

CETA Staffs Video Groups Across the Country: Background and Five Profiles

By STEVE SPECTOR

Paid staff positions have blossomed at community media groups where once there were only subsistence workers and overworked volunteers. The Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), the government's unemployment relief program, is financing video and filmmakers, community radio and cable TV personnel, as well as artists of all kinds.

CETA is underwriting an important stage in the growth of community media. Greater visibility and acceptance, professionalism and practical experience are the reward Media groups have had to manage larger staffs at a more intense level of responsibility, with pressures to produce better media and effectively train and interact with diverse sectors of the community. They are also developing political skills and ties among a broad range of social institutions and community organizations.

Though CETA's intention is the hiring of the long-term unemployed and economically disadvantaged, one of its by-products is the support of local arts projects throughout the country. The projects must be geared toward public service. For the arts that means accessible cultural programs, open workshops for the various underprivileged sectors of the community, free dance, dramatic and musical performances, and public works projects like murals, and arts and crafts education centers.

Community media groups have a somewhat different role. While they are considered arts groups, they are frequently more oriented towards social service.

Many have reached a level of sophistication where responsive and workable social action communications projects can be put together easily if they don't already exist. CETA can provide the people, but not the hardware.

Dierdre Frontczak, of the National Endowment for the Arts, suggests that artists, in developing their applications for CETA positions, form cooperative unions to approach their prime sponsor (see Sidebar for explanation of CETA). They should then present a comprehensive proposal which balances the community's need for the arts with an employment and training plan.

Frontczak recommends meetings between the arts groups and the various individuals holding influence over the funding process, be they officials, the established grand dames of local culture or the appointed advisory boards which are supposed to develop the economic plans which guide the use of CETA money.

Where there is much competition for the jobs, it is the best organized groups which receive the CETA allocations. Often the larger blanket arts groups who apply for a block of placements which they divide among themselves, gain precedence over smaller, isolated groups asking for few people and seeming to lack a broader context.

The process among the cross-section of media group I surveyed is simpler in reality, though there are variations on

the theme everywhere. The essential process of getting CETA money, as they see it, includes:

1) Gaining knowledge of the availability of CETA placements, either through announcements and requests for proposals in the local press; through direct requests from prime sponsors or advisory councils; or through the grapevine, with the group taking the initiative.

2) The guidelines governing CETA are learned, and a concise proposal of a few pages is written and submitted to the proper authority. That may be the prime sponsor, CETA's local office, or in some cases, a local arts council which may be responsible for reviewing proposals for the arts.

Sue Buske, the CETA official for Dubuque, Iowa, and a cable access advocate, stresses the importance of a workable proposal that includes a

With CETA placements doubling or tripling a group's size, the activities of the individual groups I contacted have undeniably been strengthened.

The fact remains, however, that the money won't always be around. When CETA funds a program, they assume the job holder will be skilled and able to find work after his or her training. Its goal is only temporary employment.

Brooklyn, NY

Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers, NYC. Paul Schneider is a filmmaker producing a documentary, with Newsreel, about a Brooklyn community's struggle to retain fire protection in its neighborhoods. He heard



definite goal, budget, end point, and transition. She recommends personal contact with CETA processors and advisory boards to assure their understanding of the proposal. Buske warns against asking for more staff than the project can handle. This kind of "bloating" could leave a group high and dry when CETA money is withdrawn.

3) After a group is allocated positions, recruitment begins. The jobs must be filled by individuals from the prime sponsor's area of jurisdiction. Importation of people is a violation of the law. If detected, it can cause revocation of the placement. There is also to be substantial effort at hiring women and minorities.

The job application process should be open and well publicized. If the jobs are not filled within a certain amount of time, the money is returned to the prime sponsor. This hasn't been a severe problem. Once hiring is done, the project is underway.

According to the Cultural Council Foundation of New York City, "Each applicant must be aware that CETA funding is *not* a grant or fellowship, but provides for full-time public service jobs" related to the applicant's artistic discipline. The group for whom the artist works should also be aware of its public service commitment, and that its CETA contract may not be renewed.

Most of the CETA jobs among media groups are funded under Title VI of the Act. Participants are, technically, public service employees.

Community media projects often have public action programs anyway. Some have a pool of producers on call to respond to requests from the public.

that the Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers (AIVF) was accepting applications for CETA subsidized jobs.

His processing took about two and a half months. It included:

- filing a basic application form designating the job sought, background information, and an eligibility report;
- an artistic review of his work and a personal interview, where he was evaluated according to his ability to work in a cooperative, public service-oriented manner;
- final selection.

Federal eligibility requirements include: a total family income not exceeding 70 percent of the lower living standard for the given region (in NYC that ranges from \$2730 for a single person, to \$10,470 for a family of six); local residence; and long term unemployment or receipt of public assistance.

CETA does provide a percentage of an agency's allocation to go to administrative costs. This can go as high as 10 percent, and differs throughout the nation. AIVF can purchase certain supplies, but no hardware.

Schneider applied to the Cultural Council Foundation (CCF), which administers 300 of 500 CETA arts jobs in NYC. As a filmmaker, he was assigned to the AIVF.

AIVF is the action counterpart of the Foundation for Independent Video and Filmmakers, part of a consortium of different arts groups which organized a structure for public service arts projects. Consequently those groups became

subcontractors of the CCF, itself a subcontractor for the New York City Department of Employment which received 28,000 CETA jobs.

AIVF is now responsible for 14 CETA placements including an animator, a program coordinator, an independent producer and 11 film and video people who form a producers' pool that responds to community requests.

Tom Lennon, of AIVF, said "We wanted to strike a balance, in providing jobs for producers—which would maintain their autonomy as artists—and provide adequate response to community needs." This meant clarifying AIVF's role as producers and not audio-visual technicians.

They began lobbying for CETA subsidies in 1974, following the example of arts groups in San Francisco. But the density of New York's fiscal crises delayed any comprehensive CETA arts connection until 1977.

AIVF reworked its proposal to the CCF a number of times. They were finally awarded 14 positions in September, 1977. 300 people applied for the jobs.

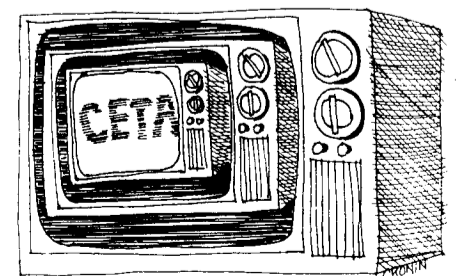
AIVF productions include Paul Schneider's film on the People's Firehouse in Brooklyn; videotapes about the plight of the dehospitalized elderly who populate Single Room Occupancy hotels, and on battered women; and a film on the unionizing of housekeepers in the South Bronx.

These artists' work is hampered by lack of equipment and supplies. AIVF supplies only the producer to whom-ever's request for one is approved. The burden of scrounging supplies is laid on the artist and his client, a situation which can be frustrating, embarrassing, and impoverishing. Schneider has already mounted at least \$4000 in debts and needs almost as much to complete his film.

Bergen County, NJ

Bergen County Media Projects. Across the Hudson River in New Jersey, the Bergen County prime sponsor has provided a subsidy of about \$500,000 to four media projects employing 35 people. Fred Silverman started the Children's Media Project with a staff of seven, which works with kids in developing and producing new programming. He responded to a newspaper announcement placed by the Bergen County Community Action Project, requesting proposals for special one year projects to receive CETA jobs. As an individual, he had to find a nonprofit community organization to sponsor him. In this case it was the Bergen County Chapter of the Urban League.

The county, with an active interest in media, also subsidized five jobs in a public access and video outreach project with the local libraries and cable franchise; a community media center with 15 jobs concerned with hiring and training among the minorities; and a video





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training program for high school students, including production, programming and cable access.

Equipment was not a grave problem. The high school project's gear had been mothballed after it was bought during the instructional media fad of the early '70's. It was simply rediscovered by the project's developer, who was working as a janitor.

Recruitment was handled by the local

employment agency which hired a variety of people. Silverman noted that a balance between experienced staff and trainees was not achieved. The potential for actual production was compromised by an overall lack of experience, and the extension of the basic video learning process.

Silverman's project is becoming the Children's Media Design Center, a non-profit organization now searching for funding.

San Diego, CA

San Diego Community Video Center. The San Diego Community Video Center is the largest cable access operation and maintains the most CETA jobs of all community media groups, according to Michael Wecks of CVC. CETA money expanded the staff of five to 14 last August.

CVC contracted to produce five video programs on the arts, minorities, senior citizens, local government, education and community organizations. CVC is also working on a needs assessment for the programming on the San Diego public access channel.

Another fourteen CETA jobs were awarded CVC to organize the National Conference on Public Access Cable TV this summer.

Their first proposal to the San Diego Regional Employment and Training Consortium was rejected because the public access concept was not under-

stood. Through subtle politics CVC eventually got its jobs.

The recruitment effort included notices to more than 100 local organizations and employment offices in the San Diego region. 180 people responded, with 60 interviewed, and 28 chosen.

CVC may have been bloated with jobs. Too many people too quickly resulted in administrative problems. They used 10 percent of their CETA money for overhead, though not hardware, and, unlike AIVF, they were already a production group.

With the Californians' revolt against property tax, Wecks feels that harder times are ahead for them. Plans to consolidate CVC's activities, with the support of local government, may be jeopardized if the latter must reserve its budget and its CETA money for basic social services.

Columbia, MO

KOPN-FM. According to Stephen Dreyer at KOPN, a community radio station in Columbia, Missouri, its staff was aware of CETA and realized they would have to go to the state prime sponsor for their region.

While Columbia had a CETA allocation, the city kept it for itself. They assembled a five-page proposal outlining KOPN's community involvement, focussing on their need to work with minorities and women. They received the five positions requested, and now maintain a staff of eleven.

Derby, CT

STAND. STAND is a community multimedia center in Derby, Connecticut. Derby, a town in the Lower Naugatuck Valley—a rural and not too prosperous or populated area—is too small to have its own prime sponsor.

Harriet Moss, video production coordinator for STAND, said they had seen an ad requesting proposals and responded with a couple. STAND received nine positions for its Media Resource Project, which includes Mainstreet Video. They hired three video and three radio people, a counselor, a resource person and a programming aide.

They are producing and training others in video and radio, and are working specifically with groups representing blacks, women, senior citizens, and youth. They are also developing access and programming on their local cable system.

STAND's Valley-FM Project received another ten CETA jobs when it received a construction permit from the FCC. Harriet Moss said STAND was preparing a hunt for seed money in a drive to capitalize. The Naugatuck Valley doesn't really have an economic base to support their media activities, but through dependable production and cable consulting they might gain support from other parts of the state.

The CETA job holders may have to disperse to where there is a market for their skills if ongoing programs can't be sustained.

How To Apply For CETA Funds

The Labor Department's Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) directed that money be distributed to alleviate the pressures of unemployment. State and local governments use the money to develop training and placement programs, to fill vacancies in public services, and to support projects which enrich the quality of life while preparing the participants for eventual employment outside the CETA Program.

CETA jobs are transitional. Their purpose is to provide the individual with marketable work experience so that once his time on the CETA payroll runs out he can find work elsewhere.

CETA's job placements in the arts indicates that the government finally recognizes art as a legitimate occupation. Artists—painters, writers, filmmakers, or video producers—are a skilled labor force and are qualified for support from the Department of Labor just as are unemployed firemen, teachers, and clerks. Through CETA, an unemployed artist can become an employed one.

Congress appropriated \$8.3 billion for CETA in May, 1977. These funds supported the extension of CETA to subsidize 725,000 jobs for 1978, a substantial increase from an estimated 300,000 in early 1977. Of these jobs, at least 9000 may be arts related.

The Labor Department dispensed this money to about 500 "prime sponsors"—government bodies of states, cities, towns, counties, and regions. The awards are based upon the percentage unemployed and the overall population of the sponsor's area.

The money is allocated into program categories known as "Titles." Of seven titles, art projects fit into four.

Title I provides grants to prime sponsors for recruitment and placement, classroom and on-the-job training, and transitional employment for the unemployed, underemployed and economically disadvantaged. Job counseling and recruitment centers for artists and skills training are funded under this title.

Title II provides transitional public service employment. Projects that employ artists include workshops, residencies in local organizations, public murals, cultural festivals and touring of rural areas.

Title III provides access to arts training and development through short term programs for special groups. Youth, native Americans, offenders, older workers, and migrant farm laborers can be employed under this title.

Title VI is the best known of CETA categories aimed at the poor and the longer-term unemployed. Its funding can be applied to a variety of public interest projects, with few restrictions on the types of jobs created. The prime sponsors must specify the use of these funds within 60 days of receipt.

The prime sponsors develop a "Comprehensive Manpower Plan" which they submit to a regional director of the Labor Department. The plan details the sponsor's employment strategies in accordance with community resources and needs. The sponsor draws up the plan in consultation with its Manpower Planning Council, made up of representatives of the community and major civic groups.

In theory, Title VI forces prime sponsors to be responsive to their communities' needs. The communities, in turn, are active in developing the guidelines and programs by which CETA can be applied to their employment projects. It

certainly means political involvement for those wanting a piece of the CETA pie.

Dierdre Frontczak, of the Cultural Resources Development Project at the National Endowment for the Arts, suggests that diverse artists and media people form arts councils to lobby the local manpower council and other officials for CETA funds. They must also develop comprehensive projects which enrich the community and fulfill the long-term goal of outside employment for the jobholder.

Without such a consortium, artists must approach their local officials alone, often competing against each other for job apportionments. Local governments seem receptive, for arts programs are lively and visible. Politicians also can gain an image of benevolence and culture.

Some local governments think that CETA will pay many incidentals they can't handle themselves. Others say they can't find programs or people to fund. They squander the money in other ways, or are irresponsible in developing an employment plan. In such cases, the Labor Department may withdraw the funds.

Artists have tended to assume that CETA is an arts support program. Many do not prepare for the end of their terms when they'll be on their own. Communities would just as soon be entertained by a new generation of CETA artists, than pick up the tab for the old generation who can no longer afford to be free.

The Carter Administration is proposing to extend CETA through 1982. While initially maintaining the level of 725,000 jobs, it plans to make the number responsive to future unemployment rates.

The states are to gain greater authority in planning the use of CETA funds. Rules concerning those eligible for Title VI jobs will be tightened, emphasizing jobs for the long-term unemployed.

CETA will pay a maximum salary of \$10,000 per year, for a maximum of 18 months per individual. Proposals for the future also include an emphasis on transition preparation, development of community support for the arts.

Artists should seek out people who can interpret the federal jargon, and advisors on applications, proposal writing, and gathering of community support and influence. One such advisor is Ms. Frontczak at NEA, Washington, D.C. 20506, (202) 634-6110. Also available through her is the *Bulletin on Federal Economic Programs and the Arts*.

Other good references include: *Catalyst*, a newsletter for community groups involved in CETA; and *CETA, A Citizen's Action Guide*. Both are published by the Center for Community Change, 1000 Wisconsin Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20007 (202) 338-3565.

Grantsmanship Magazine has also published an ongoing series of CETA articles.

Another resource is the Neighborhood Arts Programs National Organizing Committee. It is contracted by DOL thru October, 1978, to work in creative job development in the arts. It is a nonprofit member organization which also serves as an information conduit on that subject.

NAPNOC's main office is at 2013 Columbia Road, NW, Washington, DC. They have regional offices in Knoxville, Tennessee and San Francisco, California.