

Tele-learning Event: Thursday, October 13, 2005
Call # 2: Case Study: Identifying Opportunities for Low-Income People
Within the Manitoba Innovation Framework
Summary of Conversation with Garry Loewen

Garry, how did a senior manager at Air Canada get involved in community economic development?

- *Didn't really choose it, it chose me*
- *Started with a religious calling, and a detour through parish ministry*
- *Invitation from Mennonite Central Committee to create some jobs programs*

Tell us more about the Manitoba Research Alliance on CED and New Economy. Who is involved and what is the Alliance seeking to do?

- *3 year project ending December 2005*
- *3 Manitoba universities, 21 community partner organizations were involved*
- *Investigating impact of new economy on marginalized communities, identifying opportunities, and policies and practices that could assist in capturing those opportunities for marginalized communities*
- *Total grant was \$895,000*
- *42 research projects were funded*
- *About 50 academic researchers participated*
- *37 community researchers were involved*

Garry, you have been doing this work for a lot of years now. With your background and experience, you could easily do something else. What keeps you involved?

- *Very meaningful work – nothing more critical than reducing poverty, and CED is an important strategy in achieving that*
- *Good blend of my skills and interests*
- *Really enjoy the community members and practitioners I get to rub elbows with in doing this work*

Tell us more about the challenge that motivated the research study. What is happening in Winnipeg?

- *Publication of Manitoba Industrial Development Strategy*
- *All based on high tech industries*
- *Concern about how this high tech direction would further marginalize people with employment barriers.*
- *Had an idea that other jurisdictions probably had some important learnings for us*

What did your research project mean to do?

- *Sponsored by the Research Alliance, and the Province of Manitoba*
- *Research team was a professor, myself and four students working full or part time over the course of 9 months*

Project Aim

- *Learn about the recruiting practices/employment requirements of the industries targeted by Manitoba*
- *Determine the extent to which the targeted industries had built employment bridges to people with employment barriers*
- *Identify interventions in these industries globally that had created employment bridges*
- *Present global interventions to local employers and community based organizations to determine how replicable they might be here*
- *Organize a “collaboration event” with all relevant stakeholders present (based on Innovation Theory) to spark the possibility of some new partnerships and networks for implementing best practice*

Project Components

- *Literature search*
- *Web search*
- *Interviews with global employment development practitioners*
- *Identify and document about two dozen programs globally*
- *Interview approximately 3 dozen local employers*
- *Develop recommendations*
- *Test recommendations at a local Collaboration Event*

Garry, you have seen CED work across Canada. Is this challenge unique to Winnipeg?

- *Not at all*
- *All jurisdictions are competing for knowledge economy industries*
- *All jurisdictions experiencing deeper segregation of workforce based on ability to compete in high tech jobs*
- *Dearth of research and solid information on best practices for employment development generally across Canada, and particularly as it relates to moving barriered job seekers beyond entry level work*
- *Feel that our research results on best practices and on program replication would be as applicable in other parts of Canada as in Manitoba*
- *What we discovered about the readiness of local industry to implement new practices may be different across the country*

What did you find out about the characteristics of programs that successfully assisted low-income residents train for and secure decent paying jobs?

- Refer to the **Employment Development Best Practices Schematic** (visual framework)
- Need to be careful when we start talking about best practices
- Are a lot of ways to be effective in this work
- We would not want to hold out our best practice principles as the only way to get good results
- But we would want to say that generally the strongest results are going to come from approaches that incorporate the greatest number of these characteristics.

- The most important characteristics
 - Engage the employer (demand side driven)
 - Focuses on good jobs
 - Comprehensive supports - basic education, soft skills, job readiness/job search, specific job skill development
 - Networked – employers, funders, community colleges, community based organizations etc. all working in formal arrangements
 - Interventionist – actually alters the structure of the labour market - recruiting, qualifications, job design

- Some other characteristics
 - post-employment supports
 - Cultural competency
 - Training programs that simulate workplace

Now, these robust, comprehensive systems don't emerge spontaneously. You also found that a workforce intermediary is critical to making it all happen. What is a workforce intermediary? Why are they important – what do they do?

- A collaboration that brings together all of the relevant partners to plan and implement a course of action including:
 - Employers
 - Community colleges
 - CBO's
 - Adult Learning Centres
 - Government
- Creates formal agreements and accountabilities
- Can have any of a variety of org structures (network, npo, etc.)

What are some characteristics of successful intermediaries?

- Is generally demand side driven – employers make commitments that drive the rest of the process
- Typically initiated and held together by a high profile champion, which could come from business, government or community

Garry, you also found that many communities have many of these elements already in place and that the active leadership and participation of the business community was central to their success.

What is the “business case” for businesses to get involved?

- *Current, projected labour shortages*
- *Free HR planning & training*
- *Corporate social responsibility and image*

What are the various ways they can get involved?

- *Program design*
- *Instruction*
- *Work experiences/internships*
- *Providing employment*

What are the critical things to keep in mind in getting businesses and private sector leaders involved?

- *Involve a champion that they respect*
- *Appeal to the business case*
- *Create some profile*
- *Bring some resources to the table*
- *Allow commitments to be tentative until results are proven – i.e. internships/co-operative work experiences*
- *Make it easy for them to participate*

Garry, your team did a comparison of Winnipeg’s employment development systems against these key characteristics. What did you find?

How does Winnipeg’s Employment development community compare?

- *Has a strong community base, located in low-income neighbourhoods*
- *Is accessible to job-seekers*
- *Is skilled in providing wide range of employment related supports*
- *Needs strong, formalized networks*
- *Needs more high capacity organizations capable of providing comprehensive services*
- *Needs to be more demand driven*
- *Needs a more interventionist approach*

How does Winnipeg’s business involvement compare?

- *Many co-operants*
- *A few customized training situations*
- *Close to a workplace intermediary in the aerospace industry*
- *Is mostly at the receiving end of community based organizations*

Based on these findings, what did you recommend for Winnipeg?

- *Workforce intermediary in both IT and Advanced Manufacturing*
- *Employment development community be assisted to*
 - *Become more networked*
 - *Become more comprehensive*
 - *Become more employer driven*
 - *Become more interventionist*
 - *Become more culturally competent*
- *A host of other recommendations regarding program design*

How have recommendations – and the entire study – been received? Has there been any movement on any of them since the study was submitted and discussed?

- *Some media interest (business media)*
- *Lots of interest in government*
- *Provincial/federal task group working to establish WI for IT and Advanced Manufacturing*
- *Mixed response from employment development community – but dissemination not yet wide enough*
- *Limited dissemination in business community, but good response where presented*

I know it's impossible to estimate the potential impact of system reforms like this –it varies from place to place and a lot of things have to go well. But do you have a sense of the number of low income people that might benefit from your recommendations if and when the community moves forward on them?

- *Example of Center for Employment Training*
 - *Started in San Jose*
 - *33 centres across the country*
 - *Over 100,000 individuals trained and placed over 35 years*
 - *Works out to about 150 individuals per location per year*
- *Challenge in moving to scale is to find funding for the range of employment supports*
- *Presume we are talking about 100 to 200 per city per year*

To what extent do you think the findings in this study are relevant to the diverse communities involved in Vibrant Communities – from Saint John's to Victoria? What would you like people on the line to take away from your experience in this research?

- *Likely applicable to urban centres across country. May not be applicable to rural*
- *VC folks are all about adding value by building collaborations*
 - *Key finding is need for employment development systems to be networked*
 - *There is likely a “collaboration gap” related to employment development in most Canadian cities*
 - *VC projects have potential to play a brokering & coordinating role here*
- *VC folks also always looking for ways to engage business community*
 - *Business community is at centre of WI's, so this is a route towards engagement*

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