

# **Effects of Internship Involvement with Change Agent Productions**

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## **Introduction**

Social enterprises are diverse entities designed to accomplish numerous outcomes. Many social enterprises are designed to empower and build the vocational, interpersonal and business skills of vulnerable populations that have traditionally lacked access to specialized work training or been excluded from the labor market (Mancino & Thomas, 2005; Ndemo, 2006; Ferguson, 2007). While building the skills and marketability of disenfranchised populations appears to be an important component of social enterprise, few studies have actually documented the effects that working in a social enterprise has on the participants (Ferguson & Xie, 2007; Ferguson & Islam; 2009). This pilot research explores the effects of internship participation with Change Agent Productions among low-income, culturally-diverse, urban teens and young adults.

Change Agent Productions (CAP) is a social enterprise of the YMCA of Greater Long Beach Downtown Community Development which began in October, 2007, and is currently funded by a two-year grant from ZeroDivide. Change Agent Productions (CAP) is comprised of professional digital media artists who work alongside urban youth who have graduated from the YMCA Youth Institute (YI) to carry out professional media projects. CAP was specifically designed to provide challenging, positive youth, and career development opportunities for low-income, culturally-diverse high school and college-age youth. CAP work opportunities for youth are designed to build on the job skills training they received while in the YI and to help them more fully develop their business, academic, technical and social skills.

CAP was primarily designed to provide media services to community-based organizations and non-profits. CAP provides a wide-range of media services including

video (documentaries, advertisements, public service announcements), graphics (corporate branding, brochures, professional reports, magazines), web (construction, layout, domain registration), audio-visual (on-site tech set-up and support, presentation equipment), and training (movie-making, graphic design, media lab consultation).

Whenever feasible, CAP employs interns to work on their paid projects.

### ***CAP Staff and Interns***

Change Agent Productions began operations with three full-time professional staff; one Art Director and two Digital Media Artists. Two part-time Digital Media Artists were added to the project in December, 2007, and January, 2008. Due to the amount of first-year business, both part-time staff became full-time in June, 2008.

Another part-time member was added in June, 2009, due to increased work volume with the YI. It is worth noting that 50% of CAP staff are themselves YI alumni.

YI alumni applied for internships with CAP by filling out an application and survey, providing their grades and completing an interview. This process was designed to help them to develop skills in obtaining a job. In the application, youth were asked to list their recent YI involvement, current extracurricular activities, number of hours per week they could work, the types of software and equipment they were most proficient with, and, the technology skills they would like to further develop. In addition, they are asked about possible time obstacles, skills they would like to acquire, potential career fields and their relationship to CAP, and what they personally hoped to accomplish through internship participation. They are selected for projects depending on their skill sets, availability, interests and acceptable grades. As of September, 1 2009, 58 high school

and college-age youth had completed an application to work with CAP. Of those, 52 (90%) had actually worked on a least one job.

## **Methods**

### ***Design***

A mixed-methods approach to exploring the effects of working with CAP on interns was utilized. First, interns completed a standardized leadership survey and technology use and competency checklist prior to working with CAP and toward the end of the CAP funding period. Second, staff and the interns themselves rated changes in interns' interpersonal skills, professional/job skills, and technology skills. Third, interns were invited to participate in focus groups at the end of the first and second year of the project to explore effects of internship participation. The results of quantitative analyses are presented here while the focus group findings are contained in a second report.

### ***Sample***

As shown in Table 1, interns ranged from 14 to 21 with the majority falling between the ages of 16 and 17 (58%). Sixty percent were male. Just over half (54%) were Latino followed by Asian American/Pacific Islander (19%) and African American (13%). Interns worked between one and nine jobs with an average of 2.23 jobs per intern. Although 52 youth participated, the number of interns included in each phase of the analyses presented here differs due to the availability of the data.

Table 1  
 Description of Change Agent Production Interns  
 (N = 52)

	%	N
<b>Age</b>		
14	4%	2
15	15%	8
16	27%	14
17	31%	16
18	11%	6
19	6%	3
20	4%	2
21	2%	1
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	60%	31
Female	40%	21
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Latino	53%	28
Asian American/Pacific Islander	19%	10
African-American	13%	7
Bi/Multicultural	10%	5
European-American	2%	4

### ***Instruments***

#### ***Leadership Skills***

Interns completed the Leadership Skills Inventory (Karnes & Chauvin, 2000), a standardized leadership instrument which measures nine areas of leadership skills prior to working at CAP and toward the end of the two-year funding period. The inventory

measures nine areas of leadership skills. The alphas on the leadership subscales varied somewhat depending on time point so the range for each scale is reported. Participants rated themselves on behaviors on a scale ranging from 0 “Almost Never” to 3 “Almost Always.” Higher scores on each of the leadership subscales indicated better ability.

The Fundamentals of Leadership scale measured knowledge of leadership and was composed of the mean of 9 items. One item was “I can identify the positive and negative aspects of being a leader.” The alpha for this scale ranged from .75 to .87. The written communication scale measured ability with and knowledge of written communications and was composed of the mean of 12 items. One item was “I can distinguish fact from opinion in writing.” The alphas for this scale ranged from .81 to .89. The speech communication scale measured ability with and knowledge of communicating through speech using the mean of 14 items. One item was “I can deliver a prepared speech to a group.” The alpha for this scale ranged from .78 to .89. The character-building scale measured character traits using the mean of 17 items. One item was “I am willing to admit my mistakes.” The alphas for this scale ranged from .82 to .93. The decision-making scale measured ability with and knowledge about making effective decisions using the mean of nine items. One item was “I am aware of how my decisions will affect others.” The alphas for this scale ranged from .61 to .65.

The Group Dynamics scale measured ability with and knowledge of working with and in groups using the mean of 19 items. One item was “I can lead a group so that people feel safe expressing their opinions. The alphas for the group dynamics scale ranged from .90 to .93. The problem-solving scale measured knowledge of and the ability to effectively think about and solve problems using the mean of 6 items. One item was “I

can develop different ways to solve problems.” The alphas for the problem-solving scale ranged from .72 to .86. The personal skills scale measured personal traits such as self understanding/knowledge, self-confidence, determination and social skills using the mean of 21 items. One item was “I am patient with myself and others.” The alpha for the personal skills scale was .92. The planning skills scale measured the ability to plan in advance and meet deadlines using the mean of 16 items. One question was “I can tell what is needed to accomplish certain goals.” The alphas for the planning scale ranged from .60 to .89. Higher scores indicated better self-perceived leadership skills.

### ***Technology Skills***

The technology use and competency measure was used to explore the effects on the internship on technology skills. The instrument, originally designed for use with the YI, was composed of 13 questions regarding frequency of use of various technologies and seven questions which explored the ability to use technology to produce specific products. Response categories for technology use were 1 “Never,” 2 “Once per Month or Less,” 3 “Weekly,” and 4 “Daily.” The response categories for technology competence were 1 “No Knowledge,” 2 “Little Knowledge,” 3 “Average Knowledge,” and 4 “Excellent Knowledge.” Higher scores indicated more technology use and competence.

### ***Ratings of Specific Skill Gains***

Both CAP staff and the interns completed rating forms designed to explore the effects of the project on interns’ interpersonal, professional/job and technology skills. These instruments were designed, in part, based on focus group findings from the first year of the project. Interns assessed their skills in three areas after working at CAP for a year. Participants rated their agreement with each skill statement on a scale ranging from

1 “Strongly Disagree” to 4 “Strongly Agree.” Higher scores indicated more skill gains. The interpersonal skills scale consisted of 10 items that measured intern self-assessment of their improvement in working with and communicating with others. Questions included, “My work with CAP has helped me to accept different ideas and viewpoints,” “My work with CAP has helped me to improve my speech communication skills,” and “My work with CAP has helped me to get along well with others.” The alpha reliability was .84 for interns and .77 for staff.

The professional/job skills scale consisted of 12 items that measured perceived self-improvement in basic skills required to hold a job. Questions included, “My work with CAP has helped me to be on time,” “My work with CAP has helped me to accept responsibility,” and “My work with CAP has helped me to set and follow-through on goals.” The alpha reliability was .94 for interns and .90 for staff.

The technology skills scale consisted of 6 items that measured perceived skill improvements in working with different technologies. Questions included, “My work with CAP has helped me to improve my technology skills in graphic design (Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign),” “My work with CAP has helped me to improve my technology skills in Digital Video Editing (Final Cut Pro, iMovie, After Effects, etc.),” and “My work with CAP has helped me to improve my technology skills in Web Design (construction, layout, domain registration, maintenance, applications, Flash, Dreamweaver, Photoshop, HTML, peripheral configuration).” The alpha reliability was .91 for interns and .61 for staff (after web design was dropped).

## *Analysis*

Self-report changes in leadership skills and technology use and competence were investigated using paired samples t-tests. Descriptives were used to explore staff and intern perceptions of skill changes.

## **Results**

### *Changes in Leadership Skills*

As shown in Table 2, these CAP youth self-reported a significant improvement in Fundamentals of Leadership Skills,  $t(18) = 2.18, p < .05$ . However, improvements were noted in all areas.

Table 2  
CAP Intern Report of Changes in Leadership Skills

Skills	Before CAP Internship			After CAP Internship		
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	Difference
<b>Fundamentals of Leadership</b>	<b>2.63</b>	<b>.37</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>2.80</b>	<b>.25</b>	<b>.18**</b>
Written Communication	2.43	.40	19	2.50	.35	.07
Speech Communication	2.50	.42	19	2.59	.30	.09
Character Building	2.62	.45	19	2.79	.21	.17
Decision-Making	2.67	.21	19	2.73	.24	.06
Group Dynamics	2.52	.41	19	2.68	.31	.16
Problem-Solving	2.51	.41	19	2.61	.37	.10
Personal	2.69	.31	18	2.78	.20	.09
Planning	2.58	.31	19	2.69	.19	.11

**\*\*p < .05**

### *Changes in Technology Skills*

As shown in Table 3 and Table 4, these CAP youth did not report any significant changes in technology use or competence.

Table 3

## CAP Intern Report of Changes in Technology Use

Technology Use	Pre-CAP			Post-CAP		
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	Difference
I currently use the computer at home and school.	3.68	.58	19	3.84	.50	.16
I send email.	3.11	1.08	18	3.28	.96	.17
I access the Internet (websites, surf the web).	3.89	.31	19	3.84	.37	-.05
I create web pages.	1.84	.90	19	2.16	1.12	.32
I create graphic designs with computer software and code applications (HTML, Dreamweaver, etc.).	2.47	.90	19	2.63	.90	.16
I use word processing software applications to write text.	3.58	.69	19	3.47	.70	-.11
I use data processing software applications for databases or spreadsheets.	2.50	1.04	18	2.72	1.02	.22
I use digital video equipment (cameras/video).	3.21	.71	19	3.05	.78	-.16
I participate in Internet chat rooms/discussion boards/listservs.	2.33	1.33	18	2.72	1.27	.39
I use the computer to complete school assignments.	3.42	.77	19	3.58	.61	.16
I use digital music software (GarageBand, Reason, Logic Pro).	2.89	.81	19	2.74	1.10	-.16
I use presentation software (Powerpoint, Keynote, Inspiration).	3.10	.99	10	2.70	.48	-.40
I use digital editing software (iMovie, Final Cut).	3.20	.79	10	2.60	.84	-.60

**\*\*p < .05**

Table 4

## CAP Intern Report of Changes in Technology Competencies

Technology Competence	Pre-CAP		N	Post-CAP		Difference
	Mean	SD		Mean	SD	
I can use input devices (mouse, keyboard, remote control) and output devices (monitor, printer) to successfully operate computers, VCRs, audiotapes, etc.).	3.82	.39	17	3.76	.44	-.06
I can use a variety of media and technology resources (word processing, presentation, graphic design software) to create presentations both inside and outside of the classroom.	3.50	.62	18	3.56	.78	.06
I can work cooperatively with others to use technology to produce and share information.	3.44	.62	18	3.61	.61	.17
I can create multimedia products (digital videos, movies, magazines, newsletters, invitations) with support from staff or student partners.	3.61	.50	18	3.50	.62	-.11
I can use technology tools to locate, evaluate, and collect information from a variety of sources.	3.41	.71	17	3.53	.51	.12
I can use technology tools to process data and report results.	3.41	.62	17	3.41	.62	.00
I can use technology tools for managing and communicating personal/professional information (finances, schedules, addresses, correspondence).	3.19	.65	16	3.12	.81	-.06
I can use a variety of media and formats to communicate information and ideas effectively to multiple audiences.	3.06	.85	16	3.25	.86	.19

\*\*p < .05

### *Intern Rating of Skill Changes*

As shown in Table 5, interns reported that the interpersonal skills they most improved as a result of their work with CAP were their ability to: (a) get along well with others; (b) work with diverse groups of people; (c) improve speaking and presentation

skills; and (d) accept different ideas and viewpoints. Improved writing skills was rated the lowest followed by ability to resolve conflicts. However, interns, on average, more than “agreed” that their skills improved on each skill area.

Table 5  
Intern Self-Assessment of Interpersonal Skill Improvements Resulting from CAP Work  
(N = 23)

Interpersonal Skills	Mean	SD
Get along well with others.	3.87	.34
Work with diverse groups of people.	3.83	.39
Improve my speaking and presentation skills.	3.74	.45
Accept different ideas and viewpoints.	3.70	.47
Feel more confidence and comfort in working with clients.	3.64	.49
Work more effectively on teams.	3.57	.51
Improve my listening skills.	3.57	.59
Be a good leader.	3.52	.67
Resolve group conflicts.	3.43	.79
Improve my writing skills.	3.30	.56

As shown in Table 6, interns thought their professional/job skills that improved the most as a result of working with CAP were accepting responsibility, attending to detail, being on time and being organized. They rated implementing decisions effectively and being a good problem solver lowest. Although, again, they more than “agreed” that they improved in all of their professional/job skills.

Table 6  
Intern Self-Assessment of Professional/Job Skill Improvements Resulting from CAP  
Work  
(N = 23)

Professional/Job Skills	Mean	SD
Accept responsibility.	3.71	.46
Attend to detail.	3.61	.58
Be on time.	3.57	.59
Be organized.	3.57	.60
Make good decisions.	3.52	.51
Set and following-through on goals.	3.52	.60
Ask questions and for help.	3.50	.67
Plan ahead.	3.48	.73
Manage my time effectively (prioritizing projects).	3.43	.59
Set and meet deadlines.	3.43	.68
Be a good problem-solver.	3.39	.66
Implement decisions effectively.	3.26	.62

As shown in Table 7, interns reported that they were most likely to have improved their technology skills in the areas of digital video filming and technology training and they were least likely to improve their web design skills. Overall, interns more than “agreed” that each of their technology skills improved as a result of their CAP work.

Table 7  
Intern Self-Assessment of Technology Skill Improvements Resulting from CAP Work  
(N = 21)

Technology Skills	Mean	SD
Digital Video Filming (Camera, Lighting, etc.)	3.90	.89
Technology Training Skills (movie-making, graphic design, media lab consultation, technology set-up, network make up).	3.86	.85
Graphic design (Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign).	3.67	.97
Digital Video Editing (Final Cut Pro, iMovie, After Effects, etc.)	3.62	.86
Audio/Visual (on-site set-up and support, presentation equipment, web streaming, displays/monitors, LCD projectors).	3.57	.98
Web design (construction, layout, domain registration, maintenance, applications, Flash, Dreamweaver, Photoshop, HTML, peripheral configuration).	3.14	1.11

As shown in Table 8, overall, these interns thought their greatest gains from their work with CAP were in technology and interpersonal skills.

Table 8  
Intern Self-Assessment of Skill Improvements while working with CAP

Scale	Mean	SD
Technology Skills (N = 21)	3.63	.79
Interpersonal Skills (N = 23)	3.62	.34
Professional/Job Skills (N = 23)	3.50	.42

### *Staff Ratings of Intern Skills*

As shown in Table 9, staff reported that the interpersonal skills that interns improved the most as a result of their work with CAP were their ability to: (a) work with diverse groups of people, (b) get along well with others, (c) accept different ideas and viewpoints, and (d) listen. Improved writing skills was rated the lowest by staff, followed by the ability to be a good leader.

Table 9  
Staff Ratings of Interpersonal Skill Improvements Resulting from CAP Work  
(N = 26)

Interpersonal Skills	Mean	SD
Work with diverse groups of people.	3.92	.27
Get along well with others.	3.85	.37
Accept different ideas and viewpoints.	3.73	.45
Improve listening skills.	3.64	.49
Feel more confidence and comfort in working with clients.	3.61	.50
Work more effectively on teams.	3.61	.50
Resolve group conflicts.	3.46	.58
Improve speaking and presentation skills.	3.42	.50
Be a good leader.	3.38	.57
Improve my writing skills.	3.31	.47

As shown in Table 10, staff reported that the professional/job skills that interns improved the most as a result of working with CAP were: (a) accepting responsibility, (b) asking questions/asking for help, (c) being on time, and (d) attending to detail. They rated interns lowest in planning ahead and implementing decisions effectively. However, staff noted that each of the skills was improved as a result of work with CAP.

Table 10  
 Staff Ratings of Professional/Job Skill Improvements Resulting from CAP Work  
 (N = 26)

Professional/Job Skills	Mean	SD
Accept responsibility.	3.73	.53
Ask questions and for help.	3.65	.56
Be on time.	3.58	.50
Attend to detail.	3.54	.58
Set and following-through on goals.	3.54	.51
Manage time effectively (prioritizing projects).	3.54	.58
Make good decisions.	3.50	.58
Be a good problem-solver.	3.50	.58
Be organized.	3.46	.65
Set and meet deadlines.	3.42	.58
Implement decisions effectively.	3.42	.58
Plan ahead.	3.34	.63

As shown in Table 11, staff reported that the technology competence skills that interns improved the most were in: (a) digital video filming, (b) technology training skills, (c) graphic design, and (d) digital video editing. They rated interns lowest in web design and audio visual.

Table 11

Staff Ratings of Technology Skill Improvements Resulting from CAP Work  
(N = 26)

Technology Skills	Mean	SD
Digital Video Editing (Final Cut Pro, iMovie, After Effects, etc.)	3.88	.51
Technology Training Skills (movie-making, graphic design, media lab consultation, technology set-up, network make up).	3.86	.85
Digital Video Filming (Camera, Lighting, etc.)	3.81	.49
Graphic design (Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign).	3.61	.64
Web design (construction, layout, domain registration, maintenance, applications, Flash, Dreamweaver, Photoshop, HTML, peripheral configuration).	3.61	1.02
Audio/Visual (on-site set-up and support, presentation equipment, web streaming, displays/monitors, LCD projectors).	3.46	.58

As shown in Table 12, overall, staff thought the greatest intern skill gain was in the area of technology.

Table 12

Staff Rating of Overall Skill Improvements while working with CAP

Scale	Mean	SD
Technology Skills (N = 26)	3.71	.36
Interpersonal Skills (N = 26)	3.59	.40
Professional/Job Skills (N = 26)	3.52	.27

### Conclusions

This research presents a preliminary look at the effects of youth internship participation in CAP, a social enterprise of the YMCA Downtown Community

Development Branch. Since this is a preliminary study on a new project, the results should be interpreted with caution. Changes in intern skills were explored using before and after CAP measures and intern and staff ratings after participation.

Leadership and technology use and competence skills were measured before and after CAP internships. Although interns rated themselves higher in all of the leadership skill areas, fundamentals of leadership was the only area that evidenced significant improvement. There were also no significant before and after improvements on technology use or competence. The lack of significant outcomes on these measures may have been influenced by a few factors. First, the small size of the sample limited the power of the tests to determine significant differences. Second, the “before CAP” measures of leadership and technology use and competency were often taken right after these youth participated in the intensive summer YI where extensive leadership and technology training was done. The timing of this administration of the surveys may have inadvertently led to inflated scores on these measures prior to CAP experiences, making it difficult to show large skill increases particularly when 41% of the youth worked a single job. Third, these measures, though pertinent to the goals of the project, were somewhat global and may not have had outcomes one would anticipate for every job completed by interns during their work with CAP. For example, if an intern solely did training or graphic design, it would not be expected that his/her music software skills would have improved.

Interns were also asked to more specifically rate their changes on a variety of interpersonal, professional/job and technology skills as a result of working for CAP. The levels of agreement related to the perceived changes fell between “agree” and “strongly

agree on all of the 28 items measured. In fact, overall, on 71% of the items, interns rated themselves above 3.5. These interns reported that they improved the most on technology and interpersonal skills while the professional/job skills changes were rated slightly lower when looking at overall averages. In particular, these interns thought they had gained skills in filming digital videos, providing technology training, getting along with others, working with diverse groups of people, speaking and presenting, accepting responsibility, and accepting different ideas and viewpoints. Conversely, they rated themselves as gaining skills the least in the areas of web design, implementing decisions effectively, writing ability, being a good problem-solver, resolving group conflicts, setting and meeting deadlines, and managing time effectively.

Staff also rated each intern on the same items. Again, all of the items measured fell between “agree” and “strongly agree,” and 19 (68%) items were rated above 3.5. Like the interns, they thought that technology and interpersonal skills improved more than professional/job skills, yet they rated the technology skills somewhat higher than the youth themselves. In terms of specific skill gains, staff thought youth most improved in working with diverse groups of people, editing digital video, training on technology skills, getting along well with others, filming digital video, accepting responsibility, and accepting different ideas and viewpoints. Staff rated interns least improved in writing ability, planning ahead, being a good leader, implementing decision effectively, speaking and presenting skills, setting and meeting deadlines, being organized, and resolving group conflicts.

Taken together, these intern and staff ratings along with the change in fundamentals of leadership, along with focus group findings reported elsewhere, indicate

that internships with CAP did help participants to gain important and diverse technology, interpersonal, and, to a slightly lesser extent, professional/job skills that should prove useful to them in both their future academic and career pursuits. Thus, CAP appears to be meeting some of its social enterprise goals in terms of developing and empowering low-income, urban youth. These gains were noted even though most of the participants only worked one or two jobs. It is possible that continued work experiences with CAP may help these youth to further hone and develop these important skills. This may be particularly true if youth are able to participate in new and different types of jobs. Given that professional/job skills were rated somewhat lower by both youth and staff, it may be important for CAP or other social enterprises to incorporate a specialized job skill training component to its program to build upon what was learned during the YI. This training should focus primarily on planning, managing time and prioritizing projects, organizing, meeting deadlines, problem-solving and implementing decisions.

While the findings here are somewhat mixed, there is some support for the notion that well-designed social enterprises may positively influence youth who work in them. This is particularly true given the pilot nature of the intervention and ongoing changes with program development and evaluation. The ability to draw stronger, more definitive conclusions about program effects on participants will increase if CAP continues to generate funding to continue its mission, is able to serve more youth, and a more stringent evaluation design can be added. .

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