

CASE STUDY

COMPREHENSIVE EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ACT (CETA)

The *Comprehensive Employment and Training Act* (CETA) illustrates how equity can be advanced through cross agency coordination. CETA was created by the Nixon and Ford administrations during times of high unemployment in the mid-1970s. It was the largest federal public service employment program since the 1930s to create opportunities for artists. The program ran from 1973-1981, providing many hundreds of millions of dollars to low-income artists. It invested \$300 million in CETA arts jobs, jobs that provided steady income and benefits.

CETA provided training in artmaking, and also arts administration and technical support. It nurtured a generation of arts leaders and strengthened the community arts and alternative arts space movements in the 1970s. Many of these organizations hired their first paid staff with CETA money. Cultural critic Arlene Goldbard wrote:

There is scarcely a U.S. community artist who was around in the mid-1970s who did not either hold a CETA job or work directly with someone who did. Most community-based groups in the United States dating from that time were launched on their labor-intensive path with CETA support.

CETA shifted responsibility for design and management of its programs to the state and local level to engage local knowledge and decision-making. This was a significant break from the centralized authority of previous New Deal programs.

By using his knowledge of the government gained by working for the Department of Labor and Office of Management and Budget, savvy administrator John Kreidler helped adapt CETA from a program that did not initially include the arts to one that employed thousands of artists.

In New York City, CETA supported jobs for more than 600 artists to provide cultural services throughout the City, as well as 300 employees in maintenance, guard, and other positions at cultural organizations. DCLA under Commissioner Henry Geldzahler and the nonprofit Cultural Council Foundation played key roles in administering the largest program. Subcontractors included the Black Theatre Alliance, the Association of Hispanic Arts, and the Foundation for Independent Video and Film. Hospital Audiences, La Mama ETC, the American Jewish Congress, and the Theater for the Forgotten administered additional programs.

Artists played key leadership roles. In dance, for example, director of artist residencies, Liz Thompson, and coordinators including Blondell Cummings, Anthony LaGiglia, and William Dunas, were all dancers. The program was funded through the New York City Department of Employment. Artists received \$10,000 plus fringe benefits.

Ted Berger, former Executive Director of the New York Foundation for the Arts, who helped develop CETA in New York City, describes how many of the lessons learned from CETA were applied after 9/11 in the creation of the New York Arts Recovery Fund. For Berger it is of key importance to “not have to reinvent the wheel every time there is a disaster, natural or economic. We have to think long-term and in more systemic ways.”

WHAT WE CAN LEARN

Programs like CETA can promote equity and result in significant long-term relationships and ongoing artist alliances.

Like the Works Progress Administration (WPA) during the Great Depression, CETA responded to a strained economy and growing unemployment. It helped low-income cultural workers survive, build their skills, and use their creativity in support of communities.

By supporting artists to work in schools, hospitals, libraries, prisons, community centers, and subway stations, CETA increased access to and participation in arts and culture.

An evaluation of the CETA program carried out for the US Department of Labor, *The CETA Arts and Humanities Experience*, demonstrates that additional positive impacts can include economic and skill development for individuals, economic development for local jurisdictions, cultural development for communities, and an increased understanding of culture as an industry.