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Creativity as Community Aid and Employment Training

December 1, 2009 · [1 Comment](#)

As our cities and towns across America face massive unemployment and what is likely to be long term joblessness, we hear a great deal about “green” jobs and shovel ready jobs, everything from weatherizing homes to building roads. But as many have observed, these are not long term re-training and employment solutions. It seems America has forgotten one of its most important training and employment opportunities, and perhaps THE most important career building direction for the future economy: creativity training and employment.

When the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act was enacted in 1973 as the precursor to the Job Training Partnership Act, literally thousands of arts and culture nonprofits emerged launched by artists who were moved by the opportunity to create the jobs – including summer jobs for unemployed high school students – that CETA made possible. CETA can be credited with supporting the first wave of non-profit media jobs as it supported community access television and the training of thousands of youth in media production. If you look across the landscape of nonprofit arts organizations in your city, and track them back to their founding dates, you will find scores of theatre companies, neighborhood cultural centers, festivals, dance companies and more that began through CETA. I look around today and see a generation of executive nonprofit leaders whose start in cultural and nonprofit management came thanks to CETA. It was used to train and create jobs, and along the way it created and sustained then-fragile new nonprofits until they were strong enough to survive and thrive. The training was typically on-the-job, and in most cases the trainees went on to employment in the field, and thousands have stayed to lead the nonprofit sector to this day.

Good as those weatherization jobs are, and as vital as they are to the low income families whose homes need the benefit the weatherization can provide, how will the training and employment impact communities in 10, 20, or 30 years? As I lead cultural plans or work on cultural districts I find over and over that it is those special community-oriented nonprofits – most launched through CETA – that create the critical mass of cultural opportunity, engagement, learning, afterschool programs, diverse programming, and new/forward looking creativity that supports culturally rich communities.

We need to launch the next generation of similar cultural and creativity job training and employment, with the same opportunities as were established 36 years ago, to train another generation of creativity workers, enable them to learn on-the-job in ways that also create community engagement and audience and support neighborhood wellness. Creativity is proven, highly effective community aid. We know it works. It creates lasting jobs, training that truly engages youth, supports the development of new community-oriented nonprofits, transforms run-down neighborhoods into cool and hip cultural districts, and builds the local economy. All this, plus we know that creativity is the future of the American economy – the most important ingredient behind new innovation, new intellectual work, and new product development.

Why, then, is it so undervalued as a key antidote to unemployment and underemployment? Creativity needs the chance to work its miracles, now.

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