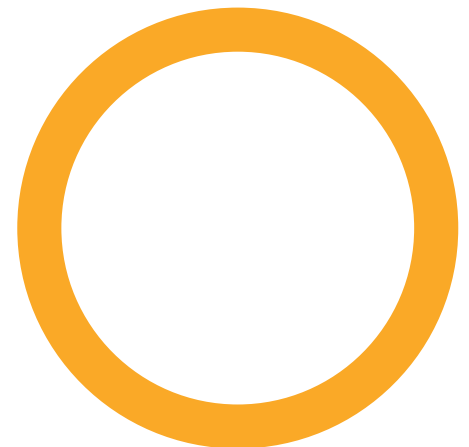


SHARING PROMISING PRACTICES FROM

Create Action

MAY 2024



“Sharing Promising Practices from *CreateAction*” was created for employers, community practitioners, government, funders, and other partners to share insights, promising practices, and lessons learned for engaging, employing, and supporting youth facing barriers to employment.

PROGRAM SUMMARY

Implemented between August 2020 and March 2024, *CreateAction* was a partnership between the [Canadian CED Network \(CCEDNet\)](#), the [National Association of Friendship Centres \(NAFC\)](#), and [Social Research and Demonstration Corporation \(SRDC\)](#), and was funded under Employment and Social Development Canada’s Youth Employment and Skills Strategy. The purpose of *CreateAction* was to help youth who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET), or who are underemployed, overcome barriers to employment and develop a broad range of skills and knowledge to support their pathways to meaningful work and improve youth wellbeing.



Canadian
CED Network
Réseau canadien
de DÉC



National Association
of Friendship Centres
Association nationale
des centres d’amitié



INNOVATION • EXPERIMENTATION • EVALUATION

CreateAction partnered with employers working in community economic development, the social economy, and the Friendship Centre Movement to offer paid full-time 6-month work experiences to youth facing barriers to employment using a cohort-based model. Alongside placements, *CreateAction* offered career-relevant peer learning opportunities and supports for youth, as well as capacity building resources and training for employers. Through ongoing evaluation activities and participant feedback, these opportunities and resources were continuously updated and adapted to meet participant needs and social realities.

DOCUMENT OVERVIEW

This document is organized into six phases that were typical of a *CreateAction* cohort:

- | | | | |
|---|----------------------|---|--|
| 1 | Employer recruitment | 4 | Youth onboarding & early placement |
| 2 | Employer onboarding | 5 | Throughout the placement |
| 3 | Youth recruitment | 6 | End of placement/ transitioning out of placement |

DEFINITIONS

The promising practices are focused on the following two groups:

Program Practitioners: Individuals/organizations actively involved in the planning, implementation, and management of work experience programs.

Employers: Individuals/organizations who participate in work experience programs by providing employment opportunities for youth to gain valuable skills and work-related experience.



RESOURCE GUIDE

The following icons located throughout the document indicate specific *CreateAction* resources that may be useful to refer to in each phase for examples and further information. A description and link are provided for each resource.

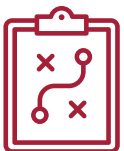


Backgrounder - Anti-oppression Principles: The intent of this resource was that it could initiate greater dialogue and discussion within our organizations on the importance of anti-oppression (AO) principles to our work in community economic development. It was a goal within *CreateAction* to create accountable spaces that were embedded in trauma-informed and AO principles where youth wellbeing was prioritized.

- **Bookshelf: Anti-oppression Resources:** This is a complimentary document to the Backgrounder: Anti-oppression Principles. It provides an additional list of resources connected to topics discussed in the Backgrounder.



Job Posting Template: This is a template for a *CreateAction* job posting, which is an external marketing document for recruitment purposes. This template was intended to be used as a guide or reference in creating or adapting a job posting for *CreateAction*.



Employment and Learning Plan: The Employment and Learning Plan was intended to serve as shared guidelines between the youth and employer to connect the youth's personal and professional interests to their *CreateAction* placement. This plan could be tailored to meet the needs of the youth and was only a template to help facilitate a productive placement experience.

PROMISING PRACTICES

1. EMPLOYER RECRUITMENT

In the employer recruitment phase, the key focus is on selecting employers whose values align with the program's goals, who are committed to expanding their understanding and capacity to work with youth facing barriers to employment, and have sufficient organizational capacity (e.g., time, resources, staffing) to support a youth placement.

This phase is crucial because it is the program's primary mechanism for providing meaningful opportunities for youth to gain essential skills and confidence in a supportive environment.

PROGRAM PRACTITIONERS

- Ensure program objectives, including a description of the target demographic of youth and the responsibilities of employers, are communicated clearly during the application process.
- Develop a strategy for meeting one-on-one with employer applicants. This can help program practitioners better understand the organizational capacity and experience of potential employers to participate in the program and can also help potential employers ask questions and ensure the program is the right fit for their organization.

2. EMPLOYER ONBOARDING

The employer onboarding phase aims to seamlessly integrate selected employers into the program, ensuring they understand their roles and responsibilities in providing work experience placements to youth facing barriers to employment.

By providing necessary training, resources, and support, this phase ensures employers are equipped to create positive and inclusive environments for youth participants. Through effective communication and relationship-building, the goal is to establish trust and strong partnerships between program staff and employers to facilitate successful program implementation.

PROGRAM PRACTITIONERS

- Establish relationships and outline expectations.
 - Develop a program guidebook for employers that provides a comprehensive overview of the program, including information on the different components of the program for both employers and youth, program-wide resources and supports, important dates and deadlines, contact information for program staff, program policies, employer roles and responsibilities, and frequently asked questions.
 - Host an orientation session for employers before youth recruitment begins to introduce them to the program and its objectives, meet the program staff, review the program guidebook, and address their questions and concerns prior to their youth recruitment efforts.
- Ensure employers can access any relevant online resource folders, tools, and applications, and that they are receiving communications from program staff.
- Collect contact information for the direct supervisor(s) of youth placements.

3. YOUTH RECRUITMENT

The youth recruitment stage is a critical phase for supporting youth who face barriers to employment, particularly in creating accessible opportunities, addressing barriers and challenges, and promoting inclusivity. It is important for program staff to work closely with employers in the recruitment phase to support their efforts in facilitating equitable and inclusive recruitment and hiring processes. The following are several ways in which the recruitment process can be adapted to effectively support youth in finding employment.



PROGRAM PRACTITIONERS

- Provide employers with sufficient time for youth recruitment, especially since they are focused on recruiting youth who may be more difficult to reach through traditional recruitment strategies.
- Provide feedback to employers on their job postings and recruitment process to support them in making the process more equitable and inclusive to youth.
- Provide capacity building training for employers before placements start on anti-oppression principles and how oppression may show up in the workplace and employer/employee rights in the workplace.



EMPLOYERS

- The job posting is one of the first things someone will see about your organization – make it a positive and memorable moment!
- Ask for feedback on the job advertisement and recruitment process – work with program practitioners to consider alternative ways of making the process more equitable and inclusive to youth.
- Create an accessible job posting – use simple design, inclusive and plain language, and avoid jargon and gender-specific terms.
- Pursue several outreach strategies to meet youth where they are (e.g., direct outreach to community, community bulletins, engaging organizations who are already providing supports/services to youth facing barriers).
- Review federal and local employment standards and simplify your eligibility criteria (e.g., know your rights in what you can legally ask potential employees).
- Reconsider the necessary skills for the job and the skills you're willing to teach – overstating the job requirements may limit your reach.
- Ask youth if they require any accommodations during the recruitment process.
- Acknowledge and address barriers – unconscious bias can show up despite our best intentions; use online resources to test yourself and others on the hiring team to recognize the ways bias may show up during the recruitment process.
- Focus on lived experience as qualification and consider that people from different backgrounds may present interview behaviors that are different from what we may expect, but still have the skills to do the job.
- Offer feedback to those who weren't selected to move forward and ask for feedback on your hiring process.

4. YOUTH ONBOARDING & EARLY PLACEMENT

The youth onboarding and early placement experience are significant stages for supporting youth with barriers to employment. These stages set the tone for their integration into the workforce and can significantly impact how they show up in employment settings and define success on their own terms. The onboarding and early placement phases aim to establish communication and relationships with program staff, employers, and youth to ensure that youth have the tools, resources, and information to be well-supported as they begin their placements. It also provides employers an opportunity to learn about the youth, including what they want to get out of their work experience, their career goals, and any support they may need in the workplace.



PROGRAM PRACTITIONERS

- Establish relationships and outline expectations.
 - Provide an orientation for youth at the start of placements to provide a space for youth to feel welcome, meet program partners, learn more about the program and build a sense of community.
 - Build relationships with each individual youth and supervisor early on in the placement to establish rapport, answer questions, and identify potential challenges to the start of placements.
- Offer an individual check-in with employers and youth to identify any emerging needs and changes to the placement and to address employers' questions.

EMPLOYERS

- Ensure youth have access to the necessary tools, technology, supports, and resources in the placement.
- Review organizational policies, procedures, and resources to support the youth early on in the placement.
- Introduce youth to key team members at the organization and help them to establish individual connections within the workplace.
- Discuss wraparound supports available internally and through other community-based service organizations to empower youth to perform at their best in the workplace
- Consider developing a plan to address barriers that exist for youth (e.g., connecting with local services, providing childcare, transportation).
- Support youth in developing their understanding of organizational jargon, workplace culture, etc.
- Establish shared guidelines and identify youth's personal and professional interests by creating a shared plan for the placement and review this at specific time intervals to review placement progress.
- Develop a communication and check-in plan with the youth while considering each person's communication style and how to best navigate communication in the workplace.



5. THROUGHOUT THE PLACEMENT

Maintaining communication and relationships between program staff, employers, and youth is crucial to supporting youth's personal growth, professional development, and sense of belonging within the workplace and broader program community. When supervising youth facing barriers to employment it is important to recognize that personal experiences and life outside of work have an impact on youth's professional life. Approaching the relationship with empathy is key to providing a supportive and empowering work environment for youth.



PROGRAM PRACTITIONERS

- Regularly communicate with employers and youth about upcoming events, program changes, and important dates.
- Provide opportunities for peer learning among employers to network and discuss challenges and successes.
- Create a booking page for employers and youth to schedule one-on-one meetings with program staff on an as needed basis.
- Conduct separate employer and youth check-ins throughout the placement to provide tailored support, address questions or concerns, and identify any new or anticipated challenges.



EMPLOYERS

- Provide regular and consistent feedback to youth and encourage youth to also communicate to supervisors and team members if they are experiencing any work-related or personal challenges.
- Support the youth to create a personal and professional development plan.
 - What skills do youth want to grow and gain experience in?
 - What training opportunities or connections can you help facilitate?
- Provide training for employers and youth on healthy boundary setting at work through a trauma-informed lens.
- Review employment and learning goals set out at the beginning of the placement and discuss with the youth where adjustments should be made.



6. END OF PLACEMENT / TRANSITIONING OUT OF PLACEMENT

As the placement comes to an end, what is the best way you can support the youth and end the employment relationship positively? This phase is a critical moment for supporting youth's career objectives and overall wellbeing. Considerations in this phase include future work or education interests and connections to local social services.



PROGRAM PRACTITIONERS

- Support employers and youth in developing a plan to help the youth transition out of the placement. This could include providing them with a template that they can adapt to suit their own needs.
- Establish guidelines for employers to support youth during their transition as they seek further employment or education opportunities (e.g., check-in meeting on the last day, employer recommendation letter/testimonial on LinkedIn, reference consent, personal introductions).



EMPLOYERS

- Create a career planning checklist where youth can identify areas for additional support (e.g., resume building, drafting email for job searching).
- Provide time for youth to reflect on their work experiences, skills gained, personal learnings, and accomplishments to envision their career aspirations.
- Provide a resource list to support further skills development while they may be looking for education or employment.
- Support youth in developing a list of supports they may want to access if needs arise post-placement (e.g., EI, financial wellbeing, housing, healthcare, community resources). Refer to social services in the youth's community that have expertise in providing these supports, as well as online tools and resources found in *CreateAction's* Employment and Learning Plan.
- Provide referrals or connections to social services in the community for youth to access to support their needs post-placement.



LESSONS LEARNED

The following learnings serve to inform other work experience programs supporting youth facing barriers to employment, as well as future iterations of *CreateAction*, fostering continuous improvement and knowledge sharing.

- 1 Cultivating empathy in the workplace is key to providing a supportive and empowering experience for youth.
- 2 Clear communication of program objectives and expectations are essential for both program practitioners and employers throughout all phases of the program.
- 3 One-on-one meetings with employer applicants can provide valuable insights into their organizational capacity and help ensure alignment with program goals.
- 4 Accessible job postings and outreach strategies are crucial for reaching youth who may face barriers to employment.
- 5 Discussing and providing available wraparound supports for youth during onboarding and early placement stages can help set them up for success in the workplace.
- 6 Regular communication and check-ins between program staff, employers, and youth throughout the placement are essential for addressing challenges and providing tailored support.
- 7 Creating a transitioning out of placement plan helps support youth as they move on from the program, facilitating their continued career development and wellbeing.



Create Action

MORE INFORMATION

Canadian Community Economic Development Network
www.ccednet-rcdec.ca

National Association of Friendship Centres
www.nafc.ca

Social Research and Demonstration Corporation
www.srdc.org

Funded by the Government of Canada
Financé par le gouvernement du Canada

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