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Local economic strategies for ageing labour markets: The Canadian Targeted Initiative for Older Workers in Fort St. James, British Columbia

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Local economic strategies for ageing labour markets

The Canadian Targeted Initiative for Older Workers in Fort St. James, British Columbia.

Working Paper

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This paper was prepared for the Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) programme of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as part of a project on "Local economic strategies for shrinking and ageing labour markets".

- Section 1 provides background on Canada's policy responses to population ageing and discusses recent labour market trends among older workers in Canada.

- Section 2 describes the Canadian programme most closely linked to the LEED project, namely the Targeted Initiative for Older Workers (TIOW).

- The third section describes a particular TIOW project: the Fort St. James project in north central British Columbia. It was selected by the federal Department of Employment and Social Development and its partners in the provincial and territorial governments in order to illustrate features of the TIOW programme that have potential for providing lessons and insights that could be of international interest.

- The fourth section describes best practices and lessons that can be learned from Fort St. James. Many of these will be of interest to a variety of stakeholders, including programme practitioners within Canada as well as other countries. There are also important lessons for those who evaluate and fund similar programmes.

- The final section summarizes the conclusions.

The paper was prepared on the basis of interviews and reviews by stakeholders at Employment and Social Development Canada, the department that has responsibility for TIOW at the federal level, the Labour Market & Immigration Division in the Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Development & Minister Responsible for Labour in the government of British Columbia, the department responsible for TIOW at the provincial level and the College of New Caledonia responsible for the design and delivery of the project at the local level[1]. The provincial officials played a particularly strong role in capturing the discussions as they related to the lessons learned from the Fort St. James project.

[1] The author would like to thank the following contributors to this research paper:

- Laurie Goldmann and Suzanne Noonan who are with Employment and Social Development Canada, the department that has responsibility for TIOW at the federal level.

- Laura Colpman and Andrew Walter who are with the Labour Market & Immigration Division in the Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Development & Minister Responsible for Labour in the government of British Columbia, the department responsible for TIOW at the provincial level.

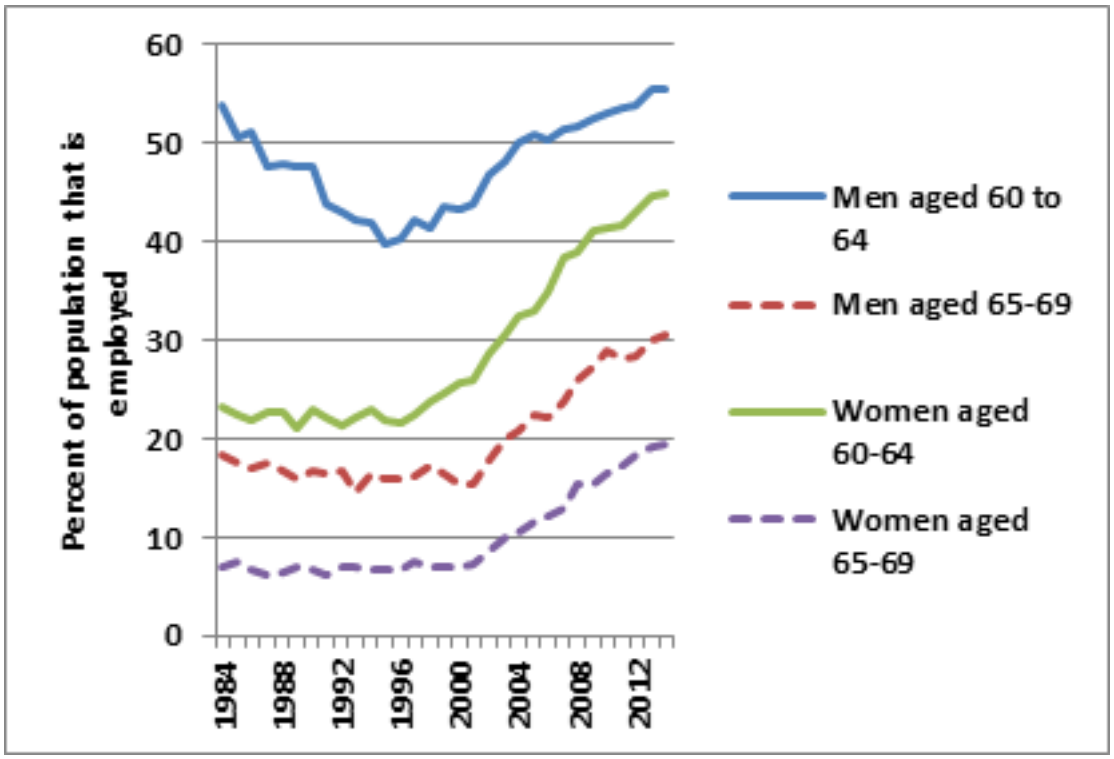
- Maureen Mallais and Ann McCormick at the College of New Caledonia who are directly responsible for the design and delivery of the project at the local level.

POPULATION AGEING AND OLDER WORKERS TRENDS IN CANADA

Like most OECD countries, Canada is facing the demographic challenges of an ageing population and an ageing workforce. By 2036, it is predicted that nearly one in four Canadians will be over the age of 65, nearly double that of 2009 (Statistics Canada, 2010). As a result, older workers will have an increasingly larger share of the labour force.

Nevertheless, compared with many other countries, the negative fiscal implications of population ageing have been relatively small in Canada. In particular, the cost of the public pension system, being heavily targeted on those with low incomes, has been relatively low. Further, public pension financing was redesigned in the 1990s to be fiscally sustainable even after the baby boom generation reached retirement age. The conclusions of a 2001 OECD comparative study[2] of 9 OECD countries noted that, in Canada, aging populations therefore posed a relatively smaller policy challenge than in other countries. However, like other countries, there could be potential adjustment problems associated with a possibly large increase in the ratio of retirees to workers. This increase could occur in the period, starting about now, when many baby boomers will start reaching traditional retirement ages – assuming of course that retirement behaviours remained unchanged.

Figure 1. The rapid growth of employment rates for people in their 60s



Source: Labour Force Survey, Cansim Table 282-002

[2] OECD, *Ageing and Income: Financial resources and retirement in 9 OECD countries*, 2001, ISBN 92-64-19542-4

However, retirement behaviours did change over the past decades. As Figure 1 shows, since the mid-1990s, there has been a remarkable growth in employment rates of workers in their 60s – one that has taken place independent of any policy reforms and one that seems likely to continue and even accelerate over the coming decade. If these trends continue, they will offset any negative effects of population ageing related to ratio of retirees to workers. The overall size of the workforce will continue to grow in line with traditional patterns[3].

Moreover, Figure 1 also shows quite dramatically that there is no evidence of any deep across-the-board problem with the employability of older workers. Quite the opposite is true. Box 1 provides evidence that shows, in general, that older workers are doing very well in the Canadian labour market at least as measured in terms of their employability, mobility and future prospects.

Box 1. Older workers in Canada - some facts

- Over the past 20 years, the ratio of part-time to full-time work has remained steady in all age groups, young and old, with somewhat more part-time work among those over age 60 and, especially, over the age of 65.
- Trends in unemployment rates among older workers follow the same cyclical pattern as those for the labour market as a whole and are at similar levels to those of all workers (about 6%), but are much lower than the unemployment rates for younger people age 15 to 24 (where about 14% of the labour force is currently unemployed).
- The duration of unemployment increases with age. However, it is not always well understood that the biggest increases in the incidence of long-term unemployment (26 weeks or longer) are among age groups under the age 45. Longer-term unemployment increases by a smaller amount between those aged 45-54 and those aged 55-64. Very long-term unemployment (a year or more) is, however, largest among those 55 to 64.
- Unemployed older workers aged 55-64 spend about the same amount of time looking for work as younger workers. They were also just about as likely as their younger counterparts to look for work outside their community. They are, understandably, more likely than younger workers to accept a wage decline when looking for work, especially for those who have faced longer durations of unemployment.
- Unemployed older workers are, however, more pessimistic about their chances of finding work, especially among immigrants, the long-term unemployed and those with lower education levels. Despite this greater pessimism, most older workers do not feel that there was a lack of available jobs. Some 25% of them felt that better health or being younger would help most in finding a job – a much smaller percent than suggested by some ageist stereotypes. Many also reported an interest in acquiring new skills and getting assistance in finding a job.
- In terms of moving from a career job to bridge employment, after leaving their long-term career jobs, two-thirds of older workers (defined as being age 50 and over) were re-employed, the majority of them within the first few years of leaving, regardless of age of exiting their career jobs.
- The baby boomers who will soon begin moving into traditional retirement ages in large number will be much better educated and skilled than the current generation of people of the same age. Demand for their skills will likely be even higher than it has been over the past 20 years.

Source : The first two bullets are from the Labour Force Survey, Cansim Table 282-002. The second last bullet is based on research by Bonikowska and Schellenberg (http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/olc-cel/olc.action?objId=11F0019M2014355&objType=46&lang=en&limit=0). The remaining bullets are taken from a special survey whose results are reported in André Bernard, 'The job search of the older unemployed', Perspectives on Labour and Income, August 2012.

[3] Peter Hicks, *The Enabling Society*, The Institute for Research on Public Policy, April 2015.

Older workers, like workers in any age group, do of course face some difficulties in the labour market. However these can be primarily addressed by mainstream employment and income support programmes that apply to people of all ages. All mainstream programming should be sensitive to the diverse characteristics of their potential clientele, whether this relates to gender, age, health status, or skills and educational attainment. With one exception described below, age is not a useful characteristic for framing separate policy responses.

The success of older workers in the labour market has only become obvious over the past decade or so. In the early 2000s, the strength of trends towards increased employment, which started in the mid-90s were not as obvious. In consequence, there were studies in Canada that were based on the assumption that older workers were a potential target for separate policy action. This included the OECD study of older workers which was published in 2005 and an internal 2008 Canadian study, Expert Panel on Older Workers, *Supporting and Engaging Workers in the New Economy*. Both referred to the TIOW programme in favourable terms.

Good employability of older workers overall but local challenges in vulnerable communities

The one exception where older workers do stand out is their higher incidence of being unemployed for a year or more[4]. While the numbers here are relatively small, they may well be a proxy for a small sub-population of older workers that does warrant policy attention – often where age considerations interact with other variables to produce vulnerable or underutilised population groups. Examples of these other variables include low education and literacy skills, low demand in the local labour market, obstacles to geographic mobility, age discrimination by employers in some industries and local areas, and the strength of community supports. These challenges can be even more pronounced when older workers reside in smaller or more remote communities which may have limited job opportunities or infrastructure to support training and/or employment transitions.

When multiple factors such as these are involved, responses cannot be one-size-fits-all programming aimed at large groups defined by a single characteristic such as 'older workers'. Rather, it does mean that solutions are likely to involve flexible responses, often involving partnerships among different programmes and difference actors, public and private, tailored to the specific needs of the community or sector where problems do exist.

[4] Although even here the situation is much better than in many other OECD countries, see OECD Scoreboard on Older Workers, http://www.oecd.org/els/emp/ageingandemploymentpolicies.htm

THE TARGETED INITIATIVE FOR OLDER WORKERS (TIOW): A PROGRAMME THAT LEARNS FROM EXPERIENCE

The TIOW programme was not designed to meet any overall problem associated with the role of older workers in the labour market. Rather it was designed to be a highly targeted labour market initiative to address one of the main areas where the challenges faced by unemployed older workers are greatest, and where the most innovative solutions are needed, namely those living in small, vulnerable communities.

The goal of the programme is to support older workers in reintegrating into the workforce or, in situations where there is little likelihood of immediate employment opportunities, to increase their employability and to ensure that they remain active and productive labour market participants while their communities undergo adjustment.

Under TIOW, the Government of Canada is responsible for setting overarching policy parameters, managing allocations, conducting evaluations, and approving all new projects prior to commencement. Provinces and territories are responsible for targeting specific communities for interventions as well as for designing and delivering projects (normally via community-based organisations). Key features of TIOW include the following:

- **Group-based.** Emphasis is placed on peer mentoring and support. This is an especially important aspect since many learning activities take place in classroom and collective settings that could otherwise be inhospitable for older people.

- **Customised interventions**. Provinces and territories typically work with community organisations to tailor projects to meet participant needs and to fit in with local labour market needs.

- **Partnership**. Projects are often embedded in regional economic development strategies and complement existing employment programming and adjustment initiative in the region.

The programme is cost shared by the federal government and participating provinces and territories. It was announced in 2006 as a temporary measure and has been extended three times since then, in the federal budgets of 2008, 2011 and 2014. Budget 2015 reiterated this commitment. The current extension represents a federal government contribution of $75 million over a three year period until March 31, 2017 ($25 million/year in 2014-15, 2015-16, and 2016-17).

Concretely, the federal government funds up to 70% of eligible project costs, and each province or territory funds a minimum of 30% of eligible costs. The eligibility of participants and communities are strictly defined. Participants must be an unemployed older worker (primarily aged 55 to 64, with those 50-54 or 65+ eligible but not at the exclusion of prime targeted age group) who resides in an eligible community. Eligible communities include cities or towns of 250,000 or less that are experiencing one or more of the following: high unemployment, significant downsizing or closures, skills mismatches and/or unfilled employer demand. The latter two criteria were added in the Budget 2014 renewal of TIOW so that communities with tighter labour markets can now participate.

TIOW participants receive income support while participating in a project (such as allowances, wages or wage subsidies) as applicable under provincial or territorial legislation. All projects must provide a minimum of 25 hours of programming a week. All must ensure the provision of employment assistance activities such as résumé writing, counselling, interview techniques, or job search techniques.

All must include at least two employability improvement activities such as:

- **Participant assessment**: prior learning assessment, portfolio development, grade 12 equivalency, vocational and interest assessment.
- **Mentoring**: to support older workers as they transition to employment.
- **Specific occupational skills training**: targeted to current of anticipated labour market demands, including in classrooms (e.g., short certifications) or on-the-job employer-based training.
- **Preparation for self-employment**: support business plan development, business shadowing or business mentorship.
- **Basic skills upgrading**: computer use, reading, writing, numeracy and oral communication.
- **Direct marketing to employers**: including matching to vacancies, monitored work placement with subsidies to employer.
- **Employer-based work experience**: Subsidised work placements with local employers to enable participants to gain skills/experience in new fields.
- **Community-based work experience**: job creation activities aimed at community benefits that include support to economic development plans in communities with fewer job prospects.
- **Post-project follow-up**: social events, telephone contact, open door counselling.

The programme results are described in Box 2.

Box 2. Targeted Initiative for Older Workers - results

As of July 2015, over 38,000 unemployed older workers have been targeted by provinces and territories for TIOW participation in small, vulnerable communities across the country through more than 463 projects (476 of which were extended). Participation has been roughly equal between men and women over the years, with even slightly more women taking part in TIOW projects overall.

As per the most recent programme evaluation results (2014):

- 75% found employment in their local area during or after their participation.
- Over 70% felt more employable as a result of their participation.
- Over 80% were satisfied with the training they received.
- 75% of those who worked after the programme experienced a change in their work setting (50% changed sectors; 25% changed employers).
- 44% were employed eight months after programme participation. This number remained constant at 42% after 18 months.
- Many participants were successfully matched with local employers – a majority of whom were retained after their work placement.
- These results are very positive, especially given that 30% of TIOW participants do not have a high school diploma, 50% were out of the workforce for at least a year before taking part in training, and 57% lived in areas with unemployment rates of at least 10%.

- Jobs found following project participation were widely distributed in many industries.

Source : Employment and Social Development Canada (2014), Summative Evaluation of the Targeted Initiative for Older Workers

The programme design was the result of a lengthy learning process based on earlier Canadian and international experiences with employment programmes for older workers and on a rich history of active labour market programming more generally both in Canada and world-wide – including lessons from solid evaluation studies that used control or comparison groups.

Four key lessons were particularly important:

1. The need to set clear employment and employability objectives (including in the overall programme design, in dealings with partners and in the process for selecting particular projects) and to put in place practical processes for monitoring results. Earlier programmes in Canada that, on the surface, had similar goals were actually quite distinct from TIOW given that some of them provided passive income support for older workers affected by large layoffs. Older worker programming has become much more active over time, moving away from reliance on passive income support.

2. The need to set tight eligibility criteria around the location of selected projects, the selection of programme participants, and the types of activities that can be used. These criteria capture past experience on which settings, which participants and which activities are likely to get the biggest payoff for those most in need of support. Without these tight-top eligibility criteria, it is difficult to select projects to fund in a fair and transparent way. Additionally, it must be understood that, while TIOW is not available in all communities, the Government of Canada provides funding to support programming related to skills development and employment services for all unemployed workers, including older workers, through a suite of other interventions and labour market transfers.

3. The need for local sponsors to construct projects in a flexible manner, in line with needs and situation of participants, local employers and other community development activities.

4. The importance of group-based project activities and peer mentoring.

The apparent conflict between points 2 and 3 (specific top-down criteria versus local flexibility) is resolved by having a very extensive list of authorised activities from which project sponsors can draw and by having an active process of learning from current experience.

The TIOW was not designed as a static programme, but rather one that would evolve over time based on experience and lessons learned. The fact that the programme uses a cost-shared funding model and is subject to periodic renewals may well be an incentive to ongoing co-operation and learning from experience. However, there is every indication that this is not the only or main factor. An active, and seemingly, sustainable partnership has been created to support the positive evolution of the programme.

One main forum in which this partnership gets expressed is an annual workshop organised by the Government of Canada to facilitate discussion among federal and provincial/territorial partners on TIOW matters. These workshops have been highly beneficial for facilitating partnerships and generating valuable programme insights on a range of topics including (but not limited to) the design of specific projects, the

selection of project sponsors and the identification of participants needs. Some of the lessons learned include the importance of having strong, pro-active local sponsors and facilitators that are prepared to act in partnership and are plugged into their communities. Additionally, the importance of establishing networks/linkages with local employers and maintaining "success stories" from past participants has also been reinforced through these workshops. In 2014, the partnership produced a Best Practices Compendium[5] that captures many lessons in the form of case studies, an initiative that will be maintained in the future. The Compendium represents a unique example of collaboration among federal and provincial/territorial partners. It provides detailed examples of best practices on three very practical topics: project design and administration; working with employers and building on local strengths. It can be used as a learning tool for promoting effective and innovative labour market practices for older workers and other client groups. The Compendium will be further updated over the programme's current renewal period.

In addition to facilitating best practices forums and developing best practice compendiums, the federal and provincial/territorial governments embrace multiple opportunities for engagement on the TIOW programme including maintaining regular communication through multilateral calls and ad-hoc discussions as well as through organizing joint site visits to observe TIOW projects in action.

Another building block in learning from experience has been the requirement to evaluate the programme. This is an important, but more complex, dimension that is addressed later in this paper.

[5] *2014 Targeted Initiative for Older Workers: Best Practices Compendium.* For further information, please contact laurie.goldmann@hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca

THE FORT ST. JAMES PROJECT: AN OVERVIEW

The Fort St. James project is a good illustration of how the TIOW design flexibility can be applied in a particular location. As noted, these applications are highly diverse and tailored to meet a wide range of local situations. That is, the actual content and mix of activities and selection procedures that have been used in Fort St. James will not make sense everywhere. However, the approach they have taken to tailoring the TIOW instruments to the special needs of their community does provide a case study of interest, including for other countries.

Labour market context

To understand the project, it is important to situate it in the labour market situation in Fort St. James. Fort St. James is a small community in north central British Columbia, some 160 kilometres NW of the Prince George, the nearest major city. It is the service hub (retail, banking, medical, social services, education, banking) for a broader district of some 3000 people (with about half living in the town itself) plus some 1400 people living on reserves in four First Nations communities: Nak'azdli Band, Tl'azt'en Nation, Takla Lake First Nation and the Yekooche First Nation. Generally speaking, residents of these communities prefer services close to their home community, reflecting their residence and cultural connections. The population is younger and has less educational attainment than the provincial average. It is also somewhat more reliant on public income support.

Because the area is so small and because the immediate Fort St. James labour market is often combined in different regional groupings with diverse characteristics, it is difficult to obtain precise labour force data. However, recent estimates show an employment rate (58% in 2011) that remains a few points under the provincial average, while the unemployment rate (8% in 2011) remains a few points higher than the provincial average. Forestry, mining and exploration are the main economic drivers, supporting spinoff jobs in many sectors. Employment in these sectors can be variable depending on world markets, and are heavily influenced by particular capital projects especially in the construction trades. Current job outlooks call for considerable job growth, especially in construction where annual growth rates of nearly 5% have been forecast over a ten year horizon TIOW in Fort St. James

How Fort St. James was selected for funding

Based on an additional round of federal TIOW funding, the governments of British Columbia and Canada signed a new agreement in March 2014 covering the period out to March 2017. The government of British Columbia then issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) from potential project sponsors. This request described the very detailed TIOW requirements adjusted to meet the British Columbia situation. The province-wide selection process looked at eight Economic Development Regions in BC to ensure programming and projects would be available in a range of eligible communities throughout BC. The selection process was completed in January 2015 and 14 new agreements were signed, with projects in place by February 2015. A community college, the College of New Caledonia (CNC), was the successful proponent in two geographic areas, one of which was Fort St. James.

The Fort St. James campus had managed seven earlier intakes of TIOW projects from 2009 to 2012, with about a dozen participants per wave. The results must be understood in context of local labour market trends. The profile of intakes in earlier waves included many experienced workers who were laid off as a result of mill closures associated with the economic downturn of 2008. The emphasis on literacy skills and employability worked well since the prospects of finding immediate employment were less than is now the case. In subsequent waves, participants tended to face more health and social barriers to work and, as a

result, the inclusion of First Nations Wellness workers in the curriculum reinforced the communications skills courses.

Despite the poor economic situation then, these earlier TIOW intakes were successful. Participants became more employable and, indeed, a large majority found jobs, although this included part-time and seasonal work:

- 77 of the total of 83 participants completed the programme. Of the six who did not complete, four left for health reasons and two were offered employment before the end of the programme.

- 41 of the 77 completers subsequently found employment in a wide variety industries and occupations, including some self-employment. Some participants sought further post-secondary education.

- 77 of the 83 participants were of First People ancestry.

A common factor among all participants was reportedly a lack of self-confidence about their overall workplace literacy skills and, for many, a lack of high school diploma.

Activities currently underway

As discussed above, the current project intake is taking place in the context of a labour market that holds promise of more job openings. The project therefore placed heavy emphasis on initial discussions with local employers to determine the kinds of skills they will be looking for in their new hiring and to design a programme that will equip TIOW participants with these skills to increase their chances of securing jobs in the local area. The activities that comprise the project are described in Box 3.

LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES

This section examines best practices and lessons that can be learned from the Fort St. James project. What constitutes a best practice depends, of course, on the perspective of the viewer. Three perspectives are further examined: those of programme participants; those of the people who select projects to be funded and those who deliver them at the local level; and those of people who fund, design and evaluate the programme.

The views of participants themselves

When asked about their assessment of the programme, participants of former intakes of the TIOW projects managed by the college campus in Fort St. James were highly positive. Following are highlights:

- Top ratings went to communication skills courses that had application in both their personal lives and in the workplace. These included problem-solving skills and team building.
- The provision of training allowances was reported to be significant to student retention.
- Participants felt they benefited from the diversity of backgrounds, encouraging the use of strategies for removing barriers and stereotypes not only in the classroom, but also subsequently in the community and workplace.

Box 3. Ongoing activities in the St. Fort James project

Three TIOW project intakes have been approved, one in 2014/15, and another two in 2015/16. Each project intake consists of 12 participants participating in a 14 week schedule of 25 hours a week – largely in a classroom setting. Participants receive $350 per week in training allowances. The activities were designed to follow the detailed requirements of the RFP, to replicate those practices that were successful in similar projects undertaken by CNC in the past and to reflect the results of consultations with local employers. Note that the college has well-established pre-existing contacts with local employers and with the aboriginal communities.

The (mainly) classroom time is allocated as follows:

- Employment assistance (33 hours) including: assessments of participants' interests, aptitudes and occupational preferences; an introduction to résumé writing and interview techniques and other job search tools; and guest speakers including local employers.
- Learning readiness assessment (9 hours) mainly based on face-to-face interviews.
- Basic skills upgrading (120 hours) with a focus on basic skills such as literacy, numeracy, financial literacy and inventory control.
- Group based and individualised computer training (51 hours) focused on the learning styles of participants and current technologies.
- Interpersonal and conflict resolution (72 hours) which build communications skills by a mix of methods such a role-playing and group discussions.
- 50+ healthy living (27 hours) covering topics on health in the workplace, stress management and life skills.
- A variety of specific workplace training (106 hours) covering a cross-section of workplaces. Examples

include construction safety, petroleum safety, cashier training, anti-harassment, accident investigation, and others.

- Information related to work in pipelines (18 hours). Pipeline construction is the most likely source of new employment in this area. Includes site visits and employer guest speakers.

- Follow-up activities include encouraging students to contact employment centers, informal employment focused discussions with former students, referrals to community helping agencies where a particular issue/concern has been identified.

Source : Documents supplied by provincial officials in British Columbia. For more details contact Laura Colpman, Laura.Colpman@gov.bc.ca

- Peer-to-peer mentoring and support became a daily occurrence and was highly valued, with students setting goals taking responsibility for their behaviour.

- A common theme expressed by the students was a renewed sense of belonging and purpose as they re-connected with the community – often assisted by engagement with TIOW graduates from previous sessions.

The views of those who select and deliver the programme

The project coordinator at the Fort St. James campus was asked what, in her opinion, should be considered as best practices. Her reply is shown in Box 4. Her unambiguous answer is the focus on the individual participant.

Box 4. "It's all about participants" – a view from the front line

(*Following is the response of Ann McCormick, who is directly responsible for the project at the local level, when asked why the project was successful. Ann is the Supervisor of the Fort St. James Campus of the College of New Caledonia.)*

To celebrate the success of the Targeted Initiative for Older Workers is to celebrate the success of each individual participant – and of the successful bonds that are formed among a community of job-ready older workers and with the community at large. The achievement of the Fort St. James TIOW Programme is based upon the fundamental belief that each individual entrant has something to contribute as a potential employee and, more importantly, as a functioning member of their greater community. This is in no way a standard "one-size-fits-all" programme for "older workers". Instruction is precision-targeted to celebrate the strengths of each individual, provide essential skills requisite of successful employment in the twenty-first century, and matching those strengths and skills with the needs of industry and the community

Participants in the TIOW Programme are diverse, yet all share some commonalities in addition to being aged 55-64. All students have had at least some workforce experience, all want back into the workforce, and all recognise that they have the potential to continue their contribution to the community and economy. They recognize they have some challenges, maybe literacy, confidence or lacking a skill set but they are open to change.

To accomplish this, the first step was to engage the community. We went to First Nation Reserves, the Regional District, the District of Fort St. James, and local employers to ensure there were potential employment outcomes for graduates of the programme – that they would have the skills to match the requirements of employers and of the community. The curriculum was then designed to address cross-sector labour market opportunities and to provide cross-sector core competencies. For example, Management Skills for Supervisors or Essential Computer Skills enhance the marketability of a potential candidate.

The next component addressed was the development of relationships with other participants, with the college, and with the greater community. This took place prior to, during, and following the programme delivery and included

instruction on personal and inter-personal skills. Inter-participant relationships provided an ongoing support network that extended even to members of other cohort groups. Participants gained a strengthened and more confident relationship with the community. The relationships established between the participants and the College has allowed us to track successes and challenges, providing more reliable longitudinal data to fine tune our practices as we move forward.

Robust literacy skills (whether reading, writing, computers, or numeracy) are now a necessity. Literacy skills deficiencies represent some of the biggest barriers that individuals face as they attempt to seek re-entry into the workforce and to engage in the current knowledge-based economy. We are keenly aware that engagement in the workforce, personal and family social health, and personal self-esteem are all influenced by an individual's literacy competencies. Literacy Skill Development therefore is an essential component of programme success.

One of the most poignant successes of the TIOW is the critical mass of successful candidates that it has generated over time and its positive impact upon the community in general. The diverse group of graduates of the TIOW continue to enjoy opportunities within the community. Employment for many has been a bonus to the ultimate value of re-engagement into the citizenship of their community. Not only has the TIOW Programme been a catalyst for positive change for its participants, it has provided positive change for the host communities. The programme's ultimate success and contribution is its participants.

Source : Interview with project coordinator

The importance that the front-line co-ordinator attached to the focus on individual participants was echoed by all those connected with the programme:

- The project was *not* designed simply to get good results on average. It was designed to get results for each individual participant.

- The CNC TIOW project was *not* designed to fill the skill needs of local employers at lowest cost, although employers were closely involved as partners and will benefit from having future employees with right skills. Rather it was designed to help participants acquire those skills that will be a precision fit with the expressed needs of potential employers.

- The CNC TIOW project is *not* about strengthening the local communities per se, although it clearly has had that effect. (The college is tightly tied into the local community in many ways and most participants have strong ties to their local community, especially First Nations people who prefer not to migrate to find work or to train.) Rather, it is about assisting participants in their integration or re-integration into the local labour market within those communities.

In other words, the focus on individual participants is not at variance with the important role of employers and the local community. Rather it refers to dealing with the individual participant in ways that value the individual's relationships with other participants and with the local economy and community more generally – producing positive interactions that result in benefits to the individual, to classmates, and eventually to employers and the community as a whole.

In addition to the focus on the individual, officials identified the following lessons or best practices:

- ***Strong project coordinator and team:*** The selection of an experienced team to deliver the programme is of obvious importance, particularly the role of a strong project coordinator. Coordinators need to support students in the form of referrals to other community helping agencies if necessary – as well, they need competent staff to ensure seamless delivery of courses throughout the term. The project made use of the much broader capacities and contacts of the College of New Caledonia, including but not restricted to its local campus in Fort St. James. CNC has, as described above, much related experience in similar kinds of projects. The practices

described here have been replicated with similar success in neighbouring northern rural communities by the college.

- ***Linkages over time and with other programmes:*** A related strength is that a particular intake of the CNC TIOW project is not seen as existing in isolation. There is much interaction with other programming and other initiatives within the College. For example, in earlier intakes, participants included those who had previously taken literacy training – including two ESL learners that transitioned into the TIOW project. As well, two TIOW completers transitioned into further college literacy training. More generally, success stories from prior Aboriginal students returning to their homes have encouraged current students to persevere for the full duration of the programme. TIOW is considered part of a continuum of programmes and services targeted at assisting participants (CNC students) obtain and maintain employment in the community.

- ***Getting the right size and duration.*** Obviously the programme design, which in this case involved a fixed term of 14 weeks with a dozen older adults in a mainly classroom setting, is not only convenient administratively from the college's perspective but also, and more importantly, provides a sufficiently intense experience that allows real relationships to be built. In the classroom everyone is at the same level – teachers, participants, college administrators. Everyone is an equal learner through the project -- all opinions matter. These relationships endure and move into the community.

- ***Training content***: As in many other TIOW projects, the importance of literacy and computer training cannot be under-stated. BC provincial officials emphasised the computer content requirement in the formal Request for Proposal (RFP) for 2014 to 2017 TIOW projects and CNC responded with a programme that includes over 50 hours of group and individualised computer programming training throughout the project. It is a central foundation requirement along with communications and life skills.

- ***Financial support*** is needed. The existence of a training allowance seems to play a large part in ensuring high levels of programme completion and commitment to the programme. Participants are all of about the same age, often had similar life experiences and Project Sponsors recruit participants most in need of service delivery. An allowance during the programming not only eases the stress of 'going back to school' when one is an older worker, it also builds self-esteem by acknowledging that the individuals' time is important, compensating them for their commitment to the process and work in the project.

- ***Participant assessment***: the initial assessment and selection among potential candidates is a major factor contributing to the success of the project, as participants not only have to be eligible for programming but need to be suitable and appropriate for the Project Sponsor group based programme. The existence of a supportive exit strategy in the rare cases when it is clear that the project is not working for the participant is also important. Both intake and exit conversations can involve challenging conversations but the ongoing principle is that that the programme has to be the "right fit, right here, right now". Developing and maintaining an individual's self-esteem is paramount throughout the programme so for those who are not accepted, or who exit early, there is always an open door for them come back when they are ready, and they're assured that it's OK to take a break. Word gets out in a small community and this openness builds trust in the process so people aren't afraid to come back and try again when they are ready.

The perspective of those who fund and evaluate

The Fort St. James example suggests that the funding and design of TIOW is a key to its success and could be of interest for similar programmes in many countries.

Programme design

The underlying strategy of combining tight eligibility criteria and providing a wide range of eligible activities to allow flexibility at local level is particularly successful in the case of TIOW's implementation in Fort St. James. Defining tight eligibility criteria ensures that the only projects to be funded are those that respect core programme parameters that seem reasonably likely to make a significant improvement, based on past experience. Allowing flexibility in the eligible activities with local sponsors helps create an intervention that can be tailored to diverse local contexts. It is the heart of a system that encourages initiative and creativity in doing things that make most sense locally, while still ensuring mutual accountability for the funds spent.

Collegial governance

Another obvious strength has been the collegial style in the way the project is managed, with emphasis on learning based on experience, which has characterised the senior management of the project at both orders of government: federal and provincial/territorial. The emphasis on case studies and sharing best practices has been exemplary. A culture has been developed that values change and excellence that permeates the whole programme, from the classrooms in Fort St. James to the annual meetings of federal, provincial and territorial officials held in the National Capital Region (NCR) of the country.

Funding Model

Cost sharing and the fact that funding needs to be periodically renewed (both for the programme as a whole and at the level of selecting individual projects), has also been beneficial.

It translates into some level of competition, entrepreneurship and adjustment to changing needs. This is healthy and productive for promoting the achievement of results and stimulating innovation. Many local projects are only funded for a short period and potential sponsors must compete when new rounds of funding become available. The best projects will usually win and, if results are carefully monitored, a real market can be created that will result in ever-better results over time. However, in any given year, provinces and territories may implement a mix of new projects and/or extend existing projects depending upon their respective priorities.

Similarly, if policy priorities shift at the political level, or if economic conditions change, adjustments can be made without the massive disruption that is often seen in traditional programming.

The TIOW funding model also promotes a culture of change, improvement, and learning from the lessons of experience. The present TIOW design resulted from a long history of temporary initiatives – including pilot studies and experiments – that has created the culture of collaboration and excellence that continues to thrive.

The TIOW funding model, of course, would not make sense in all programmes. Cost sharing plays an especially important role in areas of shared jurisdiction. Temporary funding, for example, could be disruptive in some ongoing mainstream programming where some level of stability is needed to maintain the necessary infrastructure. However, in the context of TIOW, the cost-shared, time-limited funding approach is typically seen as a way of helping realize the potential of the latent infrastructure that often exists in communities as they undergo local economic development. It helps establish linkages that would

otherwise not exist, often re-enforcing the initiatives of other partners in the community and building a stronger collective capacity. Recall that the TIOW is a targeted programme for smaller and often remote communities that are experiencing labour market challenges or transitions.

Using multiple forms of evidence: balancing art and science

A final area of strength that warrants international attention is the balance that has been achieved between quantitative and qualitative analysis with 3 streams of evidence defined as follows:

- *Monitoring* is the mainly quantitative exercise that examines the subsequent experience of participants to see whether they found and retained jobs, their subsequent income and reliance of public income support, etc. In other words, monitoring measures outputs – the extent to which the programme is meeting its stated objectives. It allows calculation of measures of efficiency – the relative cost of producing different outputs.

- *Evaluation* refers to another quantitative approach that, in addition to other functions[6], measures incremental impacts, typically by comparing the subsequent experience of participants with a control group (or, more usually, a comparison group) of people with similar characteristics who did not participate in the programme. This allows the calculation of measures of outcomes, effectiveness and associated measures of cost and benefit.

- *Qualitative* analysis refers to case studies, best practices benchmarking, seeking the views of participants and other forms of qualitative analysis that use the experience and assessment of front line staff and other observers to tell narrative stories about those features of the initiative that are working well, or sometimes that have failed to work well. This provides a far more nuanced understanding than is possible using numbers alone.

All three are needed and are powerful when used in combination. However each has problems if used in isolation.

Best practices and qualitative information generally are the richest sources of detailed information and are particularly useful in the practical job of programme design. However, in some types of qualitative analysis there is tendency to mainly share examples that emphasize the best features (or occasionally the worst features) of an initiative. They are often not as strong in making comparisons related to the relative success of different best practices. In the absence of supporting quantitative information, it is sometimes not easy to see which features of the case study are working best for whom and in which circumstances. That is a particularly important consideration for TIOW projects which are highly diverse and tailored to local situations and client needs. And, by definition, local observers cannot see longer-run incremental impacts given current technologies. They can only see what happens to actual participants (monitoring information), not what will likely happen, often several years in the future, in the absence of the programme. The latter is the domain of evaluation.

Similarly qualitative information obtained from participants about the features of the intervention that were most, and least, appreciated is of greatest value when used in conjunction with quantitative monitoring data about the labour market experiences of those participants after the intervention.

[6] In practice, actual evaluation exercises produce both monitoring information and information about incremental impacts. For example, the Canadian evaluations of TIOW produced the measures of results found in **Error! eference source not found.**.

Monitoring of the subsequent behaviours of participants is therefore critical, particularly at the level of individual projects, where it allows case studies to be placed in the context of the outputs that are actually being achieved, expressed in a quantitative manner that allows comparisons. On the other hand, monitoring information taken in isolation from case studies does not shed much light on the critical question of which features of a programme are working best for which types of client. It is this latter kind of information that is critical in making incremental programme improvements, building on experience.

Moreover, as with case studies, if used in isolation monitoring does not shed much light on actual impacts – the higher level objective being sought. Monitoring information is often a poor proxy for measures of incremental impacts and outcomes, as many decades of experience in evaluating active labour market programmes have made clear.

Evaluation, at least in principle, therefore provides the missing piece – measures that show what difference the programme made and at what cost. However, classical evaluations are not well suited to measuring the impacts of the new kind of programming that the TIOW represents. The difficulties and future solutions are discussed in Box 5.

Improvements can and are being made to improve all three streams of evidence. Routine ways of using all three streams in harmony are still in the process of evolution. Nevertheless, the TIOW programme has gone a long way in using all three streams of evidence together in mutually supportive ways:

- The compendium of best practice which has already been described.
- Monitoring information is available (although improvements are possible and are being explored) in ways that will allow some comparisons across projects.
- Two rounds of traditional evaluations have been conducted.

A formative evaluation was completed in 2010, and a summative evaluation was completed in two phases – with the overall summative report completed in 2014. Although the data base was not strong enough to perform a thorough classical evaluation, it was possible to calculate some measures of incremental impact by comparing TIOW participants with participants with similar characteristics who used active labour market programming interventions that were available through another programme. The result showed that TIOW participants were more likely than non-TIOW participants to find employment (by 6 percentage points). This is a very positive finding.

Despite the fact that traditional evaluations cannot get down to the level of individual projects, the message that things are working as whole does provide assurance that the evidence from monitoring and from best practices narratives is credible. It means that a strategy built around highly diverse project designs does work.

Box 5. Evaluation trends

Generally speaking, programmes such as TIOW would benefit from evaluation techniques that utilize a variety of quantitative and qualitative modes of assessment especially given that:

- There is much variety in the types of activities that can be undertaken.
- The focus is not on the average outcomes from standardised processes but on learning what kinds of interventions are working best for individual participants with different characteristics in different labour market situations.
- Programme designs are evolving: dynamic not static. Therefore, estimates of expected success at the level of

individuals – both in referring people to the best available interventions and in constantly improving those interventions in light of the changing needs of the community/best practices – are necessary. That information is needed in real time, when decisions are being made, not years after the fact.

- It is desirable to take explicit account of the effects of the project in shaping the broader community capacity to collectively meet employability and community development goals.

Evaluation approaches overall are gradually evolving in this direction

The next generation of evaluation techniques will likely result in a better balance among these considerations, with results that will be particularly relevant for programming such as TIOW. It will likely use predictive analytics when referring individuals to the programme interventions that are most likely work best for them. These are calculations of expected results that would be based on the subsequent experience of individuals with similar characteristics and in similar circumstances who participated in similar programmes in the past. The results would be available in real time, when decisions are being made. The same 'what works' calculations could also apply to the project as a whole, allowing programme designs to evolve based on a much stronger base of evidence.

Such technologies are already in used many applications in other domains. In a 2015 essay, I describe how they can be adapted in the area of social and employment policy. Doing so would not only greatly strengthen the operation of sophisticated programming such as TIOW, but also would allow the mainstream delivery of active labour market programming (and the delivery of other social programming) to gradually switch to more individually-based empirical evidence to help inform programme designs and delivery options.

Source : Hicks, Peter, The Enabling Society, 2015, IRPP

CONCLUSIONS

On average, older workers tend to fare better in the Canadian labour market than do their younger counterparts. Employment policy, in general, should not be framed in age-related terms. However, the special circumstances of a relatively small group of older workers – those who have been unemployed for long periods and who live in smaller, vulnerable communities – do warrant special attention. The TIOW programme directed to this group has been successful and provides many lessons for others to consider.

These various lessons – related to combining front line diversity together with tight eligibility criteria, to collegiality, to the funding model, and to the balancing of different kinds of evidence – cannot be instantly applied in all areas of service provision. They grew out of the history of this particular programme which is relatively small, has evolved gradually over many years based on past programming/pilot approaches and is supported by staff (at all orders of government and among local sponsors) with a common culture that has evolved in a way that values the application of these lessons in practical day-to-day work.

Although not all lessons can be transported quickly, or in their entirety, to programmes with very different histories, accountability regimes, or management cultures, they can provide some ideas for starting up new programmes that can work in similar ways, or help to generate dialogue about the gradual evolution of existing programmes in this direction.

With innovative projects such as the Fort St James TIOW example to draw from, this unique and highly targeted Canadian programme will have much to contribute to the design and management of active labour market policies and programme in Canada and internationally for years to come – including, but certainly not limited to, programmes directed to older workers.

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