

Economic Opportunity Institute

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What is Community Jobs?

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Community Jobs is the first and largest program in the nation to provide welfare recipients with paychecks for their work in the public and private nonprofit sectors. A component of WorkFirst, Washington state's welfare reform program, Community Jobs (CJ) incorporates training, intensive support services, and paid work that all lead toward permanent economic self-sufficiency. Community Jobs creates a wage ladder for very low-income people and is one of the state's most successful programs serving hard-to-employ individuals.

Community Jobs is designed to achieve long-term economic self-sufficiency for individuals who are moving from welfare to work. Community Jobs has three main elements:

- Participants earn a paycheck for hours worked.
- Participants step onto a job ladder that leads to economic self-sufficiency and steady employment.
- Participants begin a structured plan toward a living wage and independence from welfare.

Community Jobs is an open door for its participants, leading to increased family income, greater self-esteem, new skills, and new opportunities. Private nonprofit partners who administer each local program secure 20 hours of paid work for each participant and provide one-on-one support and mentoring to ease the transition to the world of work.

Program participants, who have had major difficulties in securing employment on their own, work in CJ up to nine months, long enough to gain substantial work experience. While developing their own work and life skills, CJ participants improve their communities by working in community, government, and tribal organizations.

The Typical Participant

The typical CJ worker is a 30-year-old single parent with two children, starting the program with very limited work experience and less than a high school education. The typical CJ participant may go on to become a bus driver, graphic artist, or teacher's aide; a counselor, administrative assistant, or carpenter; or a construction worker, nursing assistant, or computer technician.

While participating in Community Jobs, individuals receive \$6.50/hr for their work, are eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit, and, like other working families in WorkFirst, have only one-half of their earnings count in determining their welfare grant.

The average Community Jobs participant earns \$944/month, well above the average welfare check of \$546/month. Individual assessments and Individual Development Plans (IDP) enable participants to achieve career and personal goals. With 93% of CJ participants co-enrolled in additional training and

advancement activities, participants develop a foundation for genuine job advancement and quality of life improvements after leaving CJ.

CJ Partnerships

CJ is administered by the Washington State Office of Trade and Economic Development (OTED) working in partnership with the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), Employment Security Department, State Board of Community and Technical Colleges, and community agencies.

CJ relies on local innovation to achieve its goals. OTED contracts with 17 local nonprofit consortia that develop jobs in government, nonprofit, and tribal organizations, employ CJ participants to work in those jobs, and provide them with intensive support services. Contractors have designed specific programs to fit their participants and communities and are held accountable through performance-based contracts that link payments to participant success. A well-established referral system with the DSHS helps potential participants access Community Jobs services quickly.

As of July 2000, 3,400 people had participated in Community Jobs, with enrollment expected to exceed 5,000 by the end of the fiscal year.

The Economic Opportunity Institute (EOI), a nonpartisan, nonprofit public policy institute, has worked in concert with OTED to design and implement the Community Jobs program. With its focus on helping low-income people move into the middle class and sustaining economic security for working families, EOI has collaborated with OTED, DSHS, and CJ-contracted agencies to insure the integrity and quality of the Community Jobs program and improve its various components.

Outcomes

In the year 2000, two years after the start of Community Jobs, the Economic Opportunity Institute conducted an outcomes assessment and made recommendations to improve the program. The following information is based on data gathered from the five areas (12 counties) included in Phase I of the Community Jobs program (Pierce; King; Spokane, Pend Oreille, Stevens, Okanogan, Ferry; Grays Harbor/Pacific; and Thurston, Lewis, and Mason).

- 66% of CJ participants found employment after leaving the program.
- CJ graduates began to move up an income ladder, with wages increasing in each successive quarter of employment. Median wages in the fourth quarter were 137% higher than those reported for the first quarter of employment.
- CJ participants and supervisors gave excellent ratings to the program, with 85% indicating that CJ helps prepare participants for work and 89% rating the overall experience from good to excellent.

Community Jobs makes a major impact on the lives of individuals and families. One year after leaving the program, CJ participants had an average annual income of \$14,772, more than double what they had prior to participating in the program (\$6,552). Participants report that they have increased self-esteem, motivation to succeed, and a better quality of life because of the program.

Related Link(s)

- [EOI Workforce Development Policy: Community Jobs](#)



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