

## State Versus Federal Priorities

NHTSA and FHWA have been encouraging states to identify their most pressing highway safety problems before selecting projects to correct them. In some states, such as Maryland and South Dakota, officials told GAO investigators that they found the problem identification process to be a good way to manage grant funds. Other state officials, however, complained that the process does not work; the breakdown occurs, they said, because less than one-third of the grant funds is available to solve different state-identified problems than those already identified by the federal government.

Although federal earmarking of funds is likely to continue even when state problem identification analyses indicate that funds could be better spent elsewhere, the situation should improve. Congress is concerned with the ability of the states to identify and address their highway safety problems. A recent U.S. Senate bill (S. 1377, June 17, 1981) proposes to amend section 402(a) of the Highway Safety Act to read:

"Each State shall have a highway safety program designed to reduce traffic deaths and injuries by identifying its highway safety problems, by adopting measures to reduce its highway safety problems, and by evaluating the effectiveness of such measures."

If the bill is adopted by Congress and subsequently becomes a part of the Highway Safety Act, the requirement for states to identify their highway safety problems will then be firmly recognized.

### GOAL-SETTING PROBLEMS

B. J. Campbell, University of North Carolina

About a year ago there was much discussion—and some confusion—about setting quantified or numerical goals for programs. Some states saw quantified goals as something NHTSA wanted for them, whereas NHTSA felt that it was responding to a need expressed by the states.

Basically, goal quantification is an advance statement of how well the planner hopes a program will succeed. The problem is that in many cases there is no objective data to indicate the benefits of a particular program. Frequently, past evaluations and analyses have not been done, and numbers are pulled out of the air. For instance, 30 percent improvement sounds good, but it is unrealistic and unattainable. To bring about such a large improvement would require a higher level of funding than is usually available. Even if the project were funded, the evaluation data might not be sensitive enough to show a definite improvement.

Actually, the best number to pick for a goal is close to zero. Then, if the data suggest that the impact is somewhere around zero—it may not be zero, but it is probably not 60 or 70 percent either—the improvement is probably fairly modest.

Goals made in advance often have no basis. Program planners do not necessarily know how their countermeasures will work. In one project in North Carolina, a pilot project was set up to teach students a few rudimentary emergency maneuvers as part of their driver education. The standard 30 classroom h and 6 h behind the wheel were augmented with additional time behind the wheel during which the students were taught recovery maneuvers on the range—i.e.,

off the street and under safe circumstances. There was no basis for forecasting a percentage improvement that the program was to effect. In fact, when the project was evaluated, no improvement was found. If there were a benefit, it could not be measured in terms of subsequent accidents within the size population analyzed.

It is easier to set and meet administrative goals than impact goals. A goal of distributing 100 000 posters or of making 50 speeches to an average audience of 30 each is realistic, and the success of the project can be measured.

If impact goals must be set, however, several rules of thumb may help in setting them realistically. When a project planner starts with a program, he or she generally knows how much money can be spent. The planner also has the capability to estimate the cost of an accident. A 1974-1975 NHTSA estimate was \$4000 per accident. Fatalities, injuries, and property damage were factored into this figure. Adjusted for inflation, this figure may be about \$6000. By dividing the project amount by the accident cost, the planner gets a number of accidents that represents the project break-even point. For example, for a \$60 000 project, the break-even point (the goal) would be to prevent 10 accidents.

Another way to set realistic goals is to determine the size of change that can be detected with some statistical significance. Where there is no such basis, setting quantitative goals should be avoided.

### MANAGEMENT USE OF ACCIDENT STATISTICS: ADMINISTRATIVE AND ORGANIZATIONAL PROBLEMS Cordell Smith, Colorado Division of Highway Safety

One of the most difficult problems faced by state highway safety managers is the lack of integrated and consistent traffic records. As the national highway safety effort was being developed, the need for systematic records was recognized, but not emphasized. As policy has shifted toward improved planning and evaluation, the seriousness of this oversight has become apparent.

In Colorado, available traffic records are used (a) to identify problems and set priorities, (b) to evaluate project or program impact, (c) to determine program cost/benefit, (d) to set goals within the departmental management-by-objective program, and (e) to justify programs to state legislators. But, like most states and NHTSA, Colorado is not doing the job that it could in these areas. The data are inadequate, and there are insufficient resources to upgrade our traffic records system.

The Colorado records system is used to address these specific questions:

- Which municipality or county has the worst accident problem based on vehicle miles of travel, population, miles of road, etc.? Would increased enforcement affect this problem?
- Which emergency medical service (EMS) district has the slowest response time or the best on-scene medical care? Why?
- Who are the people involved in alcohol-related crashes? If we develop a profile, could we intervene at some point before the individual is involved in a serious crash?
- What is the contribution of the roadway environment to the crash situation?
- What is the contribution of the motor vehicle inspection program?