

CEIP: GOING BEYOND OTHER “MAKE-WORK” PROJECTS

Canadian Government responses to the problem of chronic unemployment in some regions have included a variety of direct job-creation programs, many of which simultaneously aimed to provide work to participants and support affected communities. During the 1970s, a number of temporary community employment programs were introduced, including the Local Initiatives Program (LIP), the Local Employment Assistance Program (LEAP), and Canada Works. Similar initiatives followed in the 1980s under the Local Economic Development Assistance (LEDA) program and Canada Employment Program (CEP). The 1990s brought more focus to active labour market policies, including earnings supplements, wage subsidies, and self-employment assistance. Although the emphasis on direct job creation programs was substantially reduced in these years, Part II of the 1996 *Employment Insurance Act* still provides for some community-development projects as part of the Employment Benefits and Support Measures. In 2004–2005, most notably, the Job Creation Partnerships (JCP) program was accessed by close to 8,000 participants, representing about 6 per cent of all Employment Benefits expenditures.¹

Governments in the United States have also utilized community-based jobs in various capacities. In the 1980s, community work experience programs (CWEP) were initiated in several states as part of mandatory “workfare” projects. With the welfare reforms in the 1990s, several large-scale projects utilizing community service employment (CSE) were also implemented, often as components of larger demonstration projects — namely, Vermont’s Community Service Employment Program and the New Hope Project.

How CEIP Is Different from Earlier Community-based Employment Programs

The Community Employment Innovation Project (CEIP) is not a traditional job-creation project. Although the program does address a short-term need for employment, it is, foremost, a research that is testing an “active” re-employment strategy as an alternative to the “passive” receipt of Employment Insurance (EI) or income assistance (IA). CEIP designers also sought to build upon lessons from earlier approaches in developing the program model. The following are some of CEIP’s key theoretical underpinnings and features that distinguish the study from earlier community-based employment programs.

An Alternative to EI and IA

Since the late 1980s, labour market policy experts have been advocating what is known as “active” labour market policy measures. The idea is that transfer programs should encourage recipients to work rather than passively receive cash benefits, regardless of whether they work while receiving them. CEIP is an attempt to experiment with another alternative to the so-called “passive” receipt of benefits.

The goal of testing an active labour market policy alternative had several implications for the CEIP design. The program model could not provide participants with financial benefits that were substantially higher than those for which it was an alternative. Moreover, it could not provide large amounts of capital, financial or otherwise, since the provision of such capital is not a role typically assumed by a transfer program. Training was also excluded on

¹ Human Resources and Social Development Canada (2006), *Employment Insurance, Monitoring and Assessment Report 2005*, Ottawa, p. 25.

the ground that it was already being provided by governments as a form of active labour market policy.

Empowering Communities and Building Capacity

CEIP placed extensive control over project development with communities in order to explicitly link projects with local priorities and needs. The role played by the communities had two main dimensions. First, each community had to create a democratic structure to make decisions regarding the use of resources. These community boards were initially charged with developing strategic plans and setting priorities for the kinds of projects that would have access to workers supplied by the project.

Second, communities were responsible for mobilizing local project sponsors to develop projects that would employ workers. It was hoped that the organization, planning and mobilization of projects would serve as a catalyst for community action. In turn, these processes, along with the projects' output, would support community-capacity growth as well as improve social and market conditions.

Relying on Social Economy Projects

CEIP also differs from past programs in that it grows from a body of knowledge and practical experience with the social economy. While definitions of the social economy vary, a common element is that of organizations and institutions, which are neither entirely private — producing goods and services for sale in the market — nor entirely public — operating as part of a tax-funded government services. CEIP is exploring whether this third sector can be used to develop opportunities for work, recognizing that some communities have smaller market sectors than others. The idea is to encourage activities that are meaningful for both the participant and the community, without duplicating or displacing existing public and private activities.

To respect the context of a community-controlled model, CEIP did not impose a definition of the social economy on communities. They were free to determine the precise nature of the projects, within limited guidelines, and could choose, for example, to focus their resources in existing non-profit organizations rather than create new social enterprises. Furthermore, CEIP provided communities primarily free labour, but no capital support, as it is testing an alternative to EI or IA, not an economic development project. One would think that the lack of capital could limit the project development options of communities. CEIP allows to test the notion that the social economy can in fact provide a range of opportunities — meaningful jobs — some possibly higher skilled than the traditional community jobs program, without large capital investments.

Skills Acquisition through a Range of Work Experiences

Similar to earlier programs, CEIP was designed to replicate real employment. There are, however, several unique features of CEIP related to the length of eligibility, the nature of the available job placements, and the supporting program services. First, participants were eligible for three years, as long as they did not return to regular EI benefits or IA as their primary source of income. This would provide more significant employment duration than was possible in earlier programs. In addition, rather than a single work placement, participants were able to take on a number of successive new job assignments to obtain a

greater range of work experiences. This was actively encouraged through case (participant) management and a job-matching coordinator.

The focus is on the maintenance and acquisition of skills through work experiences. In particular, the varied nature of many job opportunities in the social economy can require flexibility, collaboration and multitasking, which might be expected to produce effects on skills that are transferable to a number of different jobs.

Promoting the Development of Social Capital

Unlike earlier community-based employment programs, CEIP seeks the development of social capital among participants. Consistent with recent conceptual developments, especially work done by the Policy Research Initiative, CEIP defines social capital as “*the networks of social ties that a person or group can call upon for resources and support.*”²

CEIP provides an opportunity to test whether policy measures can contribute to the development of social networks that could facilitate employment search and foster more employment opportunities.

A Rigorous Evaluation Design

One of the more important features of CEIP that sets it apart from earlier community employment initiatives is its evaluation design. CEIP has been set up as a demonstration project using multiple evaluation methods to measure its effects on both individuals and communities. This includes a random-assignment evaluation design — widely accepted as the most reliable way to estimate a program’s impacts — in order to assess the effect of CEIP on individuals who take part in the program.

To do this effectively, a measure of what participants would have experienced in the absence of the program is required. Most commonly, this counterfactual is created by identifying a comparison group that resembles as closely as possible the program group. Using random assignment ensures that there are no systematic pre-existing differences between the program group and the control group. The groups are similar in all respects, including unobservable, and even immeasurable, characteristics. They differ only in that one group is eligible for the program and the other is not. Therefore, any differences that are observed over time in the experiences of the two groups can be attributed with confidence to the program.

² Policy Research Initiative (2003), *Social Capital: Building on a Network-based Approach*, Ottawa.