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 assistance workers and overworked volunteers. The Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), the government's unemployment relief program, is financing video and filmmaker, 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 make. In the early years, Schneider found that the best organized groups, who had the jobs, it was the best organized groups.

The larger blanket art groups who seem to apply for a block of placements which they divide among themselves, gain precedence over smaller, integrated groups asking for few people and seeming to lack a broader context.

The process among arts groups is complex, and artists are frequently more oriented towards social service. They have reached a level of sophistication where responsive and workable social action communications projects can be put together easily if they don't know how to do it.

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 Siderab for explanation of CETA). They should then present a comprehensive proposal which balances the arts community's need for the arts with an employment and training plan.

Frontczak recommends meetings between the arts groups and the various individuals involved in the funding process, to be the officials of the established grand dames of local culture which have a funders' 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.

CETA reworked its proposal to the CETA a number of times. The original was issued in February, 1977. 300 people applied for the jobs. CETA productions include Paul Schneider, of the People's Freehouse in Brooklyn, videotapes about the plight of the destitute elderly who populate Single Room Occupancy hotels; and on battered women; and a film on the unionizing of housekeepers in the South Bronx.

Their artistic work is hampered by lack of equipment and supplies. CETA provides only the producer to whom ever's request for one is approved. The burden of scouring supplies is laid on the artist and his clients, 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.

**Brooklyn, NY**

Association of Independent Video and Film Makers, 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 that the Association of Independent Video and film Makers (AIVF) was accepting applications for CETA subsidized jobs.

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

1. filing a basic application form for a position; an artist's review of his work and an eligibility report;
2. 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 network.
3. 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.

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The job application process should be open and well publicized. If the jobs are not filled within a certain amount of time, the group that is left with the higher number of applications will be left with the higher number of applications; in this case it was the Bergen County Media Projects. The group that is left with the higher number of applications will be left with the higher number of applications; in this case it was the Bergen County Media Projects.

**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 serving 35 people. Fred Silverman started the Children's Media Project with a staff of seven, which works with kids in developing and producing a new program. 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 program coordinator, an independent producer and 11 film and video people who form a producers' pool that responds to community needs.

**Tom Lennon, of AIVF, said** "We wanted to strike a balance, in providing jobs for producers-who 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.
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, film-makers, or video producers — are skilled labor force and are qualified for support from the Department of Labor just as are unemploy ed firemen, teachers, and cl i c s. Through CETA, an unemployed artist can become an employed one.

Congress appropriated $3.8 billion for CETA in 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.

Training programs include class room and on-the-job training and transition to employment for the unemployed, underemployed and economically disadvantaged. Job counseling and remedial education skills training are funded under this title.

Title II provides transitional public service employment project. Projects that employ artists include workshops, residencies in local organizations, public meetings, 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 long-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 sponsor must specify the use of these funds within 60 days of receipt.

The prime sponsors develop a Comprehensive Manpower Plan that 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 cooperation 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 influence for those wanting a piece of the CETA pie.

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.

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 and development of community support for the arts.

Artists should seek out people who can interpret the federal jargon, and advise on applications, 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, D.C. 20007 (202) 330-3858. The National Arts Program Magazine has also published a ongoing series of CETA articles.

Another resource is the Neighborhood Arts Programs National Organizing Committee. It is contracted by DOL, the Department of Labor, with a creative job development in the arts. It is a nonprofit member organization which also serves as an information conduit on all those subjects.

NAPNO's main office is at 2013 Columbia Road, NW, Washington, D.C. They have regional offices in Nashville, Tennessee and San Francisco, California.

Derby, CT

STAND, STAND is a community multi-media center in the village of Derby, a town in the Lower Naugatuck Valley — a rural and not too prosperous or populated area — is too small to have its own television station. 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 Mainstage Video. They hired three video and three radio people, a counselor, a resource person and a programming aide.

They are also developing in video and radio, and are working specifically with groups representing blacks, women, 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 to drive to capitalize. The Naugatuck Valley doesn't really have any official support for its 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 programs if ongoing programs can't be sustained.