

# ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY INSTITUTE

*We use new tools to strengthen the middle class*

## Community Jobs

Community Jobs (CJ) is one component of Washington State's Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) "WorkFirst" system that combines waged work, a continuum of supports and mentoring for welfare recipients who are entering work.

**CJ is the first program in the nation to provide comprehensive, paid work experience plus training opportunities for hard to employ TANF recipients.** CJ builds participant work and life skills, while participants improve the quality of their communities through their work in community, government and tribal organizations. They are bus drivers, graphic artists, and teacher aides. Private non-profit partners provide participants with 20 hours of work, a paycheck-- not a welfare check and one-on-one support and mentoring to resolve barriers to work.

Program participants remain in CJ up to nine months, long enough to gain both substantial work experience and an opportunity to deal with life situations beyond crisis management. Participants develop a platform for genuine job advancement and quality of life improvements after leaving CJ. Participants are eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit, which along with Washington State's \$6.50/hr. minimum wage and a 50% earnings disregard, boosts participant income well above welfare grants.

**CJ moves beyond convention and pursues quality through unique partnerships.** CJ, administered by the State Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development (CTED), operates in a distinctively different manner than the state welfare agency. While collaborating with state agency partners, CTED contracts with 17 consortia of private non-profits as partners not vendors, who create job sites, employ CJ participants, and provide them with intensive case management.

**Strong communications networks among partners create feedback loops.** Constant availability and access to technical assistance, site visits, an interactive discussion forum web site, a bi-monthly newsletter, regional trainings, and CJ training retreats identify and resolve problems, strengthen teamwork and encourage peer learning across the state.

**CJ contracts are performance driven.** A unique hybrid of work and performance pay points contract uses a per participant project management fee along with payments for meeting participant goals and benchmarks.

**CJ emphasizes empowerment for program participants while promoting concrete outcomes.** CJ uses individual assessments and development of Individual Development Plans (IDP) for achieving career and personal goals.

**Quality standards are established and measured.** Small caseloads, links to basic education and vocational training and worksite and participant surveys guarantee meaningful individualized service for participants.

**CJ heightens job advancement opportunities.** CJ promotes concurrent enrollment in community college classes, the Department of Labor's Welfare-to-Work services, and other training opportunities that support participants' future goals.

**CJ relies on local innovation for successful quality outcomes.** CJ programs are designed to fit their participants and local community, generating problem solving ingenuity and successful practices that can be shared statewide.

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## The Role of the Economic Opportunity Institute

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Over the past two years, the Economic Opportunity Institute (EOI) has worked in concert with CTED to design and implement the Community Jobs program. EOI has both collaborated with and, when necessary, challenged CTED and the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) in the implementation process.

EOI works with CTED and CJ contractors to advocate for and insure the integrity and quality of CJ, to create media, public, and opinion-maker support at local and state levels, and to sustain and enhance funding for CJ.

**Our goal is to insure that Community Jobs works as a vehicle to achieve economic self-sufficiency for TANF participants.** We continually push to make Community Jobs a work program, not a workfare program. Our vision is a Community Jobs program which enables a TANF-qualified individual to:

- Earn a paycheck for hours of work,
- Step onto and move up a job ladder to economic self-sufficiency and steady employment, and
- Begin a structured movement from poverty toward a decent standard of living.

### **Our efforts in this area include:**

- Advancing program mission and goals with CTED to guide the design process;
- Participating in regulatory development for Community Jobs;
- Facilitating a partnership network including CTED, EOI, DSHS, and the contractors and their service partners to aid information exchange and effective service delivery practices;
- Developing relationships with other partners, including organized labor, to resolve implementation issues and concerns about job displacement;
- Writing and publishing of a monthly newsletter to inform internal and external networks about the purpose and progress of the program;

- Working with contractor/partners on media outreach to inform the public of Community Jobs' success and benefit to local communities;
- Working with contractor/partners to develop visible and tangible projects which promote community involvement and showcase CJ benefits for the public;
- Managing a Discussion Forum web site for CTED and contractors to share information, problem solve, and answer questions

### **Results to date:**

- 40% of CJ participants in sanction moved into full participation due to CJ
- 67% of individuals referred to CJ are enrolled
- CJ participants earn 73% more income than TANF recipients - \$944 per month vs. the average TANF grant of \$546 per month
- 97% of CJ participants receive the Advanced Earned Income Tax Credit
- 93% of CJ participants are co-enrolled in additional training and advancement activities
- 70% of CJ participants are co-enrolled in Welfare to Work, Private Industry Council, chemical dependency, domestic violence, parenting, mental health, tribal programs, life skills, and pregnancy to employment programs
- 30% of CJ participants (vs. 15% for WorkFirst) are enrolled in community college activities such as vocational education, Families that Work, Adult Basic Education, GED, ESL and Limited English Pathways
- CJ, which accounts for 6% of the total WorkFirst caseload, is responsible for 11% of total WorkFirst community college enrollments
- 85% of participants successfully complete 9 months of CJ or obtain unsubsidized employment
- 67% of CJ participants have obtained unsubsidized employment (vs. 30% for WorkFirst)