of the program "in house." For example, IDA program staff began to do more economic education and one-on-one work with participants on their own rather than continuing contractual arrangements and informal agreements with other organizations in the community for these services.

Overall, the collective experience of 13 programs that are part of the first national IDA demonstration offers some lessons about the design, implementation, and administration of asset building initiatives that may be helpful to emerging asset building initiatives across the US and beyond. The lessons are demonstrated with particular clarity by the successes in the experiences

of those IDA programs that emerged as front-runners and "quick studies" in the first two years of ADD. Among the most important of these lessons are:

- IDA programs can be successfully administered by various types of sponsoring organizations in ways that help low-income and low-wealth participants begin to save money and accumulate assets.

- The importance of dedicated and competent IDA staff people cannot be overstated.

- IDA implementation is most successful when people who design and administer the program "keep it simple."

The thirteen programs that comprise the national IDA demonstration are a diverse group of community development corporations, social service agencies, microenterprise organizations, community action agencies, community development financial institutions, and housing agencies located in large cities, small towns, and rural areas throughout the country. Only three of the thirteen programs had previous experience getting IDA programs up and running. The participant groups that are targeted by IDA programs are also diverse. Despite the diversity among the thirteen IDA programs, participants in each program began to save and accumulate assets relatively early in the course of the national demonstration.

The second major IDA implementation lesson that emerges from this study is that staffing matters. Adequate staffing is one of the key characteristics of those IDA programs within the ADD demonstration that achieved early start-up. Later on, one of the central themes to emerge from our interviews with IDA directors and coordinators is that staff enthusiasm, creativity, and rapport with participants is central to successful IDA implementation and administration. Staff people who have a balanced set of economic development skills and social service abilities appear to be particularly effective in helping IDA programs get up and running.

Finally, the implementation experiences of the 13 ADD programs suggest that it's best to avoid complexities in designing, implementing, and administering IDAs. While IDAs are conceptually simple tools, bringing them to a community can be a complex and challenging task. In part, this is because they are relatively new. The bigger part of the challenge, though, is that IDA implementation involves introducing the *idea* of asset building for low-income and low-wealth populations. In the midst of this challenge, keeping logistics such as enrollment processes, account structures, staffing patterns, and requirements for participants as simple, and easy to explain, as possible can help programs get IDAs up and running.

A National Demonstration of Individual Development Accounts

The first large scale test of Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) as a social and economic development tool for low-wealth households and communities was initiated by the Corporation for Enterprise Development and the Center for Social Development in September 1997 in the form of a national policy demonstration. IDAs are dedicated savings accounts that help people build assets for increased self-sufficiency and long-term economic security. Account holders receive matching funds to help them save for purposes such as buying a first home, going to a college, or starting a small business. IDAs were first introduced as a strategy for inclusive asset-based policy by Sherraden (1988, 1990, 1991) who suggested that assets have a wide range of positive effects on the social and economic well being of poor individuals, families, and communities.

The national IDA demonstration, which is officially called the down payments on the American Dream Policy Demonstration and also known as the American Dream Demonstration (ADD), involves thirteen organizations selected through a competitive process to design, implement, and administer IDA initiatives in their local communities. The name of the demonstration was chosen by the Corporation for Enterprise Development in recognition of the potential of IDAs to "help restore to poor people and distressed communities a reasonable opportunity to realize the American Dream of good jobs, safe homes, and small businesses" (Friedman, 1997, p.2). The programs that are part of the national demonstration have together established more than 2,000 IDAs in low-income communities across the country, with each site starting 50 to 150 accounts and one site expanding to more than 500 accounts. The six-year demonstration will involve operation and evaluation from 1997 through 2001, and an additional two-year post-program evaluation to 2003.

In addition to raising funds for and providing technical assistance to the thirteen IDA programs in the demonstration, the Corporation for Enterprise Development works to develop new asset-based anti-poverty policies. Examples include legislation to fund a federal demonstration of IDAs (US Senate, 1998) in addition to the privately funded ADD demonstration and several state policies, including large initiatives in Indiana and Pennsylvania (Rist & Edwards, 2001). Such policies are designed to help low-income people build assets by offering incentives similar to those currently available to non-poor people through tax code provisions for pension plan exclusions and home mortgage interest tax deductions.

New asset-based policy initiatives demand a thorough evaluation of the efficacy of IDAs as a social and economic development strategy. Such an evaluation effort has been undertaken by the Center for Social Development at Washington University in St. Louis. The overall evaluation involves several complementary research components and methods including case studies, surveys, in-depth interviews, return on investment analyses, and assessment of community level effects.

One evaluation component of the IDA demonstration is an implementation assessment. The purpose of the implementation assessment is to describe and analyze the design, implementation, and administration of IDA programs in the demonstration. The implementation assessment addresses several questions including: How do organizations get IDA programs up and running?

What strengths and capacities are required to get IDA programs started? What challenges and obstacles do programs face in IDA implementation? What lessons about IDA initiatives can be learned from the collective implementation experience?

Given the growth in IDA activity nationwide, the lessons we learn about design, implementation, and administration may be helpful in developing asset building policies and programs. This report offers some preliminary suggestions about best practices in IDA program design, implementation, and administration.

IDA Implementation Assessment Questions and Methods

Information for this implementation assessment came from (1) program documents from the thirteen sites in the national demonstration (2) guided narratives completed by IDA staff in the fall of 1997, the spring of 1998, the fall of 1998, and the spring of 1999 and (3) follow-up interviews with key staff from each of the thirteen sites during the national ADD meetings held every six months during the first two years of the demonstration. These sources of information are described briefly below. The <u>IDA Evaluation Handbook</u> (Sherraden et al., 1995) was used in planning the implementation assessment and provides a more detailed description of case study methodology in IDA evaluation.

Program documents that were reviewed for this study include descriptions of the thirteen IDA programs that are part of the national demonstration and each of their parent organizations, the proposals for funding that the programs submitted to the Corporation for Enterprise Development as part of their applications to be ADD sites, and outreach and marketing materials such as public service announcements, eligibility guidelines, newsletters, and brochures.

IDA staff completed and submitted guided narratives about their IDA programs during the fall of 1997, the spring and fall of 1998, and the spring of 1999. This first guided narrative instrument included open-ended questions on the earliest steps involved in getting an IDA program up and running. Several of the questions addressed various capacities of sponsoring organizations and IDA programs. The second guided narrative asked respondents to detail specific design features of their IDA programs and to share information about initial implementation experiences and emergent administrative issues. As the first year of the demonstration came to a close, in the fall of 1998, IDA staff at the thirteen ADD sites completed and submitted the third guided narrative by focusing on relationships and partnerships with key organizations in their larger communities. Finally, IDA staff members were asked to summarize their experiences in getting IDA programs up and running in the fourth of the guided narrative instruments (see Appendices A through D).

We also interviewed IDA staff from each of the thirteen sites during national demonstration meetings in September 1997, March 1998, September 1998, and March 1999. During the interviews, which typically lasted 60 to 90 minutes, we "filled in the blanks" when guided narratives were less than complete, clarified responses, and asked for more in-depth information as needed. In semi-structured interviewing involving multiple interviewers, formal written guides help enhance the reliability and comparability of qualitative data (Bernard, 1988). In this study, an instrument for the interviews was developed that included a matrix to help standardize the data collection process (see Appendix E).

The guided narrative instruments and the interview matrix were developed with in such a way as to ease the process of coding the data. In studies like this one, coding makes it possible to categorize massive amounts of complex data into a more manageable system of concepts so that researchers can identify major themes and find patterns.

The information gathered in this implementation assessment was analyzed using case study methods, and particularly the pattern matching strategy described by Yin (1984). In fact, data analysis always involves searching the data for patterns and testing ideas that help explain patterns that emerge (Bernard, 1988; Johnson, 1978). Testing those ideas against new observations, seemingly inconsistent data, and objective evidence is time consuming but particularly important in qualitative analysis in order to remain skeptical of initial working hypotheses and avoid creating patterns where none exist.

One example of the use of a "constant validity check" (Bernard, 1988, p.320) in this study is the way in which patterns that seemed to be emerging from these data on design, implementation, and administration of IDAs were checked periodically against the research on IDA savings among participants of the thirteen ADD sites (Schreiner et al., 2001; Sherraden et al., 2000). In other words, as they emerged, findings from the qualitative study of IDA program implementation could be compared with findings from quantitative research on IDA savings outcomes.

Both deductive and inductive methods were used in analyzing data from program materials, guided narratives, and interview materials. The guided narratives and interview guides were designed with working hypotheses about successful IDA program implementation in mind (Sherraden et al., 1995). Then additional themes and patterns emerged from the data as the research progressed. Hypotheses were used initially to form ideas about how to explain patterns in the data, and then observations from the data helped to refine and sometimes modify the ideas so that more rigorous testing of these explanations could proceed.

Passages from guided narratives and quotes from the interviews that were typical of key findings on the design, implementation, and administration of IDA programs are used in this report to illustrate lessons from the national demonstration about asset-building initiatives in low-income communities. Some words and phrases in the passages have been altered in minor ways to avoid identifying individual programs and to keep the focus on what we can learn from the aggregate IDA implementation experience.

Initial Tasks and Experiences in IDA Implementation

The thirteen programs that comprise the national IDA demonstration are a diverse group of community development corporations, social service agencies, microenterprise organizations, community action agencies, community development financial institutions, and housing agencies located in large cities, small towns, and rural areas throughout the country. There is an IDA demonstration site in most regions of the country (see Table 1).

The participant groups that are targeted by IDA programs are also diverse. Nearly all of the participants in national demonstration programs have household incomes that are less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level, and several IDA programs in the demonstration have targeted welfare recipients and other very low-income participants. Further, a number of IDA programs in the demonstration serve African American, Asian American, and Latino communities.

The programs that are part of the national demonstration have differing levels of prior IDA knowledge and experience. Some of the programs learned about IDAs just as the Corporation for Enterprise Development issued its request for proposals. Other programs had initiated small IDA pilots before they applied to the national demonstration. Only three of the programs had previous experience getting early, pioneering IDA programs up and running.

Despite the vast diversity among the IDA programs, staff members were able to identify some common strengths, capacities, problems, and challenges in their early IDA implementation efforts as the national demonstration began (see Table 2).

Key strengths and capacities identified by IDA staff were:

- innovative program designs.

- pre-existing key components.

- strong community partnerships.

Less often mentioned strengths and capacities were explicit goals for changes at the institutional, community, and policy levels to better facilitate asset building; creative plans for funding; strong organizational history and leadership; and effective economic literacy curricula.

Table 1. First Thirteen Programs in National American Dream Demonstration (ADD) of Individual Development Accounts

Sponsoring Organization	Location	Type of Community	Type of Organization	Participants/ Targeted Groups	Previous IDA Experience
ADVOCAP	Fond du Lac, WI	Small city and rural area	Community Action Agency	Former TANF recipients; working poor people	YES
Alternatives Federal Credit Union	Ithaca, NY	Small city and rural area	Community Development Credit Union	Single parents; youth	NO
Bay Area IDA Collaborative	San Francisco, CA	Urban	Collaborative of 28 Community Based Organizations	Asian American; African American; Latino	NO
CAAB Corporation	Washington, DC	Urban	Collaborative of 11 Community Based Organizations	Youth; TANF recipients; African American; Latino; Asian American	NO
Community Action Project of Tulsa County	Tulsa, OK	Urban	Community Based Anti-Poverty Organization	Working poor families with children	NO
Foundations Communities	Austin, TX	Urban	Not-for-Profit Housing Organization	Rental property residents; youth	NO
Central Vermont Community Action Council	Barre, VT	Small towns and rural areas	Community Action Agency and Community Development Corporation	TANF recipients; youth	NO
Heart of America Family Services	Kansas City, MO	Urban	Community Based Family Services Agency	Latino; African American	NO
Mercy Corps	Portland, OR	Urban	Not-for-Profit Housing and Social Service Organization	Low-income families; Rental property residents	NO
Near Eastside IDA Program	Indianapolis, IN	Urban	Social Service Org. / Comm. Development Credit Union	Neighborhood residents; youth	YES
Owsley County Action Team	Berea, KY	Small towns and rural areas	Association of Community Development Organizations	Very low-income; youth; African American	NO
Shorebank Corporation	Chicago, IL	Urban	Community Development Bank with Not-for-Profit Affiliate	Low-income African American youth; Rental property residents	NO
Women's Self-Employment Project	Chicago, IL	Urban	Microenterprise Development Organization	Low-income, self-employed women; public housing residents	YES

Table 2. Initial Strengths and Challenges of IDA Programs, September 1997

Strengths and Capacities	Problems and Challenges
Innovative Program Designs (11)	Fundraising / Fiscal Concerns (10)
Pre-Existing Key Components (8)	Detailing Program Designs (7)
Strong Community Partnerships (8)	Managing Organizational Relationships (7)
Explicit Goals to Make Change at Institutional, Community, and Policy Levels (4)	Staffing / Managing Work Load (5)
Innovative Funding Plans (3)	Recruiting Participants / One-on-One Work with Participants (4)
Strong Organizational History and / or Leadership (3)	Overcoming Barriers to Change at Institutional, Community, and Policy Levels (3)
Effective Economic Literacy Curriculum (2)	Enhancing Economic Literacy Component (3)

Note: Numbers in parentheses reflect the number of times that these types of strengths, capacities, problems, and challenges were mentioned as being among the most important for IDA programs in the national demonstration. IDA program representatives were asked during group discussions and individual interviews to identify three key initial strengths and capacities and three central problems and challenges for their programs.

The biggest problems and challenges in early implementation efforts were:

- fundraising and other fiscal concerns.

- detailing program designs.

- managing organizational relationships including sometimes complex relationships with community partners.

Illustrating this last point, one IDA staff member identified a complex multi-organizational design as one of her program's key strengths. Later, she said:

> Inter-organizational efforts are (pause) dynamic and can take full days.
> The agreements need to be customized because each is slightly different.
> And this does add to the complexity.

Similar sentiments were expressed by the IDA coordinator from another site who acknowledged the strength of having the local housing authority on board as a partner, but also noted great frustration with the complicated and lengthy process of getting partnership details finalized.

In fact, detailing IDA program designs and developing working relationships with organizational partners proved to be the most time consuming tasks for staff members in the early weeks and months of the national demonstration. This work contributed to slower than expected IDA start up for a number of programs, and appeared to be especially problematic for those sites with formal, complex inter-organizational designs. Relationships with multiple organizational partners may end up being central to the successful design, implementation, and administration of IDAs. But in the early stages of getting IDAs up and running, such complex designs appear to delay start up.

Other problems and challenges included staffing and managing the work load; recruiting and working one-on-one with participants; making changes at the institutional, community, and policy levels to better facilitate asset building; and enhancing economic literacy offerings.

Despite the problems, staff people generally described their IDA programs with a great deal of enthusiasm. They most often discussed challenges in a way that suggested that this enthusiasm was being tempered by realistic concerns about working out the details of their new IDA programs.

Designing IDA Programs

As the national demonstration began, IDA staff expressed almost uniform enthusiasm for the asset building potential of IDAs in the lives of low-income participants and for related changes at organizational, community, and policy levels. Enthusiasm of staff for IDAs, however, was tempered from the beginning by realistic concerns about the challenges involved in designing new programs, developing best IDA practices, and confronting the "devil in the detail."

Turning first to the findings on enthusiasm for IDAs, one program coordinator described the larger effects of an earlier asset building initiative:

> *Our early participants have been able to realize their dreams of owning*
> *a home, developing a business, or attending college. The stories of success*
> *are prevalent and well-known around the community because IDA*
> *participants are residents within our community. They are our neighbors,*
> *and they are our friends.*

Another expressed the excitement of staff members about the new program:

> *Our staff have shown great enthusiasm about the program, offering to*
> become involved in any way suitable. They've expressed the 'perfect
> fit' IDAs will have with our mission ... there's a staggering degree
> of energy and enthusiasm for implementing such a ... progressive program.

IDA program staff also discussed the capacity of asset building to affect changes at organizational, community, and policy levels. One IDA coordinator explained how an earlier asset building initiative strengthened her organization:

> *We started exploring ways to implement asset-building strategies for*
> *poor people n the mid-1980s. As an organization, we became*
> *interested in ways in which poor people could "own" things:*
> *we wanted to develop homeownership strategies which helped poor*
> *people move from "renters" to "homeowners"; we wanted*
> *to help poor people create self-employment rather than only*
> *rely on conventional employment strategies; etc. Similarly,*
> *we acknowledged that our organization itself was "poor" –*
> *we owned very few assets; we rented most of our facilities;*
> *we decided that we must develop our own assets; we*
> *wanted to own rather than rent our own facilities; we wanted to*
> *develop our own financial assets. ... Our asset-building programming*
> *has helped poor people "own"things. Similarly, our asset-based*
> *strategies have increased the net worth of the organization.*

Several people also expressed enthusiasm for the potential of IDAs as a community building strategy. At one site, the idea of asset building struck a chord with low-income staff members and ultimately resulted in strengthening both the program and the larger community:

> *The staff was receptive to the IDA idea. Some were glad about instituting*
> *the program, and others wanted to know how they could get in on the program.*
> *As they were helping others, they saw advantages to getting matched money for*
> *their own savings. Our organization started matching savings in the accounts of*
> *those staff members who wanted to buy houses within the community. This was a*
> *way of investing the staff in the program and in the community.*

A program coordinator from another site described IDAs as a tool in the sponsoring organization's on-going work to build local economies and to help people develop lasting connections with the economic mainstream:

> *IDAs are a natural extension of our work to restore healthy markets and communities by supporting entrepreneurship, self-sufficiency, and investment by local residents. Whether the focus is on business development or human development, our programming takes an asset-based approach to community revitalization.*

Many program staff people involved in the national demonstration were also enthusiastic about the potential of IDAs as an anti-poverty policy approach. One IDA coordinator with a long history of policy advocacy writes:

> *Our organization has always taken what we have learned from having our feet on the ground in particular communities and used that knowledge to build programs and affect policies on a broader level. Historically, we have continually built ourown capacity in order to take on the next challenge. Now our county is one of three in the state with the goal of having 100 percent of welfare recipients moving toward self-sufficiency within five years. The IDA program is one avenue to help TANF recipients along the way to self-sufficiency. We are working closely with the state department for families and children on the county welfare reform plan.*

A number of IDA staff people also expressed excitement about the rather extensive evaluation of the national demonstration. One person wrote that his program was "comfortable with, and enthusiastic about, the evaluation" reflecting the hope of many that what we learn from the national demonstration will shape new asset-based anti-poverty policies for low-income individuals, households, and communities.

The early enthusiasm for the asset building potential of IDAs was tempered from the beginning of the national demonstration by concerns about the implementation challenges involved in designing new programs, developing best IDA practices, and confronting the "devil in the detail."

IDA program staff uniformly expressed concerns about the numerous design features yet to be detailed in finalizing plans, policies, and procedures for their asset building initiatives. One coordinator spoke of communication within her organization regarding program details:

> *IDAs are a funny program to manage because the devil is in the detail. So there's a lot to communicate. I'm figuring out how much to say to administration until the details get ironed out.*

This internal communication theme emerged again in discussions with staff from other IDA sites about building support for IDA initiatives within large, multi-purpose organizations:

> *All staff were very supportive and positive about IDAs, expressing that they thought it was a great opportunity for participants to get established economically. Some agency administrators expressed concern that this was "just another income transfer" program. ... I think some key players may see IDAs as a "give-away" program. We need to find ways to share both the big picture and the details to help upper administration overcome those perceptions.*

Staff people from a number of other programs also indicated critiques of the same nature and found it necessary to emphasize the key role that participants' savings played in leveraging matching dollars.

Recruiting Participants

Recruitment of IDA participants is initially slower than expected, but then increases rapidly as early account holders share information with friends and neighbors.

Early in the demonstration, recruiting participants emerged as a relatively common implementation challenge. One IDA staff person described the problem that many programs were facing:

> *It has been more difficult to recruit and retain participants than we originally anticipated. One of the main barriers to participation that we have identified is the fear of losing benefits. ... We are currently researching ways to help alleviate this fear and making individual visits with everyone who has attended meetings but is not currently part of the program. From these interviews, we hope to have a fuller understanding of the reasons why people do not participate and how we can help them to do so.*

An IDA coordinator for another site noted that many participants experience "time poverty" and said:

> *Much of our recruitment has involved one-on-one "selling" of the program. Some people are skeptical that they can succeed, and so they need the extra encouragement to sign up. Others are so pressed for time, busy juggling family and work, that they don't stop to focus on the marketing materials sent to them in the mail and instead need a personal phone call from someone they know and trust to convince them to take the time to participate. Finally, IDAs are such a new way of thinking that many people don't fully grasp the concept the first time they hear about it at an information session or read about it in a brochure.*

A similar early lesson learned by one of the other IDA programs in the demonstration was articulated this way: "Personal outreach and community awareness presentations are best for spreading the word about new IDA programs. Flyers and other written materials haven't worked for us as well."

This initial recruitment challenge parallels Patti's (1983) attention to recruiting and maintaining participants as a central, though often neglected, task for programs in the implementation stage of their development. He writes:

> *Too often one sees a seller's mentality in new programs, a mentality that grows out of the belief that if quality programs are provided they will be utilized by those in need. In still other instances, managers and staff are lulled into complacency because theirs is the only program of its kind available in a geographic area, or because the data available from needs assessments indicate the existence of a large pool of potential clients. Whatever the reason for failing to vigorously seek out and establish a clientele, experience suggests that many programs founder during the implementation stage because this task has not received adequate attention (p. 114).*

Overall, IDA programs that are part of the national demonstration have adapted rapidly to solve initial recruitment problems. By the end of the first year of the demonstration, six of the thirteen sites had either loosened their income and asset eligibility guidelines or had reduced the number of orientation sessions that were required before participants could open an account. Several sites had also increased the number of neighborhoods, communities, or organizations from which they were recruiting participants. One program had initiated innovative recruitment strategies including providing IDA information over free spaghetti dinners for potential participants, "donuts and IDA information to go" for early morning commuters, and banners and buttons advertising the IDA program. Such adaptations illustrate the perceived need among IDA program staff to use a number of different approaches and strategies in order to get IDAs up and running.

Balancing Economic Development and Social Service Efforts

Both economic development strategies and social service approaches are needed to successfully implement IDAs.

As the national demonstration was launched, staff members from several of the programs noted the importance of balancing economic development, social service, and public policy efforts in order to successfully implement IDAs.

Achieving this balance came up in discussions of both strengths and challenges:

> *One of our greatest strengths is having a talented staff with a wide variety of experiences in community services and economic development.*

> *Educational backgrounds of our IDA development team include psychology, social work and public policy.*

> *One of our biggest challenges will be finding and hiring a coordinator who has the people skills to do IDAs and who can also do the policy aspects of the work.*

Further, some of the earliest stories of IDA program implementation highlight the difficulty of separating social services from public policy from household economic development:

> *The economic literacy program identified five participants who could save money if they quit smoking, but Medicaid refused to pay for "patches." Our sponsoring organization bought them all "patches" and two have already stopped smoking and are saving money.*

One sponsoring organization in the demonstration was a community action agency that had historically used a social service approach in its work with individuals and families. Attempts to integrate IDAs into their economic development programs were more successful than attempts to integrate IDAs into their social service programs. While acknowledging that the participants of the social service programs often had complex problems, the IDA coordinator also believed that the nature of the helping approach played a role in the organization's challenges with IDA implementation:

> *We believed that case management provided through our host programs would provide a more holistic approach to working with IDA participants. We also believed existing relationships with familiar staff would benefit participant's IDA activities. After several months of operation, however, we found that things went most smoothly when goals were similar between the host program and the IDA program. In other words, we think we're beginning to notice a pattern -- IDA participants who are achieving their asset-building goals are coming from our homeownership and business development programs. They seem to have more focused goals. Participants from our early childhood education and transitional housing programs are having more trouble -- more complex problems in their lives. And they're more used to working with staff members in those programs around day-to-day challenges rather than long-term economic development goals.*

On the other hand, there are perhaps as many potential problems in programs that heavily emphasize economic development but do not have a social service orientation. In an earlier IDA pilot at one site, there were limited IDA-specific support services and few account holders ever utilized their IDAs. A staff member described plans for more balance in the future:

> *Previously, there was ... no contact with IDA participants once they left the host program. In the future, we will maintain contact with participants through the end of the demonstration and continue to provide support and assistance to participants. The IDA project manager and the IDA case manager will serve as counselors and question participants about progress toward home ownership, business development, or educational goals. The IDA staff will also be liaisons between participants and the professional social workers in our organization. We feel that the combination of professional social work support, full-time case management, and a required financial literacy curriculum will significantly increase participant savings and utilization.*

The perceived need to achieve and maintain balance between social service, economic development, and policy efforts in IDA programs is consistent with Herbert Rubin's findings from research on successful community-based development organizations:

> The goal of all three approaches - development, services, and advocacy - is to enable the poor and poor communities to gain a material stake in the nations wealth. ... Empowering people who have started in one-down positions requires a holistic approach that unites development work with the provision of social services (Rubin, 1997, pp. 65 and 83).

The theme of balancing economic development and social service efforts re-emerged when IDA staff articulated benchmarks of success in the first year of the demonstration. The two benchmarks most often cited were opening IDA accounts and offering classes and other supplemental services to participants. In the next section, we identify some characteristics of the IDA programs that reached these benchmarks relatively early in the national demonstration.

Characteristics Associated with Early IDA Start-Up

During the first year of the demonstration, a small group of sites consistently emerged as front-runners in getting their IDA programs up and running using five measures of early start up. These measures were: (1) at least some IDAs opened by the end of calendar year 1997 (2) number of IDAs opened by the end of March 1998 (3) number of IDAs opened by the end of June 1998 (4) ratio of IDAs opened by the end of June 1998 to IDAs planned by that date as estimated from program proposal (5) total amount of participant savings reported by the end of June 1998.

The IDA programs in the national demonstration that achieved early start up shared several common characteristics that are detailed in Table 3. Some of the common features of front-

runners were characteristics of their sponsoring organizations, while others were characteristics of the IDA program itself and even more specific program design components.

<u>Host Organizations and Early Start-Up</u>

Turning first to characteristics of sponsoring organizations, the programs in the national demonstration that were front-runners in getting IDAs up and running had large, stable parent organizations. Support for the IDA initiative from chief executive officers and key board members of these sponsoring organizations was central to success in many cases. All of the sponsoring organizations of front-runners had extensive histories of effective

Table 3. Characteristics Associated with Early Start Up of IDA Programs, June 1998

IDA Program Level	Characteristics
Sponsoring Organization	• Large, stable umbrella organization • History of effective anti-poverty work and services to low-income people • Local funding secured before national demonstration kick-off meeting in September 1997
IDA Program	• Clear, consistent articulation of plans for IDA program design • Simple, straightforward account design (deposits, match rates, totals) • Staffing by 2 to 3 FTEs hired early in 2 to 3 key positions with little turnover
Specific Program Components	• Economic literacy classes or meetings and savings happen simultaneously • One-on-one work with participants • Flexible implementation of pre-savings program requirements

Note: Characteristics and features of national demonstration sites that consistently emerged as front-runners in getting their IDA programs up and running during the first year of the national demonstration using five measures of early start up.

anti-poverty work and service provision to low-income communities. Finally, sponsoring organizations of programs that achieved early start up had secured at least some local IDA funding before the demonstration kick-off meeting in September 1997. Previous IDA experience was not associated with early start up. In fact, none of the sponsoring organizations of front-runners had implemented earlier IDA initiatives.

In terms that emphasize a balanced economic development and social service philosophy, one sponsoring organization of a program that got IDAs up and running relatively early described itself this way:

> *(We are) a community-based, comprehensive anti-poverty agency ... with a*
> *24 year history of providing a variety of services to low income people. (We)*
> *help individuals and families in economic need achieve self-sufficiency through*
> *emergency aid, medical care, housing, community development, education,*
> *and advocacy in an atmosphere of respect. Our business is about people. We*
> *operate on the fundamental principle that each person, regardless of economic*
> *circumstance, deserves to be treated with dignity and respect at all times. ...*
> *Our duty is to make our process and delivery of assistance effective, responsive,*
> *and respectful ...*

As the end of the first year of the demonstration approached, this philosophy re-emerged in a report from the IDA coordinator:

> *IDA staff members are very pleased with the program. We're having fun*
> *here! There are so many great candidates - we get several calls a day asking*
> *for information, and three to four applications a day.*

As this example suggests, it may be that certain characteristics of sponsoring organizations influence day-to-day IDA implementation efforts in ways that lead to success with recruitment efforts and, ultimately, early start up.

IDA Programs and Early Start-Up

At the level of the IDA program itself, common characteristics of front-runners included the clear and consistent articulation of design features in the program proposal as well as in later guided narratives and interviews. An additional and related characteristic of front-runners was a simple straightforward account structure (i.e. deposits, match rates, totals). Even when modifications were made to solve problems, the new design was simpler rather than more complex and the change was clearly and consistently articulated:

> *The only major adjustment made to the program since the initial planning has been the*
> *match rate structure. Originally, we had planned different match rates depending on the*
> *asset use. When we ran focus groups and began to create marketing materials, however,*
> *it became clear that this structure was too confusing and difficult to explain clearly. It*
> *also became clear that this structure would add a layer of administrative complexity to*
> *the program. So we decided to have the same match rate structure for all participants.*

The advantages of simple and straightforward account designs were also noted by staff members from another IDA program that simplified their original design and ended up with a consistent 2:1 match rate:

> *Now we can easily explain that every dollar that a participant saves leverages*
> *a one dollar match from our local funder and a one dollar match from our*
> *national funder. It's almost elegant in its simplicity and it helps us make*
> *the point that it is the IDA participants themselves that are ultimately*
> *responsible for building the assets in this community*.

A comparison of front-runners and programs that have experienced delays in getting IDAs up and running suggests the importance of keeping program and account designs simple. Sites that got IDAs up and running relatively late in the first year of the demonstration frequently had deposit amounts and/or match rates that varied for different groups of participants or for different IDA purposes. It may be that the ability to easily articulate design features to potential participants and to the larger community is central to successful IDA implementation.

As important as clarity and simplicity may be, it appears as though the pivotal program characteristic associated with early start up of IDAs involves staffing patterns. The front-runners in the national demonstration all had the equivalent of two to three full-time IDA staff people. Some of the front-runner programs supplemented the work of one key paid staff member with that of VISTA volunteers or graduate student interns. Key IDA staff people started working relatively early in the demonstration, and there was little staff turnover in the initial implementation period. Further, early start-up programs concentrated the IDA work effort in only two or three key positions. Programs who experienced delays in start up had: (1) fewer IDA staff people (2) responsibilities for getting IDAs up and running assigned in small measure to several people in several positions and/or (3) staff turnover during the early stages of program implementation. At this point in the demonstration, having a relatively large and stable staff appears to be critical to early start up of IDA programs.

Specific Program Components and Early Start-Up

Some programs in the national IDA demonstration designed their economic literacy components to precede the opening of accounts. Other sites designed simultaneous economic literacy and savings components, or had participants attend economic literacy classes after they had begun to save. While the amount of time required of participants in economic literacy activities did not differentiate front-runners from other programs, the sites that had IDAs up and running relatively early in the demonstration had: (1) account holders attending economic literacy classes and savings simultaneously or (2) savings preceding economic literacy classes.

It may be that "economic literacy first" approach simply delayed opening up accounts. Since our measures of early start up in this analysis are all based on the presence or number of accounts by certain dates during the first year of the demonstration, programs with "economic literacy first" designs may just appear to be at a disadvantage at this early stage in the implementation assessment. On the other hand, it may be that a simultaneous approach to economic literacy and savings appeals to participants or is otherwise advantageous in getting IDAs up and running.

While initial orientation or introductory sessions are often required for potential IDA participants, "savings first" and "simultaneous savings" strategies appear to have some advantages over "economic literacy first" approaches once participation begins. One program in the demonstration ties economic literacy classes and savings together in an explicit way by having participant bring proof that they have deposited $12.50 to each of eight initial classes.

A related characteristic of IDA programs that achieved early start up in the first year of the national demonstration was the flexible implementation of pre-saving requirements. All of the front-runners had reduced the number of introductory sessions, orientation classes, and/or individual meetings with potential participants that they had originally planned to require by the end of the first year of the demonstration. One program reports:

> *Requiring potential participants to attend two to three orientation meetings*
> *is a great way to ensure that you end up with a reliable and serious group*
> *of participants, but taking this approach means that only seven of ten*
> *applicants who were pre-approved end up becoming participants.*

Beyond the delays inherent in pre-savings requirements and "economic literacy first" designs, a comment by a staff member in one front-runner program suggested that too much emphasis on preliminary components or economic literacy:

> *may send a mixed message about the strengths and capacities that*
> *participants bring to asset building. ... We very much want to avoid*
> *giving the impression that we think participants "need" lots of help*
> *in the area of economic literacy.*

A second program component that was associated with early start up of IDA programs in the national demonstration is one-on-one work with participants. This sometimes takes the form of case management and sometimes is a less intensive type of personal contact with participants. But none of the front-runners had an "account management with referral for supplemental services" design.

One-on-one work with participants may end up being important to their success in building assets, but it would be premature to assume that such program components are central to successful IDA design, implementation, and administration. Even at this point in the demonstration, however, it is clear that individual contact with participants is a positive aspect of running IDA programs for staff members. As one staff person said:

> *Hearing the participants' stories is important for me. One woman came in who*
> *makes $6.00 an hour at the nursing home -- folding laundry and changing sheets*
> *and stuff -- she came in and she hopes to buy a home. There is no way she*
> *can do that earning 6 bucks an hour. I feel she is typical of what IDAs are all*
> *about, that with that IDA she can fulfill her dream. She has begun the program*
> *and has deposited her first amount. Another participant is an immigrant from*
> *Peru who came here alone and left his family there worked at restaurant*

jobs and repairing shoes. I asked him, "What do you hope to get out of the IDA program?" He said, "This program gives me hope and thanks for the hope, and this hope makes me more energetic."

In fact, the absence of one-on-one work with participants may contribute to staff turnover in some cases. A staff member who had decided to leave one IDA site reported:

I could stay ... but I find it too administrative. ... I think that participants (and all of us!) could use tools, emotional tools to help them move from point A to point B. It won't be easy to move into these changes in their lives. So I hope others are thinking of ways to incorporate this into their programs, and also to design some follow-up. We need to make sure people succeed, so even though they buy a house, for example, we need to make sure they stay in the house.

A program coordinator from another IDA site expressed similar sentiments:

We recognize that personal transformation - for participants and for staff - is essential to success and can take a long time. Though the metamorphosis that occurs when low-income people and project staff begin to move from a present, crisis-oriented focus to a transformative future is by definition difficult and fraught with risk, we know that it is absolutely possible. We have learned ... that a variety of personal and programmatic supports, sustained over time, do lead to enormous changes. We are totally committed, as policy advocates and program developers, to an approach that relies wholly neither on financial incentives nor on personal supports, but which recognizes that both must coexist or there is no long-term gain for anyone.

While the centrality of one-on-one work with participants to successful implementation of IDAs remains to be determined, at this early point in the national demonstration it is clear that individual work with participants is associated with early IDA start up.

Strategies for Rapid IDA Program Improvement

As the ADD demonstration entered its second year, participants in all 13 programs were enrolled and saving in IDAs despite the diverse nature of the geographic locations, larger community settings, host organizations, and target participant groups.

During this second year, some programs that had not been front-runners began to demonstrate steady, and sometimes rapid, progress toward their IDA implementation goals. In fact, these programs exhibited "quick study" characteristics and eventually surpassed the front-runners in meeting recruitment and savings goals.

Learning from the Front-Runners

The experiences of ADD programs that "caught up" and eventually surpassed the front-runners suggest the advantages of the providing early and regular feedback to organizations that participate in large-scale, policy demonstrations. In other words, the overall Demonstration, including the research component, appears to be a good example of a "learning evaluation."

The "learning evaluation" nature of ADD research helped in this regard, as preliminary implementation assessment results were shared with staff members from all 13 programs every six months during the first two years of the demonstration.

Staff members at IDA programs that made steady and rapid implementation progress in the second year of the ADD demonstration appeared to be particularly adept at:
(1) Learning quickly from the experiences of front-runners as shared in the form of preliminary implementation assessment results and program presentations at the semi-annual ADD meetings and (2) Making program changes quickly and efficiently in order to achieve designs that were more consistent with those of the front-runners. Examples of these experiences are reflected in comments like these from IDA staff members:

> *One of the most important changes we have made is to move the opening of the account earlier in the program. Participants now must open their accounts while attending the personal finance course rather than after. Originally, we wanted the savers to have completed their budgets before making the initial deposit. Based on the findings distributed at the Tulsa conference, we moved the opening of accounts forward and have seen a significant drop in the attrition rate.*

> *Now participants may open accounts before completing the money management classes.*

These kinds of changes most often led to the creation of "simpler" IDA programs, as well as streamlined enrollment processes and program requirements for participants.

Simplifying and Streamlining

The IDA programs that were identified as "quick studies" reported that they worked to simplify and streamline their program designs, enrollment processes, account structures, staffing patterns, and requirements for economic education.

When asked "Is your IDA program up and running the way that you expected it to be at this point in time?" one IDA coordinator responded, "Are you kidding?" before listing a number of changes that had been made in her program. One of the three central changes noted was that "applicants are not required to complete the money management course before opening their IDAs."

The coordinator of another IDA program reported a similar change involving orientation and enrollment processes.

> *We eliminated required attendance at a group orientation to enroll. This seemed to be an inhibitor to recruitment. Instead we meet with applicants one-on-one, explain the program, review their application and enroll them if they are eligible and interested.*

> *Requirements to open an IDA have changed. Household income must be at or below 60% rather than 50% of our area median income; and applicants are not required to complete the money management course before opening their IDAs.*

> *…we proposed to offer different match rates for each of the asset goals with a range for each one. We changed this policy to offer a higher match cap for home ownership than for education or business development, with all participants now receiving a 2:1 match.*

Consistent with the experience of the front-runners, many of the changes made by IDA programs that experienced steady and rapid implementation progress in the second year of the ADD demonstration resulted in concurrent saving and financial education, rather than one before the other. One IDA staff member identified simultaneous saving and financial education as a key to her program's success, saying "The economic literacy with its concurrent savings deposits was part of the original design and is working well."

Bringing Program Components "In-House"

A final strategy of IDA programs that made rapid progress in implementation during the second year of the demonstration was to bring important components of the program "in house."   Most often this strategy involved IDA program staff doing more economic education and one-on-one work with participants instead of continuing to partner with other organizations in the community for these services. These kinds of changes, especially those that resulted in more one-on-one work of some sort with participants, meant that the program designs of "quick study" organizations were similar to those of the front-runners by the end of the second year of the demonstration.

In more than a few cases, organization partners did not provide what the IDA program expected them to provide in terms of quantity and/or quality of service to the organization or to the participants. In others, IDA staff found that they lost important opportunities to build rapport with participants, and be responsive to their programming suggestions, when they had multiple organizational partners.   A relatively common resolution involved not renewing existing subcontracts, or not developing planned subcontracts. Some examples of IDA staff comments about this strategy that help illustrate bringing program components "in-house" are:

> *We have ended our contractual relationship with the agency we had worked with to provide financial literacy classes and have instead begun our own comprehensive program.*

We initially partnered with another agency to do the money management classes. Now we have become the provider of money management training.

In response to a question about ways in which the IDA program was being implemented differently than originally planned, one staff person said,

… more program components occur on-site at the IDA office. Participants open accounts on-site rather than at the bank and our money management course is taught in-house rather than through a contract with the agency we had been using to teach the course. … and applicants are not required to complete the money management course before opening their IDAs.

Initially, there was a great deal of emphasis in the demonstration and in individual sites to partner with other community organizations in order to increase the number of stakeholders who were investing in the asset building efforts of low-wealth individuals and households. This emphasis was perhaps shaped, in part, by an early working proposition that program ties with other organizations or agencies in the community would lead to more successful IDA implementation (Sherraden et al., 1995).

Given the experience of IDA programs who were front-runners, and those who made rapid implementation strides later, it is worth being somewhat cautious about the expected positive effects of multiple organizational stakeholders. It is clear from this analysis that complex IDA administrative structures with multiple organizational partners are initially more difficult to implement and tend to have slower start-up processes and fewer early implementation successes.

Support for this note of caution comes from other implementation studies as well. For example, Gilbertie (1999) identifies problems with what he calls a "diffuse" program structure. He describes one IDA program that made the decision to partner with multiple agencies and organizations including community development corporations, housing organizations, and social service agencies:

This decision made it difficult to administer the program in a consistent manner, as each partner organization brought its own priorities and management approach to the project. The partnering organizations were also responsible in some cases for the financial training classes, which were administered unevenly… Gilbertie, 1999, 17).

There are also parallels to be found in an implementation study of a multi-site statewide IDA initiative. Jennings and her colleagues (1999) write: "Six of the nine sites indicated that there were barriers to forming the partnerships and/or communicating amongst the partners. These barriers included: identifying who should be invited to participate in the partnership, turf concerns, building consensus on specific aspects (i.e. eligibility requirements for participants), lack of understanding/knowledge concerning IDAs, determining the level of commitment to IDAs and who could handle the extra workload, coordinating meetings and school recess and holidays" (p. 24). In this study, difficulties in developing partnerships was identified as one of four key reasons for delay in start up.

In other cases, organizational partners were central to success yet simultaneously labor intensive for the IDA staff. When asked about a key organizational partner, one IDA director said with some obvious hesitation,

> *Being that I can be honest here – I mean – certainly in the last couple of months it's been sort of a real – a real – well, it's a positive relationship – and I wouldn't describe it "love-hate" but they are pushing us... they've been very supportive. I guess the thing is that they are in that sort of "one step away from the realm of the real world of ... implementing real programs and it's sort of frustrating. I mean I felt like I had plenty to do and I felt like we were moving ahead at – even a little too quickly really – implementing a larger and larger program. ... I'm very happy that we're expanding .. it's just that balance of either having adequate staff capacity and an adequate planning process. ... It's been sort of a struggle just in the sense that they want us to move really quickly. ... I think there's a useful lesson here in that _____ can be wonderful partners but I think that there may be some struggles in relationships (with organizational partners) particularly when they are pushing "yes, yes, this is wonderful. We want it everywhere all at once." ... Anyway, we have been moving more quickly than I am personally comfortable with as far as being able to do things right. So partners wanting to move faster – but they're not there everyday implementing things. ... They (help) but they just don't quite get the realities of implementing and what really needs to be involved in the planning process.*

It is important to note that there are some exceptions to the pattern of problems with multi-organizational designs. For example, one IDA staff person noted that "Partnering with non-profits who are expert at specific asset training seems to be working well. As participants draw closer to withdrawing funds and present us with the plans they have developed with these partners we will have a better idea how this is working." The director of another IDA program suggested that collaboratives are more likely to be successful when all of the partners are involved in the earliest stages of program design.

Despite some notable exceptions, though, the trend within ADD has been to bring more of the central components of IDA programming "in house," rather than continuing to subcontract or similarly divide accountability for IDA implementation between multiple agencies. This strategy mirrors the "simplifying and streamlining" efforts described above by key staff people in the IDA programs that made steady, and often rapid, implementation progress in the second year of the demonstration.

Lessons from the Assessment of IDA Program Implementation

Perhaps the most important lessons from this ADD implementation assessment are that:

- Effective IDA program models exist. In other words, developing good IDA programs is possible and we are beginning to get a sense of what works best in designing, implementing and administering such programs. IDA programs can be successfully designed, implemented, and administered by several different kinds of host organizations in ways that help low-income and low-wealth participants begin to save.

- Staffing matters. In fact, the importance of dedicated and competent IDA staff people cannot be overstated. One of the key themes to emerge from our interviews with IDA directors and coordinators was the central role of staff enthusiasm, creativity, and rapport with participants in successful IDA implementation and administration. Staff people who have a balanced set of economic development skills and social service abilities appear to be particularly effective in helping IDA programs get up and running.

- Keep it simple. Staff people in both social service and economic development organizations can be especially successful in developing and implementing IDA programs if they remember to "keep it simple." In other words, keeping program design, enrollment processes, account structures, staffing patterns, and requirements for participants as simple as possible helps get IDAs up and running.

The second of these lessons is particularly important in its detail for those people and organizations who hope to use the findings from this study to guide IDA implementation efforts. In short, the staff people chosen to design, implement and administer new IDA programs are vital to the success of the endeavor. Administrative skills, goal-orientation, and the ability to build long-lasting rapport with participants appear to be central to early IDA program implementation success and related savings outcomes.

This finding is reflected in the results of other components of the ADD evaluation. For example, Moore and her colleagues (2000) studied participant perceptions of IDA programs, saving, and the effects of IDAs and found that relationships with IDA program staff helped people save. Further, studies of IDA savings patterns in ADD (Schreiner et al., 2001; Sherraden et al., 2000) suggest strong program effects on saving. It is worth noted that the number of IDA staff people in a particular program was not associated with positive saving outcomes. It may be that the rapport building abilities, passion for the work of asset building, and administrative competencies of staff people matter more than the number of staff members in helping people begin to save for the future.

In response to a question regarding keys to success in getting IDA program up and running, one program coordinator responded:

> *The staff. We had two dedicated staff members who worked tirelessly to recruit, establish procedures, and counsel participants. In addition, they developed an economic literacy curriculum and workshop series which they facilitated. Forms, timetables, schedules, and all the other pieces necessary to have a stable project.*

One staff person identified staffing issues as one of the three most important way in which her program was being implemented differently than what they had initially anticipated.

> *The peer support groups seem to need more support from us than we expected. … Participant savings tends to drop off in dollars and frequency when they no longer meet with the facilitators after the economic literacy*

training is over. In a new design, monthly participant staff meetings i.e workshops through the life of the program would be wise.

This point is consistent with Gilbertie's (1999) suggestions that it is important that "some support be offered in addition to (and outside of) any regularly held classes or trainings" and that retaining IDA participants seems to be related to an IDA program's ability "to use its existing case management staff – who can also refer participants to other social service resources – in this role." (p.29).

The importance of staff members who work one-on-one with IDA participants also parallels findings from broad based community revitalization initiatives. For example, Hebert and Jackson (2000) note that "The success of a community initiative is often dependent on the front-line workers who actually deliver the services and implement the plans. An initiative's leaders must be effective in communicating a clear vision to their front-line workers, and guarantee them the discretion and support needed to carry it out effectively" (p. 5).

Conclusions

This study of IDA design, implementation, and administration in 13 programs across the country was conducted during the first two years of a national demonstration of asset building for low-income and low-wealth individuals, households, and communities. The Corporation for Enterprise Development organized the demonstration, which is called the "American Dream Demonstration," or ADD. This implementation assessment is one part of a six-year, multi-method evaluation of ADD that has been designed and is being directed by the Center for Social Development. The central question of the implementation assessment is: What lessons about designing, implementing, and administering IDAs can be learned from the collective experience of 13 IDA programs that are part of ADD?

The 13 programs were quite a diverse group, yet they identified some common strengths, capacities, problems and challenges in getting IDAs up and running as the demonstration began. Initially, the tasks that were most pressing included designing IDA programs, recruiting participants, and developing working relationships with organizational partners. From the beginning, staff members expressed enthusiasm for the asset-building potential of IDAs, concerns about implementation challenges, and awareness of the need to balance economic development and social service efforts.

Striking a balance between economic development strategies and social service approaches required on-going time and attention from IDA directors and coordinators. One IDA staff person alluded to this balance when she noted that her program "... shares our sponsoring organization's philosophy and practice of enabling people to move themselves out of poverty by providing the right supports while having expectations of participants."

Over the course of the demonstration, several programs told similar stories of balancing adequate support for participants with high expectations for their independent economic development efforts such as saving, making regular IDA deposits, and participating in economic education classes. This balancing act was often described in terms that echo Rubin's (1997) description of

empowerment in the context of community development: "Empowerment occurs by encouraging both material ownership and the acceptance of social responsibilities" (p. 80).

Achieving the appropriate balance between economic development strategies and social service approaches early on appears to be associated with relatively rapid start-up of IDA programs during the first year of the national demonstration. Some common characteristics of sites that emerged as front-runners in getting their IDA programs up and running are:

- Large, stable sponsoring organizations with (1) histories of effective work in low-wealth communities and (2) local funding for IDAs from the beginning of the demonstration.

- The equivalent of two to three full-time IDA staff members, hired early and with minimal turnover during the initial stages of program implementation.

- IDA program designs that include (1) one-on-one work with participants and (2) simultaneous economic education classes and saving.

These findings lend some support to propositions about successful IDA program implementation that were outlined by Sherraden and his colleagues (1995) before the national demonstration was initiated. Most specifically, findings from the front-runner analysis are consistent with working propositions suggesting that successful IDA implementation is related to organizational stability and positive regard from the larger community, ease in joining and simple IDA design features, supplemental programming for participants, flexibility in adapting to emergent problems, and secure funding.

While only three of the 13 programs in ADD emerged as front-runners, participants in all 13 programs were enrolled and saving in IDAs within the first year of the national demonstration. This collective implementation success is notable, in part, because of the diversity among the programs in terms of geographic locations, larger community settings, host organizations, and target participant groups. Further, all of the ADD programs had the challenge of implementing IDAs while simultaneously introducing the notion of asset building for low-income and low-wealth participants in economically disadvantaged communities. Given this set of implementation challenges, the fact that all 13 programs were helping people save money for long-term economic security within a year is perhaps one of the most important findings of this study.

In the second year of the national demonstration, some programs that had not been front-runners began to demonstrate steady, and sometimes rapid, progress toward their IDA implementation goals. Three programs emerged as "quick studies" and eventually caught up with, and then surpassed, the front-runners in establishing their IDA programs. Staff members at "quick study" ADD sites made program changes on the basis of what they had learned from the experiences of front-runners.

These changes often involved simplifying or streamlining program design, enrollment processes, account structures, staffing patterns, and requirements for economic education. Another strategy that the appeared to be key to rapid program improvement was to bring important components of

the program "in house." The program components that "quick studies" began offering directly, rather than indirectly through contracts and agreements with other organizations, most often included economic education and one-on-one work with participants. The finding that complex, multi-organizational IDA designs are problematic in many respects is counter to an early working proposition that program ties with other organizations and agencies in the larger community would lead to more successful IDA implementation (Sherraden et al., 1995).

ADD sites that demonstrated rapid IDA program improvement in the second year of the demonstration ended up looking more like the front-runners in terms of program design and implementation. This finding suggests the advantages of providing early and regular feedback to organizations that participate in large-scale, policy demonstrations. In this sense, research on ADD as designed and directed by the Center for Social Development is a good example of a "learning evaluation" in action.

Findings from the implementation assessment component of the ADD research project speak to the design, implementation, and administration of IDAs. By analyzing the collective implementation experience of 13 IDA participating programs, and focusing particular attention on those that achieved early start-up and made rapid implementation progress, the following lessons emerge that may help inform the design, implementation , and administration of other IDA programs in the future:

- IDA programs can be successfully established by various types of sponsoring organizations in ways that help low-income and low-wealth participants begin to save money and accumulate assets. Support for the initiative from the highest levels of administration within sponsoring organizations, and from the board of directors, is key to success. Further, a good "fit" between IDAs and the overall mission of the sponsoring organization is essential.

- In IDA program implementation, staffing matters. In fact, the importance of dedicated and competent IDA staff people cannot be overstated. One of the key themes to emerge from our interviews with IDA directors and coordinators was the central role of staff enthusiasm, creativity, and rapport with participants in successful IDA implementation and administration. Staff people who have a balanced set of economic development skills and social service abilities appear to be particularly effective in establishing IDA programs.

- IDA implementation is most successful when people who design and administer the program "keep it simple." Program staff must explain eligibility, enrollment processes, account structures, staff roles, and requirements of participants clearly and concisely to multiple groups of stakeholders in the larger community. This may explain, in part, why simple program designs help get IDAs up and running.

To summarize, the first 13 programs in the ADD demonstration are quite diverse in terms of their locations, larger community settings, host organizations, and participant demographics. Even so, participants in all of the programs were enrolled and beginning to save relatively early in the course of the national demonstration. Recruitment of IDA participants was initially slower than expected, but then increased rapidly and eventually surpassed the original ADD enrollment goal.

Turning to on-going IDA program implementation, the devil is definitely in the detail. ADD programs are administering some of the first IDAs in the world, and implementation is complex and challenging. Yet three ADD programs emerged as front-runners in getting IDAs up and running, and three others learned from, caught up with, and eventually surpassed the front-runners in establishing IDAs. This suggests that there is no one "correct" model for IDA design, implementation, and administration. Rather, IDAs can be successfully established in a wide range of contexts and communities by a diverse array of programs and organizations. This report offers some detail about best practices that have begun to emerge from the collective experience of 13 ADD sites. As IDAs and IDA-like policies and programs continue to grow and spread in the US and beyond, the experiences of these 13 ADD sites may provide some guidance in designing, implementing, and administering new asset building initiatives.

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Fall 1997 Guided Narrative

Thank you for undertaking this guided narrative, which is designed to help you describe the design, implementation, and administration of your IDA program with a focus on the problems you've encountered and the solutions you've found thus far.

Please set aside a block of time of at least one hour so that you can focus on the details of IDA program implementation. In completing the guided narrative, try to tell as complete a story as possible about your IDA program. We want to know everything you can recall.

This is the first of four guided narratives that you will complete during the next two years. This narrative focuses on the earliest steps in getting an IDA program up and running. Tell us what you thought about and how you proceeded with each step. Also, be sure to report all potential and actual problems, and how you solved or did not solve those problems.

Organization_____

Person Completing Narrative_____Date Completed_____

Where did the idea for an IDA program come from?

Who provided the initial leadership to get it started?

How were staff informed about the IDA program?

Did they like the idea? Why or why not?

Identify three ways that your organization is in a good position to implement a new IDA program?

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

Identify three ways that your organization could be in a better position to implement a new IDA program?

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

What are some important strengths of leadership in your organization? In your IDA program?

_____

_____

_____

What are some important needs for leadership in your organization? In your IDA program?

_____

_____

_____

How is your organization regarded in the community?

_____

_____

_____

Describe your organization's resource base? How well established is this resource base?

_____

_____

_____

Describe your organization's financial history? How stable has it been over the years?

_____

_____

_____

Describe your organization's experience in implementing new programs?

_____

_____

_____

Describe your planning process for the IDA program.

_____

_____

_____

How does the IDA program "fit" with other agency programs? How does it "not fit?"

_____

_____

_____

How was the IDA program director identified or recruited?

_____

_____

_____

How is your administration supportive of the new IDA program? How could they be more supportive?

_____

_____

_____

How are you and other staff well-suited for running the IDA program? How could you be better suited?

_____

_____

_____

How do staff demonstrate commitment / resistance to the IDA program at this point in time?

_____

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_____

Describe how the IDA staff have been trained thus far for the new program? What training needs remain?

_____

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_____

Briefly describe your IDA participants? Do they differ from the group you planned to serve?

_____

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Additional Comments

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Spring 1998 Guided Narrative

Thank you for undertaking this guided narrative, which is designed to help you describe the design, implementation, and administration of your IDA program with a focus on the problems you've encountered and the solutions you've found thus far.

Please set aside a block of time of at least one hour so that you can focus on the details of IDA program implementation. In completing the guided narrative, try to tell as complete a story as possible about your IDA program. We want to know everything you can recall.

This is the second of four guided narratives that you will complete during the first two years of the national IDA demonstration. This narrative focuses on the design of your IDA program and how you are implementing the program at this point in time. Tell us what you think about each of the design features and implementation steps. Also, be sure to report all potential and actual problems, and how you solved or did not solve those problems.

Organization_____

Person Completing Narrative_____Date Completed_____

What adjustments have been made to your IDA program since it was planned? Since it was started?

Describe the following design features:

population_____

purposes_____

deposit amounts_____

schedule of deposits_____

matching funds_____

caps_____

_____

uses_____

_____

monitoring_____

_____

penalties_____

_____

record keeping_____

_____

reporting to participants_____

_____

How does the IDA design "fit" the needs and goals of participants? How could the "fit" be improved?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Do you do any outreach to connect potential IDA participants with the program? Please describe.

_____

_____

_____

_____

In what ways is access to the program easy and in what ways is it difficult?

_____

_____

_____

_____

How are the rules for participation clear? How could they be more clear?

_____

_____

_____

How are IDA incentives (matches deposits, interest rates, etc.) attractive? Could they be more attractive?

_____

_____

_____

Are the restrictions and penalties effective? Are they overly problematic for participants?

_____

_____

_____

Have potential IDA participants understood the program? How is their understanding demonstrated?

_____

_____

_____

Have deposits been facilitated? If so, how? If not, what has gone wrong?

_____

_____

_____

Please describe your economic literacy training and long-range planning efforts with participants.

_____

_____

_____

_____

Please describe any supplemental programming for participants.

_____

_____

_____

How are IDA accounts monitored? Is this working? How could it work better?

_____

_____

_____

How are IDA staff pleased with the program? How are they frustrated with the program?

_____

_____

_____

Describe any staff turnover in your program? How many staff people have left? Why?

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Additional Comments

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Fall 1998 Guided Narrative

Thank you for undertaking this guided narrative, which is designed to help you describe the design, implementation, and administration of your IDA program with a focus on the problems you've encountered and the solutions you've found thus far.

Please set aside a block of time of at least one hour so that you can focus on the details of IDA program implementation. In completing the guided narrative, try to tell as complete a story as possible about your IDA program. We want to know everything you can recall.

This is the third of four guided narratives that you will complete during the first two years of the national IDA demonstration. This narrative focuses on community support and other resources that helped get your IDA program up and running. Tell us what you thought about and how you proceeded with developing or using each resource. Also, be sure to report all potential and actual problems, and how you solved or did not solve those problems.

Organization_____

Person Completing Narrative_____Date Completed_____

What is the general social and economic climate of the community and how, if at all, does this affect the IDA program?

Does the IDA program have support from any particular groups or organizations in the community? If so, what is the nature of this support?

Please describe the partnerships that your IDA program has with financial institutions in the community?

Has the IDA program had any media coverage? If so, describe.

_____

_____

_____

_____

Describe public relations with regard to the IDA program. Is this a recognized and on-going staff responsibility, or is it done on an ad hoc basis?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Discuss the funding of the IDA program. Who are the funders? Is funding secure?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Are there potential new sources of funding?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Briefly describe the organization's capacity to develop new funds for IDAs? Is this a recognized and on-going staff responsibility, or is it done on an ad hoc basis?

_____

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_____

_____

Identify other organizations in your community that are central to the success of the IDA program and describe your program's ties with these organizations (i.e. providing guest speakers for your economic literacy sessions, accepting your referrals for homeownership readiness assessments, translating).

Organization Name and Brief Description

Relationship between Your IDA Program and this Organization

Organization Name and Brief Description

Relationship between Your IDA Program and this Organization

Organization Name and Brief Description

Relationship between Your IDA Program and this Organization

Center for Social Development
Washington University in St. Louis

Additional Comments

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Spring 1999 Guided Narrative

Thank you for undertaking this guided narrative, which is designed to help you describe the design, implementation, and administration of your IDA program with a focus on the problems you've encountered and the solutions you've found thus far.

Please set aside a block of time of at least one hour so that you can focus on the details of IDA program implementation. In completing the guided narrative, try to tell as complete a story as possible about your IDA program. We want to know everything you can recall.

This is the last of four guided narratives that you have completed during the first two years of the national IDA demonstration. This narrative summarizes your experiences in getting your IDA program up and running. Tell us what you thought about and how you proceeded with each step you took. Also, be sure to report all potential and actual problems, and how you solved or did not solve those problems.

Organization_____

Person Completing Narrative_____Date Completed_____

Is your IDA program up and running the way that you expected it to be at this point in time? Explain.

_____

_____

_____

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_____

What are the three most important things that have helped you get the IDA program up and running?

(1)_____

(2)_____

(3)_____

What are the three most important things that prevented or almost prevented getting the program started?

(1)_____

(2)_____

(3)_____

What problems did you encounter while getting the IDA program up and running that are now resolved?

_____

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_____

What problems remain unresolved? Explain.

_____

_____

_____

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_____

Identify three ways that the IDA program is being implemented as it was originally planned?

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

Identify three ways that the IDA program is being implemented differently than originally planned?

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

What are some aspects of the design, implementation, and administration of the IDA program that may have influenced individual outcomes for participants? How?

_____

_____

_____

_____

What are some aspects of the design, implementation, and administration of the IDA program that may have influenced outcomes for participant's families and households? How?

_____

_____

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_____

What are some aspects of the design, implementation, and administration of the IDA program that may have influenced neighborhood and community outcomes? How?

_____

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If you were going to help a new program by sharing the three most important lessons you've learned about IDAs, what would those lessons be?

(1) _____

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(2) _____

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(3) _____

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Additional Comments

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Organization_____

Interview Date   CSD Evaluator   IDA Staff Person Interviewed:

_____   _____   _____

          Meeting/Phone/On-Site   _____

_____   _____   _____

          Meeting/Phone/On-Site   _____

_____   _____   _____

          Meeting/Phone/On-Site   _____

_____   _____   _____

          Meeting/Phone/On-Site

Typical Day / Week in the IDA Program:

Fall 1997_____

_____

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Spring 1998_____

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Fall 1998_____

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Spring 1999_____

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Stories about the IDA Program: Think about someone who is benefiting from or having problems with the IDA program. What are the benefits / problems? What is causing the benefits/problems -- something about of the person, the IDA program, and the neighborhood?

_____
_____
_____
_____

	Brief Description (What is your IDA about?)	Three Biggest Problems (Design, Implem, Admin)	Resolution (How resolved/addressed?)	Three Biggest Strengths (What's working for you?)	Benchmarks (For next 6 months)
Fall 1997					
		(1)	(1)	(1)	
		(2)	(2)	(2)	
		(3)	(3)	(3)	
Spring 1998					
		(1)	(1)	(1)	
		(2)	(2)	(2)	
		(3)	(3)	(3)	
Fall 1998					
		(1)	(1)	(1)	
		(2)	(2)	(2)	
		(3)	(3)	(3)	
Spring 1999					
		(1)	(1)	(1)	
		(2)	(2)	(2)	
		(3)	(3)	(3)	