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## Evaluation Directorate



*May 2008*

# Summative Evaluation of the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities

*Final Report*  
**May 2008**



*Summative Evaluation of the  
Opportunities Fund for Persons  
with Disabilities*

**Final Report**

*Evaluation Directorate  
Strategic Policy and Research Branch  
Human Resources and Social Development Canada*

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# *List of Abbreviations*

APE	Action Plan Equivalent
AHRDA	Aboriginal Human Resource Development Agreement
ASEP	Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnerships Program
EAPD	Employability Assistance for People with Disabilities
CRA	Canada Revenue Agency
EAS	Employment Assistance Services
EBSM	Employment Benefits and Support Measures
EI	Employment Insurance
HRCC	Human Resource Centre of Canada
HRDC	Human Resources Development Canada
HRSDC	Human Resources and Skills Development Canada
HRSDC	Human Resources and Social Development Canada
IA	Income Assistance (also known as Income Support or Social Assistance)
JCP	Job Creation Partnerships
LMAPD	Labour Market Agreement for Persons with Disabilities
LMDA	Labour Market Development Agreement
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ODI	Office for Disability Issues
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OF	Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities
PALS	Participation and Activity Limitation Survey
PWDs	Persons with Disabilities
RMAF	Results-based Management and Accountability Framework
SA	Social Assistance
SCC	Service Canada Centre
SE	Self Employment
SD	Skills Development
SDC	Social Development Canada
TWS	Targeted Wage Subsidies
YES	Youth Employment Strategy



# *Executive Summary*

## **Background and Purpose**

The purpose of this document is to evaluate the overall impacts and effects of the Opportunities Fund (OF) in the areas of employability enhancement, employment, earnings SA and EI, training and education outcomes, societal outcomes, and client satisfaction. Four broad issue areas are addressed in this evaluation: 1) rationale and relevance; 2) implementation and objective achievement; 3) monitoring and client profile; and 4) impacts and effects.

The evaluation also reviews the appropriateness of accountability commitments made in the 2003 RMAF and the feasibility of collecting performance measures on an on-going basis. The evaluation activities covered in this evaluation are designed to complement OF's on-going program performance monitoring activities and to address gaps identified in previous evaluations.

## ***Program Description***

In response to an identified gap in labour market programming for persons with disabilities, the former HRDC launched the OF in 1997. The objective of the program is to assist persons with disabilities (PWDs) in preparing for, obtaining and keeping employment or becoming self-employed, thereby increasing their economic participation and independence. The program is open to unemployed individuals who normally have little or no labour market attachment and do not qualify for assistance under Part II of the *Employment Insurance Act*, who self identify as having a disability, are legally entitled to work in Canada and require assistance to prepare for or obtain employment or to become self-employed. OF has assisted over 45,000 Canadians since its inception.

## ***Methodologies***

The methodology for this evaluation is based on multiple lines of evidence as shown. The main focus of research design and data collection was to address program rational, program relevance, and program implementation issues. During the initial data collection stages, preliminary information was obtained on other variables such as the client profile and impacts and effects. Subsequent data collection activities provided detailed quantitative evidence on program monitoring, client profile and the impacts and effects of the program.

The evaluation relies on the combined results from program administrative information databases, clientele survey information, EI database and CRA income tax information and the qualitative assessment undertaken by the HRSDC evaluation unit. Combined, these data sources provide a useful information base from which to draw findings on the overall effectiveness, impacts and relevance of the program. It must be recognized, however, that the findings are based on evidence that has some inherent limitations.

These include the lack of a true comparison group and a delayed data-sharing agreement with Ontario that would have more definitively assessed the issue of overlap and duplication between OF and LMAPD clientele.

## **Evaluation Findings**

### ***Program Relevance***

The objectives of the Opportunities Fund continue to remain relevant due to potential programming gaps and varying eligibility criteria across programs. The diverse nature and complex needs of PWDs requires a broad spectrum of program responses in order to increase their income level from and participation in the labour force.

### ***Complementarity, Overlap and Duplication<sup>1</sup>***

The potential for overlap and duplication were noted as issues of potential concern. Through a qualitative assessment conducted for this evaluation, some medium-level overlap with other available programming was noted in the areas of eligible activities and sources of funding.<sup>2</sup> Overall, however, the assessment notes the OF and the Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities (LMAPDs) are complementary from a process, clientele, eligibility and intervention perspective. Furthermore, based on administrative data analysis, the evaluation shows there is minimal client overlap between OF and other HRSDC employment programs, and minimal overlap between OF interventions and other HRSDC employment program interventions (only 6.6%). The majority of the overlap was with EAS interventions which are considered to be complementary rather than duplicative. When EAS interventions are removed, only 2.3% of the OF interventions overlapped with other types of HRSDC programming.

### ***Social Equity/Societal Impacts***

The evaluation data indicate that the social equity impacts of OF extend beyond the original intent of the program (increased employability of PWDs) to include positive impacts on the Canadian workplace. Employers surveyed reported enhanced openness to hiring persons with disabilities; improved employee morale; increased diversity of their

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<sup>1</sup> The terms “overlap” and “duplication” are often used interchangeably to describe a program that may be similar in nature. There is, however, a significant difference between the two. Overlap occurs when two orders of government provide, in part, similar programs. When overlap does occur, it is generally complementary, and fills an existing gap in program or service delivery. Duplication, on the other hand, refers to one program being completely unnecessary due to the other order of government’s involvement. Evidence suggests that true ‘duplication’ is rare.

<sup>2</sup> Literature and informal interviews led to assigning different levels of overlap (low, medium and high) of various program elements. The different levels of overlap are defined based on the perceived degree of similarity between the OF and other employability programs serving PWDs, and whether the similarity leads to a negative impact (duplication) or a positive impact (filling in gaps or complementarity) on PWDs and society.

organisation and changes in their hiring practices towards PWDs as a consequence of partnering with the Opportunities Fund.

### ***Leveraging of Resources***

Evaluation findings confirmed that leveraging is applied as a common practice in the design and implementation of OF. Leveraging funding, where possible, is incorporated into the design of the OF program. OF funding provided to employers also leveraged expenditures and services beyond the amount(s) covered by the program.

### ***Innovation in Program Delivery***

Program management encourages innovative approaches to programming and service delivery. They indicated that innovative programming is often used as a funding criterion to allocate scarce program resources. However, experience has dictated that opportunities for such approaches are limited. As such, management accepts programs that use ‘promising practices’ such as holistic approaches, programs that fill in gaps in core programming and “best practices” that are adapted to meet local needs, in its definition of innovative approaches. Program management understand the need for innovation, however they stressed that the need to fill in program gaps far outweighs the need for new types of programming and service delivery.

At the same time, there was limited evidence of any systematic information provided by OF management to service providers on the results of innovations or promising practices funded under OF. This means that there could be an improvement of shared learning.

### ***Program Awareness and Promotion***

Evidence indicates that greater promotion of the OF program is necessary - many clients, employers and service providers interviewed/surveyed indicated they were not aware of the program. Although specific projects may have built-in awareness activities, there is generally no systematic approach to promote the OF program to clients, employers and service providers. According to the OF program officials, demand for programs currently exceeds program funding, which partially explains why promotion of the Program is not extensive. Special project funding to promote the program and build networks with service providers are potential strategies to make the program better known.

### ***Accountability***

Results of the review of the plans established in the 2003 RMAF indicate that performance monitoring information and reporting is in accordance with the specifications of the RMAF. The majority of performance indicators are collected and reported upon on a monthly basis, and indicators that relate to long-term outcomes are collected at various intervals throughout the evaluation cycle.

The indicators and measures selected for less frequent reporting are appropriate. Consideration should be given, however, to an annual update to the evaluation to measure indicators that are harder to monitor monthly, such as earned income, dependence on passive income and labour force attachment, by using linkages with CRA data.

The quality of the OF administrative data has improved substantially since 2000-2004. The OF administrative data for the earlier years (i.e. 2000 – 2004) had significant gaps, including little information on the type of interventions received by participants and types of disabilities. The quality and completeness of this data has improved significantly, although some data on type of disability is missing. Other improvements could include providing fields for multiple disabilities and severity of disability.

### ***Target Clients Served***

Evidence shows that the OF assists a broad spectrum of persons with disabilities. The profile of the program participants showed a relatively even distribution across many key socio-demographic variables. The severity of the disability reported by the survey respondents was also evenly distributed, including clients with severe or very severe disabilities. Regional distributions changed over time, with increases in the percentage of clients from the Prairie and Atlantic regions.

The OF clientele consists of clients with very low labour market experience and earnings in the years prior to their program participation. They also have a relatively high dependency on SA income. The findings confirm the program has significantly improved the enforcement of the eligibility criteria that excludes individuals who qualify for assistance under Part II of the *Employment Insurance Act*. Since the year 2000, when EI eligible clients were reduced to a very small percentage of the participants, the earnings profile of the OF clientele has been consistently very low. For example, between program start years 2001 to 2005, the average earned income of participants was approximately \$2.4K and over 55% of respondents reported no earned income at all. This low level of earned income was similar up to three years prior to the program start year.

While EI income was negligible, SA income played a prominent role in the earnings of the OF clients. Approximately 55% survey respondents had some SA income and the mean SA income for the year prior to their program participation was \$3.8K – higher than the earned income for the same year.

### ***Client Satisfaction***

Overall, the clients, employers and sponsors were satisfied with the programs and services received, although sponsors expressed lower levels of satisfaction with the Program. Seventy-one percent of the clients surveyed were satisfied or very satisfied with their participation with the OF, while 14% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. At the same time, however, a relatively large segment of the clients indicated they face problems getting the services they want. For example, twenty percent of respondents were dissatisfied or



very dissatisfied with the extent to which they were informed about available training and employment programs and services and how to access them.

Overall, the employers, project sponsors and community coordinators expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the program, although project sponsors and community coordinators expressed lower levels of program satisfaction than the employers.

## ***Employment and Employability***

There was a substantial and sustained increase in the percentage of OF participants with paid employment compared to pre-program levels. Based on the administrative data, the percentage of participants with paid employment (at least one employer) increased from 44% in the year prior to the program start year to approximately 62% in the program start year. This slowly declined to 54% four years after the program start year - 10.4 percentage points higher than the year prior to the program start year.

The percentage of OF participants with ongoing labour market attachment doubled in the post-program period. The gains in labour market attachment, as measured by the percentage of participants with three consecutive years with paid employment, were even larger. In the three years prior to program participation the percentage of participants in the 2001 cohort with at least one employer in three consecutive years was 21%. In the most recent three years available for this analysis, 42% of these same participants had at least one employer in three consecutive years – a 21 percentage point increase doubling the pre-program percentage.

OF participants reported a 15-percentage point gain in paid employment. Survey respondents reported just over six months of paid employment in the most recent 12 months. This is a gain of 1.8 months when compared to the pre-program period. This included an increase of 1.1 months for full-time employment, and an increase of 0.6 months for part-time employment. This represents a 15-percentage point gain in paid employment for the survey respondent (paid employment accounted for 36 percent of activities 12 months prior to program participation and 51 percent in the most recent 12 months).

## ***Income***

OF participants had a substantial and sustained increase in earned income compared to their earnings in the year prior to program participation. The evaluation findings showed a very clear pattern of strong earnings growth for the OF participants beginning in the program start year. For example, when compared to the year prior to the participants' program start year, earnings raised \$2,976 by one year after the program start year. This signifies a more than doubling of earned income. In total, the earnings gain across the five years compared to the earnings in the year prior to the program start year was \$15,683. Despite the increase in earnings in the post-program period, there was little change in the amount of SA and EI income over the same years.

Participants of the most intensive interventions experienced the highest gains in earnings. Participants with the most labour market challenges, as indicated by lower average pre-program earnings, were more likely to receive more intensive treatments. Both the participants with APEs exceeding six months and the survey respondents who reported receiving both TWS and SD, had the lowest pre-program earnings compared to other groups of participants. The participants in the most intensive treatments also had the largest total gains in earnings - \$16,070 for the participants receiving TWS and SD and \$17,900 for participants with APEs longer than six months. This finding is notable since program participants with the most labour market challenges often have the poorest program outcomes. However, the findings from this analysis may be confounded with program selection bias and should be interpreted with this caveat in mind.

### ***Cost-Effectiveness***

The estimated incremental earnings gains exceed the program costs in the longer-term. Based on modelling results to estimate incremental gains/loss in earnings, the total gain in earnings for the OF participants, discounted over the four years, was \$8.1K and was extrapolated to \$10,475 over five years. OF program management provided an average cost of \$4K to \$8K as being appropriate for this timeframe. If the lower cost is used, the estimated gain in earnings over a four-year time frame exceeds the program costs by nearly 2:1. If the higher program cost estimate is used, the earnings income gains are virtually identical to the costs within four years and would exceed program costs over a five year period. It should be noted that these estimates may still be affected by selection biases or other behavioural changes that may be occurred at the beginning of the start year for the program participants and resulted in higher earnings compared to their pre-program earnings.

### ***Conclusions***

The summative evaluation findings indicate that the program continues to be relevant by filling gaps in services and assisting PWDs who are not fully served by other federal or provincial government programs. The evaluation also indicates positive results in terms of client satisfaction, leveraging of funds, learning from other partners and programs by exploring promising practices and social equity impacts for persons assisted as well as for employers and workplaces.

The evaluation's client profile indicates that the program assists a broad spectrum of PWDs in terms of types and severity of disabilities. OF clients also tend to have low labour market pre-program experience. The evaluation shows post-program gains among clients in terms of their paid employment, earning levels and skill levels. In addition, employers and sponsors were generally satisfied with the programs and services received.

An identified weakness in the evaluation findings was the minimal evidence of awareness and promotion of the program to clients, employers and organizations. While positive post-program employment, earnings and skill-level gains are seen among participants, the evaluation does suggest the need for improved ongoing monitoring of client outcomes.

Another challenge is that the findings are based on a methodological approach that has some gaps, such as the lack of a true comparison group and a delayed data-sharing agreement with Ontario that would have more definitively assessed the issue of program relevance. At the same time, however, the methodology used provide a useful and important information base from which to draw findings on the overall effectiveness, impacts and relevance of the program.



# *Management Response*

## **I. Introduction**

The evaluation of the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities (OF) was conducted by Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC). The management of HRSDC wishes to thank our staff, clients, partners and agencies who participated in the Summative Evaluation of OF. We are pleased to provide this management response.

## **II. Purpose of the Management Response**

A fundamental principle for federal evaluations is one of independence. While the OF evaluation was conducted by HRSDC, the evaluators were given complete independence to conduct their work. Given this independence, the management response provides management of HRSDC with the opportunity to provide their perspective on the key evaluations findings and the opportunity to indicate where policies and programming have been modified and plans for further change.

## **III. Key Findings and Proposed Actions**

The OF Summative Evaluation addresses issues related to the program rationale and relevance; program implementation and achievement of objectives; program monitoring and the client profile; and impacts and effects. While some areas for improvement have been identified, generally, the key findings outlined in the evaluation are very positive.

The summative evaluation findings indicate that the program continues to be relevant by filling gaps in service by assisting PwDs who are not fully served by other federal or provincial government programs. The evaluation results are positive in terms of client satisfaction, leveraging of funds and services from other partners as common practices, and social equity impacts for persons assisted, as well as for employers and workplaces.

It also confirms that the program assists a broad spectrum of PwDs who have a very low labour market attachment and are highly dependant on social assistance income. The majority of clients reported that their participation in the program has had a positive impact on their skills and employability.

### ***Findings on: Program Rationale and Relevance***

The evaluation's analysis indicates that the program continues to remain relevant due to programming gaps and varying eligibility criteria across programs for PwDs. The diverse and complex needs of PwDs requires a broad spectrum of program responses in order to increase their income level from and participation in the labour force and OF plays a vital role in responding to these needs.

## **Proposed Actions and Work Underway**

- a) The Active Employment Measures Directorate is currently exploring different options for mitigating potential risks in some areas identified as potential areas for realignment with regards to the perceived overlap and duplication between OF and LMAPD including eligible activity duplication, budget and source of funding.

For example, HRSDC initiated a process to develop data sharing agreements with a number of jurisdictions. However, due to differences in administrative data collection procedures (not using SINS as a tracking measure, and/or lack of an electronic database), most jurisdictions were unable to provide adequate data. However, an agreement with Ontario is still being pursued at this time. An addendum to the evaluation will be provided once the results become available.

- b) It is expected that approval will be sought for extending the program's terms and conditions – which will allow for sufficient time to transition the program in the context of the overall labour market architecture commitments (announced in Budget 2007). Currently, the priority of the Government of Canada is to seek the implementation of the first two elements of the architecture: negotiating transfer Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDAs) in co-managed jurisdictions and new Labour Market Agreements (LMAs) in all jurisdictions. The third element of the labour market architecture is exploration of the feasibility of transferring federal labour market programs for youth, older workers and PwDs to provinces and territories. As OF is one of the existing programs under such consideration, any extension requests for OF would have to be made in consideration of possible future devolution. To date, no decision has been taken on the exploration of feasibility of transfer.

## ***Findings on: Program Implementation and Objective Achievement***

The evaluation's findings that the social equity impacts of OF extend beyond the basic program design and impacts on the clients to include impacts on the Canadian workplace are very encouraging. The evaluation's analysis confirmed that leveraging is a common practice in OF and that this enhances the program's complementary relationship with other federal and provincial funding.

The evaluation found that the program should work to improve their sharing of learning with other stakeholders, as well as provincial and federal counterparts. Awareness and promotion of the program were also identified as weaknesses.

## **Proposed Actions and Work Underway**

- a) Management acknowledges that further improvement of shared learning would enhance the program's ability to remain innovative. The program has normally hosted an annual conference with all the regional OF-Service Canada representatives to facilitate the sharing of information. This practice has proven to be a successful and very worthwhile endeavour for the program and will continue.

In addition, management will explore the possibility of holding larger information sharing sessions and fora with stakeholders and other department representatives to facilitate the sharing of promising practices and innovative programs to increase the level of information sharing.

- b) Work has already begun to increase promotion and awareness of OF. In November, 2007, Minister Solberg gave blanket approval for regions to allocate up to 20% of their annual contribution budget towards activities designed to increase the awareness of the employer community on the advantages of hiring PwDs. Results will be provided on an annual basis to ensure that the awareness of the program is increasing, as well as ensuring that funds are expended in an effective manner.
- c) OF has implemented several of the suggestions in the Change Agenda for Grants and Contributions, in keeping with HRSDC's commitment to ensuring the full accountability to Parliament for the efficient and effective delivery of employment programs and services in partnership with community-based organizations and other stakeholders. For example, any planned Calls for Proposals (CFPs) for OF must be posted on the Stakeholder Engagement and CFP for Employment Programs website annually by May 31 of each year, beginning in 2007. It is expected that this will enhance the public's awareness of the program and available funding opportunities.

### ***Findings on: Program Monitoring and Client Profile***

The evaluation found that the quality of the OF administrative data has improved substantially since 2000 – 2004. However, there are areas where improvements can be made in order to further strengthen the accountability and reporting of the program.

Evidence showed that the OF assists a broad spectrum of persons PwDs, in terms of types of disability and severity of disabilities, with a relatively even distribution across many key socio-demographic variables as well as the severity of the disability.

### **Proposed Actions and Work Underway**

- a) Since 2004, the program has been using the Common System for Grants and Contributions – Client Module, and it has been a particularly useful tool in terms of extracting more reliable client information. Performance results, based on the key indicators outlined in the Results-based Management and Accountability Framework (RMAF), are provided to regions on a quarterly basis and this practice has proved invaluable to the program's ability to measure its impact.
- b) Management will explore the feasibility of including extra fields in the client information system in order to record additional data like multiple disabilities and severity of disability. However, it must be noted that participants are asked to self-identify and assessing the severity of disability may be too subjective to be considered a reliable indicator.

- c) Management concurs with the suggestion to examine the usage of an alternative on-going monitoring approach to measure increased earned income, reduced dependence on passive income and increased labour force attachment by using linkages with CRA data for evaluation purposes. Management will consult with Evaluation Services on the best approach for measuring increased income and labour force attachment.

### ***Findings on: Impacts and Effects***

The evaluation reported on several observations emerging from clients' experience during their participation in the OF program. In particular, it is encouraging to hear that the programs and services had a positive impact on their skill and employability and that they were important in obtaining employment.

Management is encouraged by the finding that participants with the most intensive interventions had the highest gains in earnings. This finding is notable since program participants with the most labour market challenges often have the poorest program outcomes, however the opposite appears to be true for the OF. This further reinforces the evidence that OF is able to fill gaps in programming and services that are vital for enhancing the labour market participation of PwDs.

The evaluation findings show that the program does provide value for money in that the incremental earnings gains exceed the program costs in the longer-term.

### **Proposed Actions and Work Underway**

- a) In order to continue to have a significant impact, Management will explore the possibility of the expansion of living costs for participants to increase the possibility that the program can continue to fill identified gaps in service and programming for PwDs.
- b) Management will explore the feasibility of using OF Community Coordinator (CC) agreements as the sole delivery mechanism for the program. Under the OF CC model, an organization receives OF contribution funding and the CC then enters into its own agreements to further distribute financial assistance to employers and individuals. Enhanced Employment Assistance Services may also be included as part of the project. Given that regional Service Canada delivery capacity will be affected as the remaining co-managed provinces sign LMDAs, a more concentrated approach to service delivery through the OF CC model may result in efficiencies in operating costs as well as enhancing program accountability and ensuring program coherence at national, regional and local levels.
- c) Management will also explore the possibility of the program's administration at a national level, with HRSDC headquarters providing the framework for regional planning to set priorities for CFPs that recognize and support the unique needs of PwDs in each province and territory. Such an approach would include annual priority setting sessions each year with regional representatives and stakeholders.



## **IV. Conclusion**

This Summative Evaluation report includes several positive findings, as well as areas for improvement. Changes have been made to the program since the study period that addresses some of the observations and management is committed to continuous improvement to strengthen the program.

It should be noted that the existing delivery mechanism for the program may change in the future as a result of ongoing discussions and negotiations with provinces/territories within the context of the new labour market architecture, announced in Budget 2007. In light of this, management is working with departmental senior managers and central agencies to move forward on extending and realigning the program so that it can continue to meet the diverse needs of PwDs in Canada until final decisions are made.



# *1. Introduction and Context for Evaluation*

## **1.1 Purpose of the Report**

The purpose of this document is to report the findings of data collected and analyzed for the Summative Evaluation of the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities (OF). The evaluation methodologies included:

- Document Review;
- Literature Review;
- Expert and Key Informant Interviews;
- Survey of Sponsors, Community Coordinators and Employers;
- Preliminary Survey of Program Participants;
- Client Case Studies;
- Qualitative Analysis;
- Review of RMAF and Administrative Data Analysis;
- Survey of Program Participants; and
- Cost-Effectiveness Analysis.

The Opportunities Fund 2003 Results-Based Management and Accountability Framework (RMAF) specified that an evaluation of the OF programs and interventions take place in 2004 - 05. Following a peer review of the 2004 evaluation methodology report, it was recommended that the evaluation be conducted in two phases to address data gaps related to assessing client outcomes in the areas of employment and income. Client participation in other labour market support programs, such as the Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities (LMAPD), formerly Employability Assistance for People with Disabilities (EAPD) and the Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDA), would first need to be determined in order to draw findings relating to impacts of the OF on the program's target clients.

To address this data limitation, the evaluation team developed a number of alternative methods to determine causality and explore the concept of overlap and duplication – including a qualitative analysis and analysis of program administrative data and CRA data. These methods are further explored throughout the evaluation.

## 1.2 Background on Opportunities Fund

In response to an identified gap in labour market programming for persons with disabilities, the Department of Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC)<sup>3</sup> launched the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities (OF) in 1997. The objective of the \$30 million a year program is to assist persons with disabilities in preparing for, obtaining and keeping employment or becoming self-employed, thereby increasing their economic participation and independence. The program is open to individuals who: self identify as having a disability; are unemployed; legally entitled to work in Canada; and require assistance to prepare for or obtain employment or to become self-employed. The intent of the program is to assist persons with disabilities who normally have little or no labour market attachment and do not qualify for assistance under Part II of the *Employment Insurance Act* (unless under exceptional circumstances, as indicated by the program's Terms and Conditions modified in September 2002). The OF has assisted over 45,000 Canadians since its inception.

OF is funded from the Consolidated Revenue Fund (CRF). Of the \$30 million in annual funding, approximately \$21.6 million in contribution funding is distributed to local Service Canada Centres (SCC's) to provide financial assistance in support of activities designed to assist PWDs prepare for, obtain and maintain employment. An additional \$5.2 million is retained at the national level to fund activities under the OF National Projects option. The remaining \$3.2 million is administrative costs related to the delivery of the program.

## 1.3 Evaluation Objectives and Issues

The OF's Results-Based Management and Accountability Framework (RMAF), completed in January 2003, specified that an evaluation take place in 2004 - 05. The main focus of this summative evaluation was to assess impacts and effects in the areas of employability enhancement, employment, and change in income that can be attributed to the program. The evaluation also reviewed the appropriateness of the RMAF and the feasibility of collecting performance measures on an on-going basis. The evaluation activities were designed to complement OF's on-going program performance monitoring activities and to address gaps identified in the previous evaluation.

The evaluation issues addressed in the evaluation were:

- Program Rationale and Relevance;
- Program Implementation and Objective Achievement;
- Program Monitoring and Client Profile; and
- Impacts and Effects.

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<sup>3</sup> Since the outset of this evaluation, HRDC was split into Social Development Canada, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada and Service Canada. Subsequently, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada merged with Social Development Canada to form Human Resources and Social Development Canada. The Opportunities Fund presently falls under the aegis of Human Resources and Social Development Canada. The report will hereafter refer to Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC) rather than HRDC.

The original matrix of Evaluation Issues, Questions, Information Sources/Indicators and Methodologies is provided in Appendix A, Appendix B provides a more in-depth discussion of the evaluation objectives and issues.

## **1.4 Evaluation Methodologies**

The methodology for this evaluation is based on multiple lines of evidence. The main focus of research design and data collection was to address program rational, program relevance, and program implementation issues. During the initial data collection stages, preliminary information was obtained on other variables such as the client profile and post-program outcomes, impacts and effects. Subsequent data collection activities provided detailed quantitative evidence on program monitoring, client profile and the impacts and effects of the program.

The evaluation relies on the combined results from program administrative information databases, clientele survey information, EI database and CRA income tax information and the qualitative assessment of overlap and duplication. Combined, these data sources provide a useful information base from which to draw findings on the overall effectiveness, impacts and relevance of the program.

A more detailed description of the methodological approach is provided in Appendix C.

## **1.5 Methodological Strengths and Limitations**

Table 1.1 provides a summary of the strengths and weaknesses of the evaluation methodologies. The key strengths included the use of multiple lines of evidence, such as diverse qualitative and quantitative methodologies to address the evaluation issues and questions. The availability of very detailed earnings, EI and SA data for all participants was critical to the analysis of the earnings and employment outcomes for the program participants.

Limitations included the absence of some administrative data, such as gaps in the information of types of interventions received, the costs of interventions and the nature and type of disabilities for the clients served. The lack of similar data sources for LMAPD at the provincial level also impedes directly assessing the overlap and duplication issue.

The major limitation was the absence of a true comparison group to measure incremental program impacts. Due to a lack of sufficient client data, it was impossible to construct a true comparison group using statistical matching techniques. However, three different quasi-comparison groups were constructed to address this issue. As such, the following incremental program impact findings are derived from results from pre-and-post program comparisons and what can be gleaned from the quasi-comparison groups. While self-selection bias has not totally been eliminated, the results of the quasi-comparison groups tend to support the other lines of evidence used in this evaluation.

Additional detail on the methodology and related limitations is provided in Appendix C.

<b>Table 1.1</b> <b>Summary of Methodological Strengths and Weaknesses</b>	
<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
Multiple lines of evidence	No external comparison group
Detailed administrative income data on income for all participants	Gaps in administrative data (e.g. types of interventions, individual intervention costs, nature and severity of the disabilities)
Testing using pre/post analysis across different client groups and use of participant internal comparison group to estimate program impacts	Lower response rates may affect the results of survey data (weighting adjustments used to limit impact of potential biases due lower response rates)

## ***2. Findings – Program Rationale and Relevance***

### **2.1 Program Relevance**

*Evaluation Question 1: Are the objectives of the Opportunities Fund still relevant in the context of other Federal and Provincial programming to integrate Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) into the labour force?*

***Finding: The objectives of the Opportunities Fund continue to remain relevant due to programming gaps and varying eligibility criteria across programs for persons with disabilities.***

Research, in particular the 2001 Statistics Canada Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS) data as cited in *Advancing the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities: A Government of Canada Report* (Government of Canada, 2004), has identified the extent to which barriers to employment impact the employability of persons with disabilities. For example, adults with disabilities are over three times more likely to be out of the labour force than adults without disabilities. Analysis of PALS data also suggests that many working-age adults with disabilities, who are unemployed or out of the labour force, are potentially employable.

The literature also suggests that, in order to successfully support the integration of a heterogeneous segment of society such as PWDs into the labour force, coordinated planning, combined resources and a variety of approaches from all orders of government is required. This need for joint responsibility from all orders of government is reinforced by public opinion. For example, results from a telephone survey of Canadians show that, “when it comes to maintaining stable employment [for PWDs], Canadians view governments and employers as equally essential in providing support.”<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, the need for an integrated strategy to address gaps in programming for PWDs was one of the main conclusions of the 1997 Scott Task Force (the Task Force led to the creation of the Opportunities Fund). The original rationale - the need to address programming gaps - was reflected in program renewal documentation. Similarly, results from expert and key informant interviews illustrate that the gap filling role of the OF is meeting an essential social need, reporting that the OF objectives are very relevant considering the unmet employability needs of many PWDs. As such, the evaluation results found that the program addresses service gaps in assisting PWDs who are not fully served by other federal or provincial government programs.

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<sup>4</sup> Office for Disability Issues, *Advancing the Inclusion of Persons With Disabilities*, Government of Canada, 2004, p. 14.

## 2.2 Program Complementarity, Overlap and Duplication

*Evaluation Question 2: Does the Opportunities Fund complement, overlap or duplicate other Federal and Provincial employment programs for persons with disabilities?*

***Finding: There is little evidence to indicate that the existing overlap between the OF and other employment programs is a problem.***<sup>5</sup>

The literature and document reviews found that while a number of Federal and Provincial programs offer similar types of support services and programs for PWDs, the services and programs offered, the eligibility criteria and even the definition of disability used, varies. However, the potential for unacceptable levels of overlap remains. For example, the review showed that there are a growing number of employability programs for PWDs, and the services they provide are becoming more general in nature. Similarly, the report, *A Review of Government of Canada Labour Market Initiatives for Persons with Disabilities* (Social Development Canada, September 30, 2004), identified the growing possibility for overlap/duplication between OF and LMAPD activities as more LMAPD funding becomes available to the provinces. It is assumed that this increased funding could lead to more and increasingly diverse interventions, which may increase the likelihood for overlap/duplication.

A qualitative assessment of the potential overlap between OF and LMAPD was conducted using five key criteria and a rating of the potential level of overlap and duplication between the two programs. The analysis determined that the risk for overlap is considered low to medium across the five identified activity areas (program objectives and eligible participant – low; eligible activities, budget and source of funding – medium) and as such concluded that any overlap occurring between the OF and the LMAPD is complementary from a process, clientele served, eligibility criteria, and intervention perspective.

The results of the qualitative assessment are consistent with the opinions of the experts and key informants interviewed for this evaluation. Most expert and key informants reported that while there is a potential for overlap with other programs, OF addresses service gaps that are not being met through other programs, or complements the activities of other programs. The majority of expert and key informants indicated that the OF serves PWDs who are ineligible for other provincial programs. Furthermore, their responses indicated that OF programs and services serve PWDs with urgent needs through a streamlined application process.

In other instances, efforts are being made by the federal and provincial governments and stakeholders to avoid unnecessary overlap by coordination of services and projects through policy and management processes that facilitate program complementarity. In light of this, the OF documents include guidelines stating that activities will be carried out in accordance with harmonization with federal and provincial employment initiatives

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<sup>5</sup> The terms “overlap” and “duplication” are often used interchangeably to describe a program that may be similar in nature. There is, however, a significant difference between the two. Overlap occurs when two orders of government provide, in part, similar programs. When overlap does occur, it is generally complementary, and fills an existing gap in program or service delivery. Duplication, on the other hand, refers to one program being completely unnecessary due to the other order of government’s involvement. Evidence suggests that true ‘duplication’ is rare.



and cooperation and partnership with other governments and partners. The terms and conditions also state that the OF will function as an alternative option for cases where there is no comparable intervention easily accessible for PWDs.

*Evaluation Question 3: To what extent are clients in receipt of other services and programs (e.g. LMAPD and LMDA employment programs for PWDs) that may explain, in part, the results observed in OF clients?*

***Finding: There was minimal overlap between OF and other HRSDC programs, based on results from interviews, expert opinions and the qualitative analysis of this issue.***

HRSDC initiated a process to develop data sharing agreements to access LMAPD data with a number of other jurisdictions. However, due to differences in administrative data collection procedures (not using SIDs as a tracking measure, and/or absence of an electronic database), securing data has proven challenging. An agreement with Ontario is still being pursued at this time, however, it is not expected that the findings from this process will be available in time to inform this evaluation. It is anticipated that an addendum to this report will be provided as soon as results of the analysis are complete.

In order to provide some insight into this issue and to respond to concerns of overlap and duplication, alternative lines of evidence were developed. For example, the evaluation team was able to examine the overlap between OF and other HRSDC programs and services that are used by PWDs. By looking at OF participants in the administrative data file, the team was able to obtain information on interventions used for other HRSDC programs, including EBSMs, the Youth Employment Strategy (YES) and/or Aboriginal program funding codes with start dates in the years 2001 to 2006. In total, there were 16,154 OF interventions for 13,249<sup>6</sup> individual clients with a start date in 2001 to 2006.

Based on this information, the evaluation team was able to determine that, overall, only 6.6% of the OF interventions overlap with non-OF interventions included in the analysis. In other words, only a small number of OF clients received employment interventions from other sources during the same timeframe. Furthermore, approximately two-thirds (65.7%) of this overlap was with EBSM Employment Assistance Services (EAS) interventions - which is consistent with the program design (EAS services are intended for all unemployed Canadians and not specifically limited to participants who are eligible for EI benefits). As such, only 2.3% of the OF interventions had dates overlapping with non-OF interventions. Based on this analysis, the number of participants accessing multiple interventions via multiple sources is relatively small.

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<sup>6</sup> These numbers are difficult to compare with other program statistics due to the use of a calendar year versus fiscal year and the method used to identify unique clients. In some program statistics, new clients are assessed based on starting new interventions that year, the count presented here eliminates repeat use across six years.



# 3. Findings – Program Implementation and Objective Achievement

## 3.1 Social Equity

*Evaluation Question 4: To what extent are social equity objectives met by the program?*

**Finding:** *The social equity impacts of OF extend beyond those originally intended and leads to positive impacts for clients as well as the Canadian workplace.*

There are many definitions of social equity found in the literature. For the purposes of this evaluation, social equity is defined as the equal access of people with disabilities to public services (including education, health and government services overall), labour market and participation in the community overall, as compared to other individuals in the Canadian society.

Based on the above definition, social equity is one of the founding principles of OF as reflected in the *Opportunity Fund for Persons with Disabilities Terms and Conditions for Contributions* (February 14, 2005). The terms and conditions cite that the objective of the OF “is to assist persons with disabilities in preparing for, obtaining and keeping employment or becoming self-employed, thereby increasing their economic participation and independence”. Most expert and key informants agree that the OF program contributes to social equity objectives by improving access to employment, community activities, recreation and public services.

More direct evidence of the social equity impacts is found in the results of the Survey of Sponsors, Community Coordinators, and Employers. According to the employers surveyed, 91 % noted broader social benefits that extended to their organizations including: enhanced openness to hiring persons with disabilities (31.9%); improved employee morale (22%); enhanced corporate image/good publicity (20.9%); and diversity in the organisation (15.7%).

Table 3.1 below illustrates that 54% of firms changed their hiring practices towards PWDs somewhat or to a greater extent as a consequence of partnering with the Opportunities Fund.

<b>Table 3.1</b> <b>Percentage Distribution of the Extent of Participation in the Opportunities Fund Changed The Employers Practices Regarding Hiring Persons with Disabilities</b>	
<b>To what extent has participation in the Opportunities Fund changed your organization’s practices regarding hiring persons with disabilities?</b>	<b>Percent</b>
1 Not at all	38.5%
2	7.8%
3 Somewhat	31.3%
4	10.7%
5 Great Extent	11.7%
N=205	Total=100%
Source: Survey of Sponsors, Community Coordinators, and Employers	

## 3.2 Leveraging

*Evaluation Question 5: To what extent has the program, where possible and appropriate, leveraged services with other levels of government and with organizations?*

***Finding: Where possible, OF program and project activities and partnerships leverage funds and services.***

The *Opportunity Fund for Persons with Disabilities Terms and Conditions for Contributions* (February 14, 2005) states that “where possible and appropriate, the costs of an eligible activity will be shared with the recipient and/or with government and/or the private sector.” According to the survey, Federal government representatives agreed that OF leverages services and funding from other sources.

### **Promising practice in leveraging through Partnerships: SEARCHs**

In partnership with 21 community-based organizations and 14 networks, SEARCHs works towards a coordinated approach to meet the employment needs of people with disabilities in Saskatoon (and area). SEARCHs’ partners include disability organizations with expertise on specific disability issues. They make referrals and provide education and support to partners. They also participate in partner meetings to share information and best practices.

Other funding was received from the Saskatchewan Ministry of Community Resources and Employment to deliver services to clients under EAPD (now LMAPD) funding. The provincial multi-year funding of \$200,000 a year did not cover the services funded under Opportunities Fund.

A majority of funded organizations’ representatives and employers agreed that the program adequately leveraged services. Some employer representatives reported that, given the small amount of funding for the OF, they had no choice but to leverage other sources to provide a fuller range of employment services for the employee. Cost sharing with provincial programs, in cases of post-secondary tuition or the purchase of adaptive equipment, was cited as one example of leveraging.

The Survey of Sponsors, Community Coordinators, and Employers and the case studies similarly confirmed that the OF leveraged other sources of funding. Most project sponsors and community coordinators developed partnerships with other organizations to serve OF clients. For example, ninety-three percent of the sponsor and community coordinators surveyed reported they partnered with other organizations. Three quarters of those partnerships leveraged financial and in-kind contributions.

### **Promising practice in innovative service delivery: BC Centre for Ability**

The BC Centre for Ability is a non-profit organization that works in partnership with other community organizations to provide a continuum of vocational and support services designed to assist unemployed persons with disabilities access the labour market. Assistance can be in the form of a wage subsidy to an employer to hire a person with a disability, assistance to an individual for skills training or assistance to an individual to help them establish a new business. The Community Coordinators project delivered through the BC Centre of Ability served 79 clients with permanent disabilities and who had not been employed in the past three years or more. The demand for the program was higher than anticipated and the entire year’s budget was committed in the first four months of 2004/2005.

In BC the Employment Program for Persons with Disabilities (EPPD) provides similar services (pre-employment and employment services) to OF. The two programs are complementary as OF covers some costs that EPPD does not. For example, OF pays for living support while EPPD does not. EPPD can pay for a client's tuition, while OF can be used to provide living support. The provincial government does not provide income assistance during training / education. Cost sharing and collaboration between the provincial and federal government was noted to be a strength in this region with good levels of awareness of programs and services for persons with disabilities among provincial and federal representatives. This awareness helps to ensure clients are not receiving similar services from both the federal and provincial governments and strives to enhance and complement each other.

OF funding provided to employers also leveraged expenditures and services beyond the amounts covered by the program. For nearly half (45%) of the employers, OF leveraged funding in the form of additional costs (e.g. training and administration costs), that were not covered by OF contributions alone. Examples of leveraging funding from other sources are presented with the example of BC Centre for Abilities. They illustrate how the OF funding can be implemented in a complementary manner with LMAPD funding. These examples demonstrate the complementarity of the OF funding relative to other sources of funding.

*Evaluation Question 6: To what extent has the program demonstrated innovative approaches and best practices?*<sup>7</sup>

***Finding: Innovative programming is a key funding criterion to the allocation of scarce program resources, and it is used a portion of the time when circumstances are conducive.***

The document review found that the OF was originally established to support the development of new and innovative approaches to support the labour market participation of Canadians with disabilities. Early program evaluations noted that the program placed its focus towards supporting the delivery of core employment services. The key informant interviews emphasized that the need to fill program gaps, rather than focusing on the innovative nature of the programs and services, should be the rationale for the OF. For example, in the absence of other available programs and services, OF can serve to fund core employment programs and services based on promising practices that have been developed and used in other regions. While this may not necessarily involve truly innovative program delivery, it does focus on the adaptation of a new approach in communities where this service was not previously available. In addition, there may be limited occasions to provide innovative programs and services where gaps in core programming exist, while promising practices can be adapted to meet local needs.

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<sup>7</sup> While there are many sources that continue to use the term best practices, we will use the term 'promising practices' to refer to approaches that have been identified from the literature and confirmed by expert opinion to represent the "best" approaches for delivering labour market programs for PWDs.

There was agreement between evidence collected from the literature and the expert and key informant interviews that certain approaches, services and strategies are promising practices<sup>8</sup>. These include:

- Partnerships among delivery organizations to share resources and information;
- Programs that establish strong partnerships with employers;
- Tailored, holistic approaches involving multiple programs and services provided to clients;
- Job mentoring and coaching;
- Provision of job and home supports; and
- Client follow-up and long-term and more intensive support for PWDs with extensive and chronic needs.

While the review of program documentation found that the above promising practices are evident in some aspects of OF program implementation, there have been barriers to achieving this objective. For example, OF applicants are not directly asked to provide evidence of best practices or innovation in their proposals. There was also limited evidence of any systematic information provided by OF management to service providers on the results of innovations or promising practices funded under OF.

Program management, however, indicated that innovative programming is often used as a funding criterion to allocate scarce program resources, giving preference to projects with innovative programs and services over projects that fund more traditional approaches to service delivery. Consequently, it is possible to conclude that innovative approaches may be used a portion of the time when circumstances are conducive, in most cases; programs are developed based on promising practices as “a new way” to deliver services required by clients in a specific location.

*Evaluation Question 7: What types of alternative design and delivery approaches could the program adopt to improve outcomes?*

***Finding: Improving inter-governmental and departmental coordination should continue to be a key focus for the OF program delivery.***

There were many alternative design and delivery approaches found in the literature review and suggested by key informants. These include: coordination with other government departments or orders of government; using an outcome-based funding model; enhanced post-program monitoring of clients; greater employer-service provider engagement; and, provision of training and accreditation of delivery personnel. Of these alternative approaches, the following are most relevant to the OF design and delivery. However, each has inherent challenges that must be thoroughly examined before applying it to any OF programs.

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<sup>8</sup> Disability Policies and Programs: Lessons Learned. November 2000. Promising Practices in Employability Assistance for People with Disabilities (EAPD) Funded Programs and Services. August 2002.

One of the more interesting alternative delivery models examined was the use of outcome-based funding in the U.S. The *Evaluation of the Ticket to Work Program: Initial Evaluation Report* (Ticket to Work) (Edwards, M., Fraker, T., Kregal, J., Livermore, G., O'Day, B., Revell, G., Jr., Schroeder, H., Silva, T., Stapleton, D., and Thornton, C., 2004) outlines the use of performance based incentives for service providers. The study notes that “the new options have substantially stronger performance incentives because they require a beneficiary to exit cash benefit status by reason of increased earnings for 60 months before the provider receives full payment.”

Review of the initial findings of the Ticket to Work evaluation highlight several problems with this approach. For example, some service providers were “creaming” or selecting only the clients most likely to succeed in obtaining employment. At the same time, ‘higher-need’ clients were unable to participate in the program due to higher risks associated with service costs and positive outcomes. Similarly, the original design of the program intended to expand the number of service providers. However, due to the substantial up-front costs required before payment is received, the program actually diminished the number of participating organizations. As such, while outcome-based funding models may have intrinsic appeal, the selection of the outcome criteria and the funding formulas must be carefully tested to avoid the problems observed in the Ticket to Work evaluation<sup>9</sup>.

Another alternative design is the inclusion of funding for the training and accreditation of the service providers. The literature review found that effective training and employment measures also require sufficient personnel resources. A summary of research in Europe<sup>10</sup> concluded that the one of the reasons for poor training and employment measures take-up was the lack of staff with sufficient training on disability issues. A related conclusion was that training and accreditation of personal advisors needed more attention to improve service delivery to PWDs.

Another area of convergence for results from both the literature review and key informant interviews was the importance of inter-governmental and departmental coordination. OF program managers cited strengthening partnerships, particularly at the federal/provincial/territorial levels (e.g. annual F/P/T conferences, multi-stakeholder committees at local levels), as one area of improvement for OF. An example of positive federal-provincial coordination is provided in the case study below.

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<sup>9</sup> Performance-based funding becomes a problem (e.g. leading to creaming) only when the performance measure is the final output, rather than the appropriate measure of value-add. When value-add is used, creaming is not an issue.

<sup>10</sup> De Kok, Jan, Prins, Rienk, and Micha, Van Line. Active Labour Market Programmes for People with Disabilities, Facts and figures on use and impact. EIM Business and Policy Research, Zoetermeer, 2002.

### **Case Study: SPHERE-Québec**

In Quebec, OF is delivered through two distinct mechanisms: one for individual measures, that is, services and supports to individuals, and the other for collective measures. Responsibility for delivery of individual measures is outsourced to a third party organization called SPHERE-Québec (SQ) (formerly Comité d'adaptation de la main-d'œuvre (CAMO)).

Intake of OF clients for individual measures in Quebec is generally done (with a few exceptions) by the Service spécialisé de main-d'œuvre pour personnes handicapées (SSMO). SSMOs are provincially funded through Emploi-Quebec and are networked throughout the province. The delivery of services is conducted in partnership using existing *Tables régionales de concertation*. These Tables (or consultation groups) are composed of representatives from various organizations (service and fundraising organizations, unions, private sector, and government, including SPHERE-Québec and SSMOs) that promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in society through employment. The Tables' mandate is to identify needs and initiate and support regional initiatives targeting the integration of persons with disabilities in activities that will lead to employment.

*Evaluation Question 8: How do clients and partners become aware of the program?*

***Finding: The main sources of program awareness are the NGOs, word-of-mouth from relatives and friends, and the federal government.***

Table 3.2 provides the survey responses to questions on the clients' awareness of the OF program. As demonstrated, 51.1% of the participants indicated that they were aware of the OF program. This level of awareness was relatively consistent across years but dropped to 47% for respondents who started their programs and services in 2004 or 2005.

Of the 51.1% of participants aware of the program, 23.4% became aware of the program through an NGO, 17.9% heard about it through a relative/friend or word-of-mouth, 17.2% became aware of the program through the federal government and 10.7% through their provincial/territorial government. All other sources of awareness were below 10%.



**Table 3.2**  
**Program Awareness by Program Start Year<sup>11</sup>**

	2000	2001	2002/2003	2004/2005	Total
<b>Aware of OF program *</b>					
Yes	50.3%	53.1%	54.7%	46.6%	51.1%
No	46.6%	45.6%	42.6%	48.9%	45.9%
Don't know	3.1%	1.3%	2.7%	4.5%	3.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Number of Respondents	510	343	545	559	1,957
<b>Method of awareness</b>					
Federal government	21.3%	14.1%	18.9%	12.3%	17.2%
Provincial/territorial government	9.6%	11.1%	10.2%	12.3%	10.7%
Municipal government	3.1%	3.5%	2.1%	.4%	2.3%
Non-governmental Organization for PWDs	23.0%	23.2%	22.1%	25.4%	23.4%
Internet site	2.4%	6.1%	3.5%	3.5%	3.7%
Private business	5.5%	3.0%	3.2%	3.1%	3.8%
School board/high school	1.4%	2.0%	1.8%	1.8%	1.7%
Community college/university	.7%	1.0%	2.1%	1.8%	1.4%
Relative/friend/word-of-mouth	15.8%	18.2%	17.5%	20.6%	17.9%
Newspaper/Ad/Media	5.2%	7.1%	3.5%	6.6%	5.4%
Other	3.8%	1.0%	3.9%	.9%	2.6%
Don't know	8.2%	9.6%	11.2%	11.4%	10.1%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Number of Respondents	261	177	292	270	1,000
Source: OF Survey Data, Note: * $p < .05$ , ** $p < .01$ , *** $p < .001$ . <sup>12</sup>					

<sup>11</sup> Since the number of cases in the later program start years was smaller, the years were grouped combining start years 2002 and 2003 and also 2004 and 2005. These are combined calendar years and should not be confused with fiscal years.

<sup>12</sup> The asterisks indicate the significance level of the tests conducted to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the years presented in the table. For categorical variables the tests were based on a Pearson Chi-Square statistic and for continuous data it was based on an F-test.



## ***4. Findings – Program Monitoring and Client Profile***

### **4.1 Program Monitoring**

*Evaluation Question 9: Has the Opportunities Fund performance monitoring complied with the RMAF and is the design of the RMAF appropriate?*

***Finding: The performance monitoring information and reporting is in accordance with the specifications of the RMAF.***

The performance measurement framework, as identified in the program logic model, has 20 performance indicators for the outputs, short-term outcomes, intermediate-term outcomes and long-term outcomes. The majority of the performance indicators related to outcomes (16) are collected and reported upon monthly. Four indicators that relate to the long-term outcomes (weeks employed, dependence on passive income support increased percentage of income from earned income, and percentage of participants with ongoing attachment to the labour force) are collected at different times throughout the evaluation cycle. Given that information related to these outcomes is not easily accessible except on a longer term basis, the indicators and measures selected for less frequent reporting are appropriate. Consideration should be given, however, to using an *alternative on-going monitoring approach to measure* these outcomes by using linkages with CRA data. Although there is a lag in the availability of CRA data (e.g. 2006 will likely not be available until early 2008), providing more depth in tracking performance with more frequency will allow greater understanding of how the program is performing on these measures.

*Evaluation Question 10: To what extent has the program improved the use of administrative databases and data collection to report performance monitoring activities and track clients?*

***Finding: There has been a continued improvement in the availability and quality of OF administrative data since the program was first put in place.***

The OF administrative data for the earlier years (i.e. 2000 – 2004) had significant gaps which included very little information on the type of interventions the participants received (a large majority were simply recorded as “other”). This posed a significant problem for the analysis of the OF administrative data for this evaluation. Recently, however, the availability of information on the types of disabilities has improved, and approximately 66% of program participants’ profile includes this variable. That said, on-going improvements may include greater capacity to capture more than one disability type and the severity of each disability. Data collection on the educational attainment of the participants at program intake would also be extremely useful.

As noted above, program management could make greater use of other sources of information, such as CRA data, to track long-term outcomes on a more regular basis than simply during the evaluation cycle. An annual update to the evaluation could be conducted to measure outcomes overall and by key population segments. Another useful addition would be cost data for individual expenditures. While this is currently available in some cases, there are gaps when associating costs of services and individual intervention costs, such as with EAS. One solution may be for service providers to input individual costs. Cost data could then be used to track average costs for program delivery by type of intervention and other related characteristics. This information could also be used to estimate the cost-effectiveness of outcomes achieved, thus allowing the calculation of the benefits of individual interventions versus the costs of these interventions.

## 4.2 Client Profile

*Evaluation Question 11: What is the profile of clients by type of intervention, type of disability and relevant socio-economic variables?*

***Finding: Just over 63% of participant respondents reported taking either TWS, SD or both. The SE benefit was not greatly accessed. EAS-only clients increased to 3 out of 10 participants by 2004/05<sup>13</sup>.***

To facilitate the subsequent discussion and analysis of employment programs and services used, a typology of program use was developed (Table 4.1). The following typology grouped survey responses regarding the use of employment programs and services under these various headings.

- *Resource Centre Only – 7.5%:* Respondents used only a resource centre or reported no other EAS or other program activities such as Targeted Wage Subsidies (TWS), Skills Development (SD) or Self Employment (SE). These clients represent the minimum of program involvement - the only reported activity was the use of a resource centre and related self-directed job search activities (use of job bank, kiosks, etc. to find employment).
- *Case Management/Counselling Only – 21.7%:* These clients participated in EAS activities but no other program activities (TWS, SD or SE). These participants received either case management or counselling but may also have used a resource centre as well. This category of program participants increased substantially over the most recent two years the survey covered, nearly doubling from the 17.7% recorded in 2002/2003 calendar years to 31.2% in 2004/2005. This increase was largely at the expense of the TWS and SD interventions which showed declining use over time (including combinations of these interventions).
- *TWS – 24.8%:* These survey respondents reported participating in Targeted Wage Subsidy programming such as a job placement or a wage subsidy job or one of these activities in combination with EAS activities but no other major interventions (SD or SE).

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<sup>13</sup> Because a large percentage of data regarding types of intervention used by clients was missing in the administrative database prior to 2003/2004, survey data, rather than administrative data, was used for this analysis.

- *SD* – 21.5%: These survey respondents reported participating in a Skills Development Program such as an education or training course or SD in combination with EAS activities but no other major interventions (TWS or SE).
- *SE* – 3.1%: These survey respondents reported self-employment assistance or self-employment assistance in combination with EAS activities but no other major interventions (TWS or SD).
- *SD and TWS* – 17.0%: These survey respondents reported TWS and SD activities or these two activities in combination with EAS activities but no other major interventions (SE).
- *Other Combinations* – 4.5%: These survey respondents reported SE in combination with TWS or SD or possibly both of these other interventions and may also have received EAS.

**Table 4.1**  
Type of Program Use by Program Start Year

Type of Program Participation***	2000	2001	2002/2003	2004/2005	Total
Resource centre/ No Other specific activity	7.1%	7.0%	7.9%	8.0%	7.5%
Case management/ Counselling only	18.5%	19.9%	17.7%	31.2%	21.7%
TWS	22.7%	25.8%	30.7%	20.1%	24.8%
SD	24.9%	19.4%	19.6%	20.9%	21.5%
SE	3.1%	3.8%	2.7%	3.1%	3.1%
SD and TWS	18.2%	20.2%	17.5%	12.5%	17.0%
Other Combinations	5.5%	4.0%	4.0%	4.1%	4.5%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Number of Respondents	510	344	545	559	1,958

Source: Survey Data, Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Finding:** Available data illustrates that the OF serves a broad spectrum of persons with disabilities in terms of types and severity of disability.

Key socio-demographic characteristics, according to the administrative data included:

- The distribution of males and females was almost equal with slightly more male participants (53.4%) than females (46.6%).
- OF participants were represented across all age groups – 19.7% under the age of 25, 22.8% were ages 25 to 34, 28.5% were ages 35 to 44, 29.0% were ages 45 and over.
- The majority (58.8%) of the survey respondents were single/never married, 25.5% were married or living in a common-law relationship, and 14.9% were separated, divorced, or widowed. The percentage of single respondents rose from 51.2% in 2000 to approximately 62% in the subsequent years.

- Just under 9% of survey participants self-identified as being an Aboriginal person and 21.3% of respondents self-identified as being a member of a visible minority group.
- Approximately one in five survey respondents did not graduate high school (21.0%) and 31.6% had graduated high school but did not have any post-secondary education. Just under half (47.4%) of the respondents reported at least some post-secondary education, including 20.2% who had completed college and 12.4% who had a university degree.

Interestingly, there were substantial changes in the regional distribution of participants between 2000 and 2006, with the Atlantic and Prairies having large increases in the percentage of participants. For example, the number of participants in the Atlantic region rose from 9% in 2000 to 2003 and then leapt to 17.0% in the years 2004 and 2005. The percentage of participants from the Prairies also increased dramatically, from 11.3% in 2000 to 20.8% in 2001 and then to approximately 30% between the years 2002 to 2005. Conversely, participants residing in B.C. dropped from 22.2% in 2000 to 11.7% in 2004 and 2005 while Ontario dropped from 37.2% to 23.9% respectively. Quebec only decreased very slightly during this timeframe, 13.8% to 8.3%. The reasons behind these shifts are currently unknown; however, because APEs may include multiple interventions over more than one year, the pattern of the regional distribution for the APEs may be different from the individual interventions.

In terms of the types of disability (Table 4.2), the respondents were almost equally divided between the number who experience mobility/agility/pain related disabilities (49.2%) and those who live with learning/memory/psychological related disabilities (52.2%)<sup>14</sup>. Other, less frequent, disabilities experienced by participants included sight (13.0%), speech (5.7%) and hearing (5.6%) disabilities.

There was a relatively even distribution in the severity of the disability reported by the survey respondents – 28.1% rated their disability as mild, 36.8% rated their disability as moderate and 31.73% rated their disability as severe or very severe.

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<sup>14</sup> Note totals exceed 100% because these categories are not mutually exclusive.

**Table 4.2**  
**Nature and Severity of Disability by Program Start Year**

	2000	2001	2002/2003	2004/2005	Total
<b>Nature of Disability<sup>a</sup></b>					
Hearing	6.9%	5.7%	5.0%	4.9%	5.6%
Seeing *	10.0%	10.1%	15.0%	16.0%	13.0%
Speech	4.7%	7.9%	6.3%	4.7%	5.7%
Mobility/Agility/Pain	52.2%	50.5%	48.9%	49.5%	52.2%
Learning/Memory/Psychological	46.0%	49.8%	48.5%	53.0%	49.2%
Number of Respondents	399	293	476	491	1,659
<b>Severity of disability in terms of the limitations in the kind/ amount of work</b>					
Mild	26.6%	26.3%	29.7%	29.1%	28.1%
Moderate	36.6%	35.4%	38.0%	36.8%	36.8%
Severe	25.0%	27.5%	22.8%	22.8%	24.3%
Very Severe	8.5%	7.9%	6.5%	6.8%	7.4%
Don't know	3.1%	2.2%	2.4%	4.0%	3.0%
Refused	0.2%	0.6%	0.7%	0.5%	0.5%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Number of Respondents	399	293	476	491	1,659
Source: Survey Data, Note: * $p < .05$ , ** $p < .01$ , *** $p < .001$ .					
<sup>a</sup> Respondents were allowed to select more than one category and therefore the total for these percentages may exceed 100 percent.					

***Finding: The OF clientele consists of clients: (1) with very low labour market experience and earnings in the years prior to their program participation; and, (2) relatively high dependency on SA income.***

The earnings profile of the OF clientele has been consistently very low (Table 4.3), following a major shift in clientele after the year 2000 when EI eligible clients were reduced to a very small percentage of OF participants. The decline in EI eligible clients was the result of improved enforcement of the eligibility criteria that excludes EI eligible clients. Between program start years 2001 to 2005, the average earned income was approximately \$2,400 and over 55% reported no earned income at all. This low level of earned income was consistent up to three years prior to the program start year.

EI income was negligible, in the program start years 2001 to 2005, the average EI income did not exceed \$200. SA income, however, played a much more prominent role in the earnings of the OF clients (Table 4.4). Overall, 54.5% of survey participants had some SA income and 38.3% had more than \$5K in SA income. The mean SA income for the year prior to their program participation was \$3.8K. The mean SA income increased from \$2.9K in 2000 to approximately \$4.1K in the subsequent start years. On average, the SA income for OF participants exceeded their earnings.

**Table 4.3**  
**Prior Earnings by Program Start Year**

	2000	2001	2002/2003	2004/2005	Total
<b>Earnings One Year Prior</b>					
No Earnings	41.3%	54.8%	56.6%	59.6%	52.5%
1\$ to \$10K	33.3%	38.7%	38.4%	33.8%	35.8%
\$10.1K to \$20K	15.3%	4.0%	2.7%	3.8%	7.0%
\$20.1 to \$40K	8.3%	1.8%	1.6%	2.0%	3.7%
Over \$40K	1.6%	0.8%	0.6%	0.8%	1.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Number of Participants	4,375	2,816	3,918	3,669	14,778
<b>Mean Earnings – 1 Year Prior</b>	\$6,429	\$2,425	\$2,108	\$2,371	\$3,513
<b>Mean Earnings – 2 Years Prior</b>	\$5,574	\$2,256	\$2,357	\$2,610	\$3,349
<b>Mean Earnings – 3 Years Prior</b>	\$5,087	\$2,246	\$2,498	\$3,067	\$3,355
Source: Administrative Data					

**Table 4.4**  
**Prior EI and SA Income by Program Start Year**

	2000	2001	2002/2003	2004/2005	Total
<b>EI One Year Prior</b>					
No EI	83.3%	95.8%	97.1%	96.5%	92.6%
1\$ to \$2.5K	6.8%	1.6%	1.3%	1.2%	3.0%
\$2.51K to \$5K	5.0%	1.4%	0.8%	1.0%	2.2%
\$5.1K to \$10K	3.9%	0.7%	0.6%	0.9%	1.7%
Over \$10K	1.0%	0.5%	0.2%	0.4%	0.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Number of Participants	4,114	2,567	3,679	3,437	13,797
<b>Mean EI – 1 Year Prior</b>	\$653	\$191	\$123	\$182	\$309
<b>Mean EI – 2 Years Prior</b>	\$614	\$150	\$89	\$221	\$290
<b>Mean EI – 3 Years Prior</b>	\$571	\$211	\$149	\$291	\$323
<b>SA One Year Prior</b>					
No SA	54.9%	42.1%	40.0%	42.3%	45.4%
1\$ to \$2.5K	8.1%	7.2%	6.5%	7.1%	7.3%
\$2.51K to \$5K	7.9%	10.2%	9.9%	8.7%	9.1%
\$5.1K to \$10K	21.5%	28.2%	31.1%	29.9%	27.4%
Over \$10K	7.5%	12.3%	12.5%	12.0%	10.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Number of Participants	4,114	2,567	3,679	3,437	13,797
<b>Mean SA – 1 Year Prior</b>	\$2,949	\$4,087	\$4,386	\$4,171	\$3,848
<b>Mean SA – 2 Years Prior</b>	\$3,158	\$3,977	\$4,150	\$3,959	\$3,774
<b>Mean SA – 3 Years Prior</b>	\$3,233	\$4,023	\$4,154	\$3,731	\$3,746
Source: Administrative Data					



Dependency on social income support is a key outcome measure for the OF evaluation. This is defined as the ratio of EI and SA income to the total income from earnings, EI and SA – expressed as  $(EI + SA)/(EI + SA + \text{Earnings})$ . As evident in Table 4.5, the total income (EI, SA and earnings) in the year prior decreased substantially from \$10.4K for participant who started their programs and services in the 2000 to approximately \$6.8K in the subsequent years. This decrease was due to the reduction in EI eligible clients following the 2000 program start year since EI eligible clients had higher mean earnings than the non-insured clients.

The average dependency ratio in the year prior to program participation was 59.1%, and was higher years post 2000 – 47.0% for participants with a start year in 2000 compared to approximately 65% in later years.

<b>Table 4.5</b>					
<b>Total EI, SA and Earnings and Dependency Ratio by Program Start Year</b>					
	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002/2003</b>	<b>2004/2005</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Total EI, SA and Earnings One Year Prior</b>					
Mean Total EI, SA and Earnings – 1 Year Prior	\$10,371	\$6,883	\$6,687	\$6,806	\$7,852
Mean Total EI, SA and Earnings – 2 Years Prior	\$9,895	\$6,666	\$6,772	\$6,965	\$7,732
Mean Total EI, SA and Earnings – 3 Years Prior	\$9,623	\$6,969	\$7,148	\$7,462	\$7,939
<b>Dependency Ratio One Year Prior (EI and SA as a % of Total EI, SA and Earnings)</b>					
Mean Dependency Ratio – 1 Year Prior	47.0%	62.4%	65.5%	65.3%	59.1%
Mean Dependency Ratio – 2 Years Prior	50.3%	63.3%	62.7%	61.6%	58.7%
Mean Dependency Ratio – 3 Years Prior	53.8%	64.8%	62.8%	60.1%	59.8%
Source: Administrative Data					
*Excludes participants with zero total EI, SA and earnings since no ratio can be calculated.					

Consistent with the low levels of earnings from the administrative data, the survey respondents reported limited employment in the year prior to their program participation. On average, during the 12-month period prior to program participation, respondents spent approximately half of their time either unemployed and looking for work (3 months) or unemployed not looking for work (2.9 months). Only 2.2 months out of the past 12 months were spent employed full-time, with 1.6 months in part-time employment.

*Evaluation Question 12: What is the client profile, by reasons and circumstances, of those persons with disabilities who were eligible for assistance under EI Part II but because of exceptional circumstances, were approved to receive assistance under the Opportunities Fund program?*

***Finding: Post year 2000, only a very small percentage of OF participants were active or former EI clients, and this demonstrates implementation improvement from the previous round of evaluation.***

Table 4.6 shows the clear shift away from including either active or former EI clients as clients of the OF program. The findings confirm the program has significantly improved the enforcement of the eligibility criteria in that the number of EI client participants decreased significantly. For example, of the participants with a program start year in 2000, nearly 22% were active EI clients, another 11% were former EI clients and 68% were non-insured. In the following years, only 6% were either active or former EI clients – the vast majority, 94%, were non-insured. The administrative databases created for the evaluation provided little insight into the specific circumstances for their approval. According to the key informants, these clients are typically approved because there are no comparable services available from other programs.

<b>Table 4.6</b>					
<b>Percent of Participants Who Were Active Claimants, EI Eligible and Non-Insured by Program Start Year</b>					
	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002/2003</b>	<b>2004/2005</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Client Type</b>					
Active	21.7%	3.3%	1.9%	1.8%	8.0%
Former	10.5%	2.5%	2.7%	4.6%	5.4%
Non-insured	67.8%	94.2%	95.4%	93.6%	86.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Number of Participants	4,456	2,876	4,022	3,772	15,126

### **4.3 Sponsor, Community Coordinator and Employer Profile**

*Evaluation Question 13: What is the profile of sponsors, community coordinators and employers?*

#### **Employer Profile**

***Finding: The majority of the organizations hiring OF clients for work terms were small private businesses with less than 20 employees.***

Organisations responding to the Survey of Sponsors, Community Coordinators, and Employers mainly identified themselves as private businesses (61.8%) and non-governmental organisations (26.5%). Community agencies (15.7%) and educational organizations (3.9%) made up another 20% of the participating organisations.<sup>15</sup> Two-thirds of the firms responding to the survey had twenty employees or less, 44% had less than ten employees.

<sup>15</sup> Note these categories are not mutually exclusive.

Employers tended to hire OF participants because it was their firm's policy to do so (50%) or because the firm was having difficulty recruiting candidates for certain positions (22.5%). Three quarters of employers (75.9%) were involved in the selection of candidates hired under OF, the other 25 percent were selected solely by the organization.

## **Sponsor Profile**

***Finding: Almost all (95%) of the project sponsors and community coordinators were community agencies or NGOs.***

Over half of the sponsors surveyed (56%) identified themselves as community agencies. Non-governmental organisations accounted for just under 39% of the respondents<sup>16</sup>. Another 9.9% of the sponsors were private businesses.

***Finding: Project sponsors and community coordinators serve a diverse OF clientele offering a wide range of employment related services.***

Sponsors identified their primary client groups as persons with a learning, memory, psychological or developmental disability (82.4%). Agility, mobility, or pain was identified by just over 60%. A little less than half of the sponsors noted hearing (45.1%), seeing (44%), and speech (42.9%) disabilities as characteristic of their client groups.

Approximately half (51.8%) of responding organisations served more than 25 participants. One-quarter (25.3%) served more than 100 participants. A little less than 16% served 5 participants or less. The most frequently reported programs or services responding organisations coordinated or delivered under OF included work experience placements or wage subsidies (80.2%), followed closely by counselling on career goals and needs (79.1%).

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<sup>16</sup> Note these categories are not mutually exclusive.



# 5. Findings – Impacts and Effects

## 5.1 Impact on Employability

*Evaluation Question 14: What are the changes in employability by type of intervention and type of disability as a consequence of Opportunities Fund interventions?*

***Finding: Overall, the majority of clients reported the programs and services they participated in had positive impacts on their skills and employability in the post program period, although the perceived impacts have been lower in recent years.***

Based on the client survey:

- Gaining specific job-related skills: 66.3% indicated the programs and services were very useful or somewhat useful – 39.1% felt that the program was very useful for gaining specific job-related skills and 27.2% felt it was somewhat useful. Approximately 29% of the respondents indicated the programs and services were only slightly useful or not at all useful for gaining specific job-related skills.
- Increasing ability to find work in the future: 58.9% provided a somewhat useful or very useful rating – 34.3% felt that the programs and services were very useful for increasing ability to find work in the post program period, and 24.6% felt it was somewhat useful.
- For gaining work experience on-the-job, 53.8% provided a very useful or somewhat useful rating, 33.5% indicated the program and services were very useful for gaining work experience on-the-job, and 20.3% provided a somewhat useful rating.

In all cases, the ratings decreased between earlier start years and the starting years of 2004 and 2005. For example, the percentage who rated their programs and services as very useful for gaining work experience on-the-job was 35.6% for the 2002 and 2003 start years compared to 28.8% for 2004 and 2005. Similarly, the percentage of participants rating programs and services as very useful for gaining specific job-related work skills was 43.2% for the 2002 and 2003 program start years and 35.3% for 2004 and 2005. Interestingly, this result occurred in the same timeframe within which survey participants reported receiving a higher incident of EAS-only intervention.

Respondents also provided an assessment of their perceived change in skills and employability based on their agreement or disagreement to the following questions: “The skills I can bring to a job have increased or improved” and “My ability to get and keep a job has improved”. Overall, 27.2% of respondents strongly agreed and 38.9% agreed that the skills they can now bring to a job have increased or improved. Furthermore, 22% of respondents strongly agreed and 32% agreed that their ability to get and keep a job has improved. Again, the percentage of respondents who agreed with these statements was lower for respondents with a program start date of 2004 or 2005 compared to earlier previous years. For example, approximately 30% of respondents with program start dates prior to 2004, compared to 19% of respondents with 2004 and 2005

start dates, strongly agreed that their intervention increased or improved the skills they brought to the job.

***Finding: There was a modest gain in the educational attainment of the program participants.***

When pre-program and current educational attainment of respondents was compared, there was an 11-percentage point increase in the percent of survey respondents who reported having at least some post-secondary education. It is important to note, however, that some of these gains may have occurred with or without program participation. For example, the respondents who reported only EAS interventions had an increase of 7 to 8 percentage points in the category of having at “least some post-secondary education.” This is consistent with the respondents who reported only TWS interventions - a 7-percentage point gain. The largest gains were for the respondents who reported utilizing SD (15% points), and SD combined with TWS 17% points, interventions. Using the EAS only results as the baseline, the gain in educational attainment for SD and SD combined with TWS was approximately 7 to 10 percentage points.

*Evaluation Question 15: What are the changes in employment by type of intervention and type of disability as a consequence of Opportunities Fund interventions?*

***Finding: There was a substantial and sustained increase in the percentage of OF participants with paid employment compared to pre-program levels.***

Table 5.1 shows the number of employers participants had each year based on the T4S data from CRA files. The percentage of participants with paid employment (at least one employer) increased from 43.3% (total for percentage with 1, 2, 3 or more employers) in the year prior to the program start year to approximately 62% in the program start year. This percentage, however, began to decline, and settled at 53.9% four years after the program start year. Despite this drop in paid employment, the percentage of participants with paid employment from an employer was 10.6 percentage points higher than the year prior to the program start year.

	<b>1 Yr Prior</b>	<b>Program Start Year</b>	<b>1 Yr Post</b>	<b>2 Yr Post</b>	<b>3 Yr Post</b>	<b>4 Yr Post</b>
No Paid Employment	56.6%	37.8%	38.1%	42.9%	44.9%	46.1%
1 Employer	24.8%	34.4%	36.7%	34.5%	32.0%	32.2%
2 Employers	9.9%	15.4%	14.4%	13.5%	12.8%	12.3%
3 or More Employers	8.8%	12.4%	10.8%	9.1%	10.3%	9.4%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Number of Participants	2,876	2,876	2,876	2,876	2,876	2,876
Source: Administrative Data						

***Finding: The percentage of OF participants with ongoing labour market attachment doubled in the post-program period.***

One of the key performance measures for the evaluation was the percentage of OF participants with ongoing attachment to the labour force. Table 5.2 provides the information necessary to address this question - it measures the percentage of program participants with at least one employer across the three post-program years – 2 to 4 years after the program start year<sup>17</sup>. For comparison, the same measures were replicated for the three years prior to the program start year.

Based on the data provided in Table 5.2, there was a large increase in the percentage of OF clients with ongoing labour market attachment. For example, in the three years prior to program participation the percentage of participants in the 2001 cohort with at least one employer in three consecutive years was 20.8%. In the three most recent years available for this analysis 42.3% of these same participants had at least one employer in three consecutive years. This was a 21.5 percentage point increase in participants with consecutive yearly paid employment compared to the years prior to program participation – doubling the pre-program percentage.

<b>Table 5.2</b>		
<b>Pre-Program and Post-Program Number of Years with At Least One Employer – 2001 Participants Only</b>		
	<b>3 Years Prior to 1 Year Prior</b>	<b>2 Years Post Program to 4 Years Post-Program Start Year</b>
No Paid Employment	42.5%	31.8%
1 Year with Paid Employment	19.7%	12.7%
2 Years with Paid Employment	17.0%	13.2%
3 Years with Paid Employment	20.8%	42.3%
Total	100.0%	100.0%
Number of Participants	2,876	2,876
Source: Administrative Data		

***Finding: OF participants reported a 15 percentage point gain in paid employment.***

Survey respondents reported just over six months with paid employment in the most recent 12 months, a gain of 1.8 months compared to the pre-program period (Table 5.3). This included an increase of 1.1 months for full-time employment, and 0.6 months increase for part-time employment. This represents a 15 percentage point gain (1.8 months / 12 months) in paid employment for the respondents. There was also a 0.4 month gain in working at a volunteer job.

<sup>17</sup> An analysis of labour force attachment would normally include analysis of unemployment spells and transitions between labour market states; however, we do not have information on the length of time in various labour market states in the data available to conduct this analysis.

While all respondents reported gains in paid employment, the gains were highest for respondents who reported participating in TWS only and SD and TWS combined programs (2.2 months).

The most significant decrease in paid employment was 1.0 months for those respondents who were unemployed and looking for work. Both “unemployed and not looking for work” and “in school or training full-time” recorded a 0.5 month decrease in paid employment.

<b>Table 5.3</b>							
<b>Average Change in Number of Months Spent Employed, Unemployed and In School During 12 Months Prior to Interview Versus Number of Months Prior to Program by Type of Program Participation</b>							
	<b>Resource centre</b>	<b>Case Management/ counselling</b>	<b>TWS</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>SD and TWS</b>	<b>SE/SE plus TWS/SD</b>	<b>Total</b>
Employed full-time (30+ hrs/week)**	1.0	0.9	1.3	1.3	1.2	-0.2	1.1
Employed part-time and not in school	-0.3	0.3	1.0	0.2	1.1	0.6	0.6
Self-employed	0.2	0.4	-0.1	0.1	0.1	1.4	0.2
Working part-time and attending school part-time	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	-0.2	0.0	0.0
<b>Difference in Paid employment*</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>1.8</b>
Working in a volunteer job	0.4	0.6	0.6	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.4
In school or training full-time	-0.5	-0.5	0.9	-0.2	-0.5	-0.5	-0.5
Unemployed looking for work*	-0.8	-1.1	-1.4	-0.6	-1.3	-0.6	-1.0
Unemployed not looking for work*	0.3	-0.4	-0.4	-0.7	-0.5	-0.8	-0.5
Number of Respondents	145	414	513	402	338	140	1,952

Source: Survey Data, Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

## 5.2 Impact on Earnings, SA and EI

*Evaluation Question 16: What is the change in income earned from employment after Opportunities Fund interventions? And;*

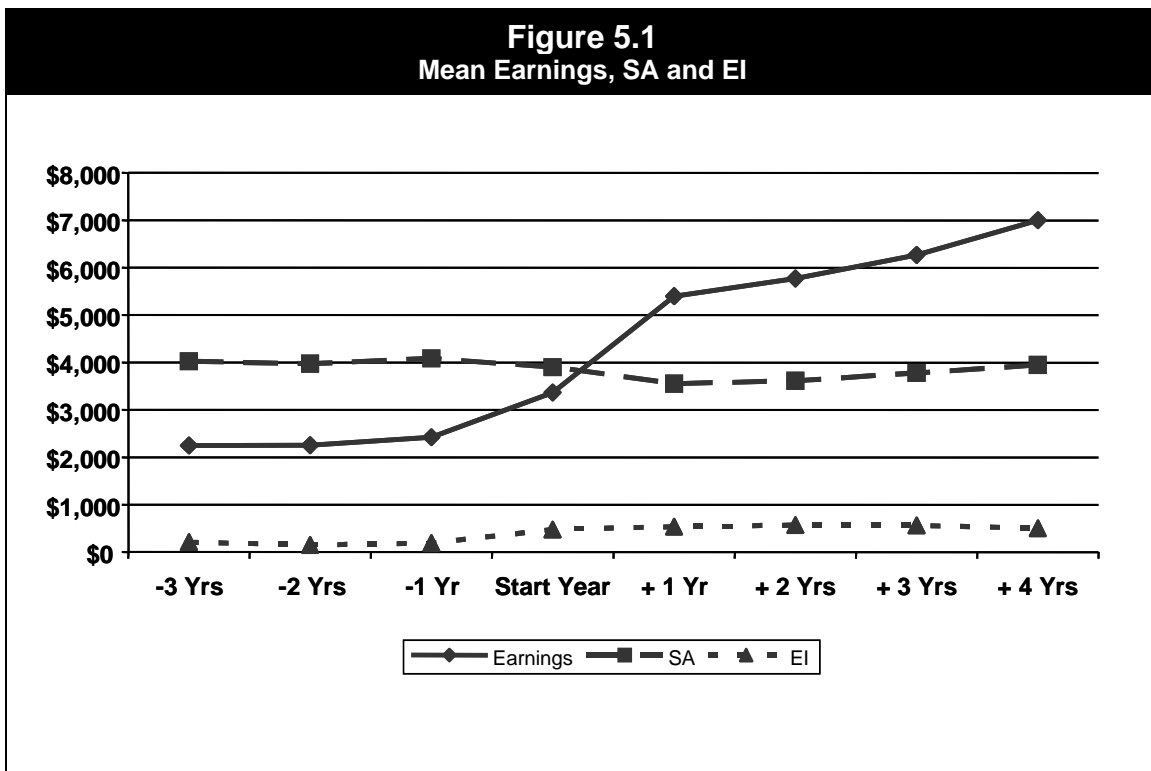
*Evaluation Question 17: What changes in the level of social income support are consequences of Opportunities Fund interventions?*



**Finding:** *OF participants had a substantial and sustained increase in earned income compared to their earnings in the year prior to program participation.*

Figure 5.1 presents the mean Earnings, EI and SA income based on CRA data for the 2001 participants. The detailed figures for this graph are provided in Tables 5.4 and 5.5. OF participants with 2001 start dates were selected for this analysis because they provide up to 4 years of post program start year outcome data, versus three years or less for the 2002 or later cohorts. The year 2000 was not selected due to a higher incidence of EI eligible/claimants in this year.

The data shows a very clear pattern of strong growth in earnings for the OF participants. Compared to the year prior to the participants' program start year, earnings rose from \$2,425 to \$5,401 by one year after the program start year, more than double and by the fourth year the after the program start year earnings reached \$7,002.



**Table 5.4**  
**Mean Earnings, EI and SA – 2001 Participants Only**

	3 Yrs Prior	2 Yrs Prior	1 Yr Prior	Program Start Year	1 Yr Post	2 Yr Post	3 Yr Post	4 Yr Post
Earnings	\$2,246	\$2,256	\$2,425	\$3,367	\$5,401	\$5,768	\$6,268	\$7,002
SA	\$4,023	\$3,977	\$4,087	\$3,905	\$3,555	\$3,616	\$3,775	\$3,951
EI	\$211	\$150	\$191	\$476	\$533	\$571	\$561	\$505

Source: Administrative Data

In total, the earnings gain across the five years compared to the earnings in the year prior to the program start year was \$15,683 (Table 5.5). Although the mean earnings have remained relatively low for this population - only \$7,002 in the most recent time period available - the gains have been relatively impressive considering the fact that prior to the program participation, the mean average earnings of survey respondents was \$2,425.

<b>Table 5.5</b>						
<b>Change in Mean Earnings, EI and SA Relative to Year Prior to Program Start Year – 2001 Participants Only</b>						
	<b>Program Start Year</b>	<b>1 Yr Post</b>	<b>2 Yr Post</b>	<b>3 Yr Post</b>	<b>4 Yr Post</b>	<b>Total Gain/ Loss</b>
Earnings	\$943	\$2,976	\$3,343	\$3,843	\$4,578	\$15,683
SA	-\$182	-\$532	-\$471	-\$312	-\$136	-\$1,632
EI	\$285	\$342	\$380	\$370	\$314	\$1,691
Note these figures are accurate within one dollar due to rounding – the original calculations were based on means including cents – so a simple comparison of the two tables yields minor differences.						
Source: Administrative Data						

***Finding: While the earnings gains were consistent across many different types of clients, there were some sub-populations who benefited more than others from their OF program participation.***

Overall, the size of the earnings gains was relatively similar across several of the different sub-populations of OF participants examined. There were some very notable exceptions. A summary of the segmented analysis of the change in earnings, relative to one year prior to the program start year, is provided below:

- Both males and females had similar earnings gains. Over the five-year period (program start year to four years post-program start year) males earned \$15,833 more compared to their earned income in the year prior to the program start year and females earned just slightly less at \$15,380.
- Older participants had lower earnings gains compared to younger participants. Over the five-year period, as defined above, the earnings gains for participants under age 45 ranged between \$17.1K and \$19.2K. For the 45 to 54 age group and 55 years and over group the total earnings gain was \$8.6K and \$1.8K respectively.
- Quebec participants had the largest earnings gain over the five years - \$27.1K. Atlantic and B.C. participants also experienced large gains, \$18.7K and \$17.1K respectively. Participants from the Prairies (\$13.7K) and Ontario (\$12.5K) had the lowest total earnings gain.
- Respondents who reported a mobility, agility or pain related disability had substantially larger gains over four years when compared to participants who reported a learning, memory, psychological or developmental disability (\$11.8K versus \$6.6K).

***Finding: Participants with the most intensive interventions had the highest gains in earnings.***

Two analyses of participant's sub-groups were conducted to examine the impacts of more intensive interventions. One analysis segmented the participants into short duration (*low intensity*) APEs less than one month in duration and longer duration (*higher intensity*) APEs. The prior earnings data, however, indicated selection bias for the shorter versus longer APEs. Participants with shorter APEs had higher earnings than participants with longer APEs. In the year prior to the program start year, participants with an APE less than one month in duration and 1 to 3 months in duration had a mean earnings of approximately \$3.3K, this dropped to \$2.2K for APEs up to six months in duration and was only \$1.6K for participants with APEs exceeding 12 months in duration. This strongly suggests that the participants with the most labour market challenges (or at least the least labour market experience) were streamed into longer interventions and action plans versus the participants with somewhat more labour market experience. Therefore findings from this analysis may be confounded with program selection bias and should be interpreted with this caveat in mind.

Participants with shorter APEs had a somewhat lower earnings increase in the first two years (the program start year and one year following the program start year). They experienced relatively consistent increases in the subsequent years. The participants with the longest APEs (six months or more), had the largest gains in earnings (\$17,900) over the five year period (program start year to fourth year after the program start year) compared to participants with APEs shorter than one month (\$12,297), for participants with APEs one to three months in duration (\$15,892) and for participants with APEs from three to six months in duration (\$14,983).

The second analysis examined survey respondents<sup>18</sup> who reported receiving only Employment Assistance Service (EAS) types of interventions (*low intensity*) as a comparison group against participants who received higher intensity interventions such as SD, TWS, and SE. Respondents with the least intensive intervention, resource centre only, had the highest prior earnings and the lowest overall earnings gain over the four year period from program start year to the third year after the program start year – approximately \$8,400<sup>19</sup>. The respondents with the most intensive type of participation, TWS combined with SD, had the lowest earnings one year prior to the program start year, \$1,946, and the highest overall earnings gain for the four year period – \$16,100. However, the results for the resource-only group may not be reliable given the small sample size. The other less intensive type of program involvement, case management or counselling only, had results similar to SD only and TWS only. Over the four year period, relative to their year prior earnings, the mean gain in earned income for the respondents who only received case management or counselling was \$10,400 and mean gain for respondents with SD only was \$10,900 and \$12,900 for the respondents who only reported participating in TWS.

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<sup>18</sup> This analysis could only be conducted with the survey respondents since detailed information on the types of interventions received was not available from the administrative data except for later years.

<sup>19</sup> The results by type of program intervention and type of disability had to be based on survey data and results aggregated over several years, consequently only four years of earnings gain could be analyzed – the program start year and three years post-program start year.

The total mean gain in earned income for the respondents who received TWS and SD was statistically significantly higher than the respondents who received only case management or counselling ( $p < .05$ ).

Based on these results, either the impacts of interventions such as SD only and TWS only are extremely limited or the respondents receiving EAS only are not appropriate as a limited comparison group due to selection process used by the delivery agent or self-selection on the part of the participants resulting in the participants most likely to succeed in the labour market participating in less intensive interventions.

There were two consistent findings from the above findings. Participants with the most labour market challenges, as indicated by lower average pre-program earnings, were more likely to receive more intensive treatments. Both the participants with APEs exceeding six months and the survey respondents who reported receiving both TWS and SD, had the lowest pre-program earnings compared to other groups of participants. The participants in the most intensive treatments also had the largest total gains in earnings - \$16,070 for the participants receiving TWS and SD and \$17,900 for participants with APEs longer than six months. This finding is notable since program participants with the most labour market challenges often have the poorest program outcomes.

***Finding: Despite the increase in earnings in the post-program period, there was little change in the amount of SA income over the same years. Relatively small decreases in SA incomes in the post-program years were offset by similarly small increases in EI income.***

As is evident in Figure 5.1 and the tables above, SA income dropped slightly from \$4,087 in the year prior to program participation to \$3,905 in the program start year (-\$182) and \$3,555 in the year post start year. This equates to a decrease of \$350 when compared to the program start year. However, after year two, SA income rose slightly each year until the mean SA income reached \$3,951, almost the same level as pre-program. As such, the total SA income decrease across the five years compared to the earnings in the year prior to the program start year was \$1,632.

EI was not an important source of income for the participants in the pre-program or post-program years. Prior to the program start year, the mean EI income ranged from \$150 to \$211. In the program start year, the mean EI income rose to \$476 and gradually increased to \$571 two years after the post-program start year. Following this, the mean EI income dropped slightly and by the year 4 post-program start years, the mean EI income was \$505. Although EI income was substantially lower than SA income, since the changes in both sources of income were relatively small, the income increase in EI offset the income decrease in SA. Compared to the EI income pre-program start year, total increase in EI was \$1,691 and the total decrease in SA income was \$1,632.

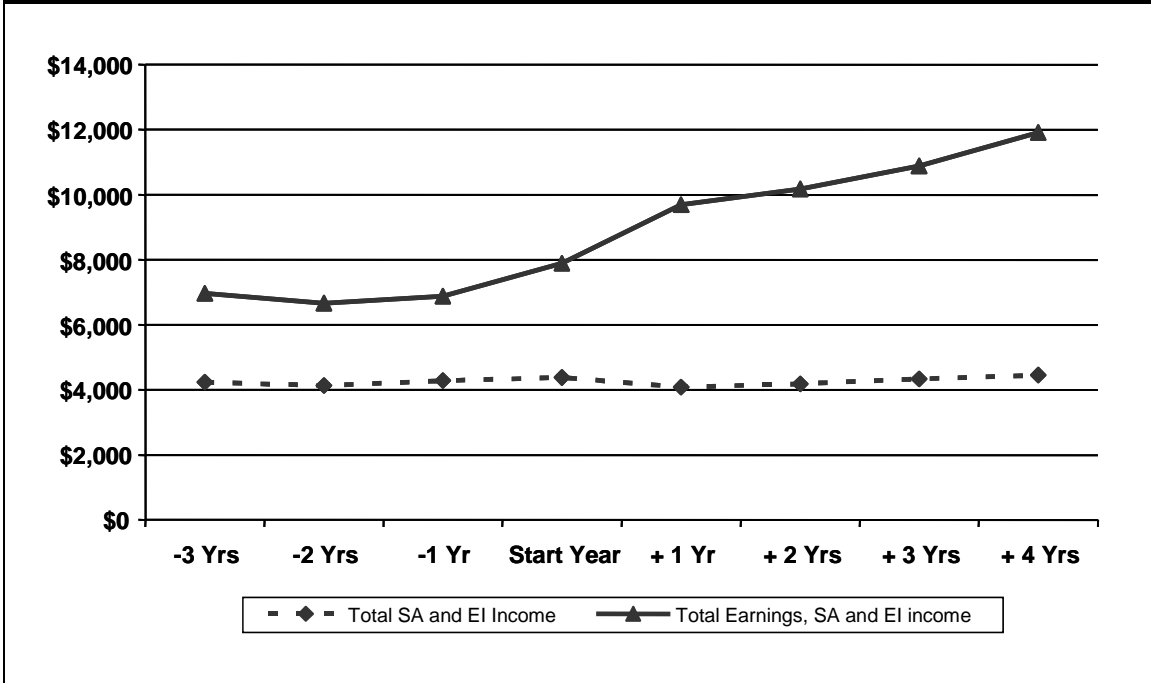
***Finding: The proportion of income from SA and EI dropped 25 percentage points compared to the pre-program levels, however, this decrease was due to higher earnings since the amount of income from SA and EI combined remained virtually unchanged.***

As discussed previously, the level of dependency on social income support is a key outcome measure for the OF evaluation. Figure 5.2 presents the total income from EI, SA and earnings and the total SA and EI income - which are the two variables used to calculate the dependency ratio. Figure 5.3 presents the dependency ratio expressed as the percentage of this total income accounted for by EI and SA income. Additional detailed information is provided in Table 5.6.

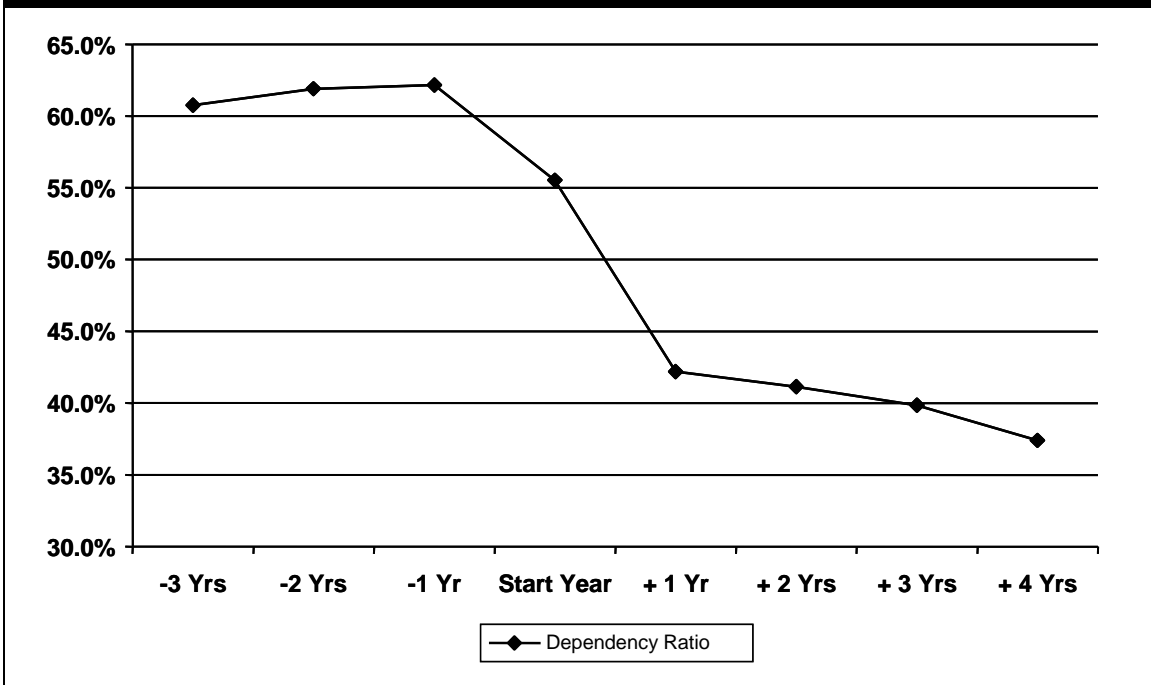
Figure 5.2 clearly illustrates that the combined income for SA and EI changed very little pre-program and post-program. This is consistent with the above analysis that demonstrated that the relatively modest decreases in SA income from the program start year onwards were offset by modest increases in EI. The pattern of increasing total income from earnings, SA and EI from the program start year and the subsequent years shown in Figure 5.2 is virtually a replication of the earnings data in Figure 5.1. Figure 5.2, however, illustrates the higher amount due to effectively adding a constant dollar amount for the SA and EI income.

The resulting dependency ratio demonstrates a substantial dependency decline in the program start year and one year after the program start year that persists throughout the following years. In total, the ratio fell 24.8 percentage points from 62.2% in the year prior to the program start year to 37.4% four years post-program start year. Despite this large decline in the dependency ratio, as demonstrated above, there was very little impact on SA or EI income. As such, the program had only a marginal impact on decreasing SA income, although SA income made up less of the total income for the OF participants as earnings increased. Based on the SA income results, it is apparent that the increased income was not substantial enough to move most OF participants off of SA or to reduce SA payments substantially.

**Figure 5.2**  
**Mean Total Earnings, SA and EI**



**Figure 5.3**  
**Mean Dependency Ratio**



	<b>3 Yrs Prior</b>	<b>2 Yrs Prior</b>	<b>1 Yr Prior</b>	<b>Program Start Year</b>	<b>1 Yr Post</b>	<b>2 Yr Post</b>	<b>3 Yr Post</b>	<b>4 Yr Post</b>
Total SA and EI Income	\$4,234	\$4,127	\$4,278	\$4,381	\$4,088	\$4,187	\$4,336	\$4,456
Total Earnings, SA and EI income	\$6,969	\$6,666	\$6,883	\$7,892	\$9,688	\$10,180	\$10,884	\$11,912
Dependency Ration	60.8%	61.9%	62.2%	55.5%	42.2%	41.1%	39.8%	37.4%
Source: Administrative Data								

***Finding: Based on modelling results, OF participants had an incremental earnings gain of \$8,860 in the four years from the program participation start year.***

As reported previously, tests were conducted using limited treatment groups<sup>20</sup> as a substitute for a comparison group of individuals who did not receive any assistance. The analyses conducted indicated that neither of the limited treatment groups tested were good candidates for creating a comparison group since there appeared to be considerable selection bias for participation in the limited treatment comparison groups. The third option was to create a comparison group from participants using their pre-program earnings, SA and EI data as the baseline date to compare the outcomes for other participants. Using this approach, a comparison group was created for the OF participants from participants in subsequent program start years. For example, the year 2001 cohort earnings in 2004 were compared to the earnings for participants with a 2005 start year. The earnings for both groups occur in the same year, for 2001 participants these earnings are post program but for the 2005 participants these earnings are pre-program. Table 5.7 shows how this was accomplished for the earnings data.

<b>Outcome Measure</b>	<b>2001 Participants</b>	<b>Comparison Group</b>
Start Year Earnings	Earnings in 2001	Earnings in 2001 for participants in 2002
1 Year Post-Program Start Year	Earnings in 2002	Earnings in 2002 for participants in 2003
2 Years Post-Program Start Year	Earnings in 2003	Earnings in 2003 for participants in 2004
3 Years Post-Program Start Year	Earnings in 2004	Earnings in 2004 for participants in 2005

<sup>20</sup> The limited treatment groups tested were individuals who only received EAS interventions versus participants who received SD, TWS or SE interventions and also participants with APEs less than one month versus participants with longer APEs.

Using this alignment of data, the earnings for the 2001 start date participants from 2001 to 2004 was compared to the earnings in the same years - but for participants who started their participation in programs and services one year later (2002). In terms of outcome measures, it was not possible to create a comparison group for the 2001 participants' earnings four years post-program start date.<sup>21</sup>

To eliminate differences in the outcome measures between the participants and the comparison group due to differences in their background characteristics, a regression model was developed for each outcome measure. Included as predictors of the outcome measures was a variable for membership in the participant and comparison group as well as variables for gender, age, region, visible minority, aboriginal status, and marital status.

Table 5.8 shows the mean earnings for the participant and comparison groups for the program start year and the three subsequent years. The table also provides the simple difference of the means and also the regression coefficient representing the difference between the participants and comparison cases removing differences due to other variables in the regression model. These differences are the raw and regression adjusted estimate of the program impact on earnings based on the comparison group data for each year. The table also provides the total mean gain or loss in earnings across all four years. As a benchmark, the earning gains based on the comparison of the 2001 participants outcomes with their earnings in the year prior to the program start year has been added to the end of this table. This replicates the earnings gain/loss reported in Table 5.5 except the data for the fourth year post-program start year is excluded to be comparable to the estimates based on the comparison group analysis.

<b>Table 5.8</b>					
<b>Estimated Gain/Loss in Earnings Based on Comparison Group Analysis – 2001 Participants Only</b>					
	<b>Program Start Year</b>	<b>1 Yr Post</b>	<b>2 Yr Post</b>	<b>3 Yr Post</b>	<b>Total Gain/ Loss</b>
Participants	\$3,367	\$5,401	\$5,768	\$6,268	
Comparison	\$1,839	\$2,458	\$2,446	\$2,268	
Difference	\$1,529	\$2,943	\$3,322	\$4,000	\$11,794
Regression Adjusted Difference	\$1,250	\$2,051	\$2,587	\$2,971	\$8,860
Comparison to Prior Year Earnings (From Table 5.5)	\$943	\$2,976	\$3,343	\$3,843	\$11,105
This Table provides new data – the internal comparison group data using pre-program data for participants – it also includes data from Table 5.5 for comparative purposes.					
Source: Administrative Data					

Based on the simple differences between the mean earnings for the 2001 participants and the corresponding comparison group mean earnings, earnings for the 2001 participants increased by \$1,529 in the program start year and increased to \$4,000K by the third year after the program start year. The total gain over the four years was \$11,794. Using the

<sup>21</sup> As mentioned earlier, this would have required 2006 participant data for the comparison group and, at the time the database was constructed, the database was not complete for the 2006 participants.



regression results, the mean earnings gain for the participants was \$1,250 in the program start year and \$2,971 by the third year after the program start year for a mean total earnings gain of \$8,860. While the simple differences between the participants and comparison cases yielded an estimate very similar to the approach of just using the 2001 participants' prior earnings as the baseline for comparison, the regression adjusted figure substantially reduced the estimated earnings gain. For the subsequent cost-effectiveness analysis we will rely mainly on the regression- adjusted estimates.

Tables 5.9 and 5.10 present the same information as above only for SA and EI income respectively. Unlike the findings for the earnings data, the regression adjusted results for SA and EI only slightly reduced the estimated mean total gain/loss from the simple differencing of the participant and comparison group means. Also the regression adjusted estimates for the mean total gain/loss was almost identical to the estimates obtained by simply subtracting the prior year outcomes from the subsequent years. The total gain/loss over the four years, using the regression-adjusted approach, was -\$1,529 for SA income and \$1,268 for ELI income. These findings confirm the earlier conclusion that the reduced SA income is almost completely offset by increased EI income.

<b>Table 5.9</b>					
<b>Estimated Gain/Loss in SA Income Based on Comparison Group – 2001 Participants Only</b>					
	<b>Program Start Year</b>	<b>1 Yr Post</b>	<b>2 Yr Post</b>	<b>3 Yr Post</b>	<b>Total Gain/ Loss</b>
Participants	\$3,905	\$3,555	\$3,616	\$3,775	
Comparison	\$4,482	\$4,263	\$4,256	\$4,054	
Difference	-\$576	-\$708	-\$640	-\$279	-\$2,203
Regression Adjusted Difference	-\$511	-\$373	-\$569	-\$75	-\$1,529
Comparison to Prior Year SA (From Table 5.5)	-\$182	-\$532	-\$471	-\$312	-\$1,497
Source: Administrative Data					

<b>Table 5.10</b>					
<b>Estimated Gain/Loss in EI Income based on Comparison Group – 2001 Participants Only</b>					
	<b>Program Start Year</b>	<b>1 Yr Post</b>	<b>2 Yr Post</b>	<b>3 Yr Post</b>	<b>Total Gain/ Loss</b>
Participants	\$476	\$533	\$571	\$561	
Comparison	\$136	\$106	\$216	\$137	
Difference	\$340	\$427	\$356	\$425	\$1,548
Regression Adjusted Difference	\$266	\$364	\$341	\$297	\$1,268
Comparison to Prior Year EI (From Table 5.5)	\$285	\$342	\$380	\$370	\$1,377
Source: Administrative Data					

***Finding: The majority of participants indicated the interventions and services they received were important to obtaining employment.***

OF survey respondents were asked to rate the importance of the employment programs and services received to the success of acquiring longer-term employment since program participation. They were also asked to provide information on their job educational and skill requirements, and if these were met due to their participation in employment programs and services. Overall, two out of three respondents rated the employment programs and services received as very important or somewhat important to obtaining their job. 47.7% of the respondents felt that the employment programs and services they received were very important to their getting the job and another 19.0% felt the programs and services received were somewhat important (Table 5.11). The highest ratings were provided by the respondents who reported participating in TWS only or TWS combined with SD interventions – approximately 80% rated these programs and services as very important or somewhat important, including 62% who provided a very important rating.

The questions regarding job requirements may provide a more objective assessment of the overall impact that participation in programs and services had on ultimately obtaining employment. Respondents were asked if their longest-held job since program participation had specific skill or educational requirements and whether they obtained these educational or skill requirements from their employment programs and services. Just over 61% of survey respondents stated their job required a specific diploma or certificate or a specific set of skills. 30% of these respondents felt they obtained the necessary skills and education to be successful in the job from the programs and services in which they participated.

Respondents who reported SD only (46%) or SD combined with TWS (43%) were substantially more likely to report that they received the necessary skills or education from their employment programs and services. The EAS only groups had the lowest percentage at 14%. At the same time, however, respondents who reported receiving TWS only was relatively low also – 26%. This appears to be largely due to the fact that this group tended to have jobs with lower skill requirements. The respondents reporting TWS only also had the highest percentage of survey respondents who stated their job did not have specific skill or education requirements – 48.6%.

Table 5.11 Importance of Employment Programs and Services for Obtaining Longest Job Since Program Participation by Type of Program Participation							
	Resource centre	Case Management/ counselling	TWS	SD	SD and TWS	SE/ SE plus TWS/SD	Total
How important were the programs and services you received to your getting this job (longest job since program participation)?***							
Not at all important	41.9%	38.4%	11.4%	27.3%	14.1%	26.5%	23.3%
Slightly important	5.8%	14.0%	6.4%	7.7%	7.4%	10.8%	8.6%
Somewhat important	17.4%	17.8%	19.3%	22.6%	15.8%	21.7%	19.0%
Very important	26.7%	28.9%	61.6%	41.4%	62.3%	39.8%	47.7%
Don't Know	8.1%	1.0%	1.4%	1.0%	0.4%	1.2%	1.4%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Number of Respondents	83	306	475	290	296	77	1,527
Skills Requirements of longest job since program participation and programs and services as source of skills***							
Obtained specific skills or education required from programs and services	14.1%	13.8%	26.0%	46.1%	43.0%	32.9%	30.2%
Did not obtain specific skills or education required from programs and services	52.5%	44.2%	24.4%	28.3%	21.8%	35.4%	31.2%
Did not require specific skills or education	33.3%	41.3%	48.6%	25.3%	33.8%	31.7%	37.8%
Don't Know	0.0%	0.6%	0.9%	0.3%	1.4%	0.0%	0.7%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Number of Respondents	98	305	472	290	296	77	1,538
Source: Survey Data, Note: * $p < .05$ , ** $p < .01$ , *** $p < .001$ .							

### 5.3 Training and Education Outcomes

*Evaluation Question 18: What are the degree of and types of skills training sought by program clients after Opportunities Fund interventions?*

**Finding:** *The majority of the survey respondents took training related to very specific skills.*

Overall, 52.6% of respondents participated in specific skills training, for example, developing computer skills. In addition, 21.6% indicated participation in a post-secondary degree or certificate program. Other types of training or education programs included participation in: basic life skills training (11.3%), job preparation training (4.9%), a high school equivalency program (4.3%), and training for entrepreneurship/starting own business (3%). Overall, 69.9% of respondents indicated that they did not believe they would have been able to enter the training program if support had not been available.

## 5.4 Societal Outcomes

*Evaluation Question 19: What are the relevant societal outcomes as a consequence of Opportunities Fund interventions?*

***Finding: According to the perceptions of the respondents, the benefits of program participation extended beyond employability and earnings gains.***

Overall, the majority of clients reported the programs and services they participated in had a positive impact on various aspects of their life. The majority of participants rated program participation as useful or very useful for increasing self-esteem and well-being (71%), increasing satisfaction with their work life (64%) and their general quality of life (64%). Just over half indicated that their participation was useful for building a network of friends and social contacts (55%). Usefulness for improved physical health was cited by 41% of respondents – 20.2% providing a very useful rating.

***Finding: The broader societal impacts of the OF program were not restricted to PWDs.***

Based on the Survey of Sponsors, Community Coordinators, and Employers, potential longer-term impacts affecting the employment opportunities for PWDs were not restricted to the OF clients. Employers were asked to identify benefits experienced by their organisation. Most respondents (91%) indicated social benefits for the firm, specifically enhanced openness to hiring persons with disabilities (31.9%), improved employee morale (22%), enhanced corporate image/good publicity (20.9%), and diversity in the organisation (15.7%). In addition, almost 19% of the firms identified other benefits including benefits to the client and to the community. A large majority (96%) indicated direct impacts on the firm. Of these, 28.3% mentioned tasks completed, 24.6% said solving staffing problems, 20.4% indicated increasing productivity, 15.7% said increasing diversity in the organisation and 6.8% mentioned monetary benefits derived from the wage subsidy.

***Finding: The survey of employers also found that 54% of firms changed their hiring practices towards PWDs as a consequence of partnering with the Opportunities Fund.***

More than half (54%) indicated the program had a somewhat (31.2%) or a large (22.4%) impact on the organisation's practices with regard to hiring persons with a disability. The remaining 46% indicated little or no change in their hiring practices.

## 5.5 Client Satisfaction

*Evaluation Question 20: To what extent are clients satisfied with services delivered under the Opportunities Fund?*

***Finding: Overall, the clients, employers and sponsors were satisfied with the programs and services received, although sponsors expressed lower levels of satisfaction with the Program.***

Based on survey data, 71% of the respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the employment programs and services they received, while only 14% were dissatisfied or very

dissatisfied. The results, however, also showed a relatively large segment of the clients face problems getting the services they want. One reason is that they often do not have access to the information or do not feel properly informed. For example, twenty percent of respondents were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the extent to which they were informed about the training and employment programs and services available to them and how to access them. Over 27% of the clients reported they had problems getting the programs or services they wanted, and 29% felt they did not receive all of the information and services they wanted. As a result, while 70% of the clients stated the program met or exceed their expectations, 30% felt that the program fell short of their expectations.

Overall, the employers expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the program. The majority (93.6%) of employer respondents felt that the services met or exceeded their expectations. Just over 6% indicated the services fell short of expectations.

The majority of project sponsors and community coordinators expressed lower levels of program satisfaction than the employers.

Project sponsors were asked to rate their level of satisfaction on a number of aspects related to OF services. Overall, approximately 59% of sponsors and coordinators were satisfied or extremely satisfied with OF. A little less than two-thirds were satisfied or extremely satisfied with the support provided by HRSDC (62%), their involvement in the design and delivery of programs (62%), and the availability of information about OF (58.9%). For almost all response categories, less than one-quarter of the respondents were dissatisfied with services provided by the Opportunities Fund. Almost thirty-five percent of respondents indicated that the types of costs covered under the program were unsatisfactory.

## 5.6 Cost-Effectiveness

*Evaluation Question 22: To what extent is the program cost-effective?*

***Finding: The estimated incremental earnings gains exceed the program costs in the longer-term, based on methodology used.***

While there was no definitive methodology for estimating the incremental impact of OF on earnings, EI and SA income of program participants in the absence of a true comparison group, the evaluation team developed an alternative approach to assess the extent of cost-effectiveness. As such, a quasi comparison group for the 2001 OF participants was constructed based on prior program earnings, SA and EI for participants in subsequent years. While this may eliminate changes in income that may have resulted from normal inflation and economic growth, the approach is still only an approximation of the incremental gains and the estimates still reflect changes that may have occurred in the absence of the program. It should be noted that these estimates may still be affected by selection biases or other behavioural changes that maybe occurred at the beginning of the start year for the program participants and resulted in higher earnings compared to their pre-program earnings. However, the use of this comparison group did substantially reduce the estimated earnings gains and is the best available estimate for the cost-effectiveness analysis.

Table 5.12 provides the estimated gains/losses for earnings, SA and EI using modelling with the comparison group described earlier. All figures have been adjusted using a five percent discount rate. Based on these figures, the total gain in earnings for the OF participants, discounted over the four years, was \$8.1K. This was virtually the same as the total income gain of \$7.8K since SA and EI income gains/losses essentially offset each other. It is important to ask how these gains compare to the program costs. While detailed program costs for these specific 2001 cases was not available, OF program management was able to provide a unit cost of \$4K as being appropriate for this timeframe. It is important to note, however, that costs can be higher depending on the mix of interventions types – a high percentage of work placements where the full wages and some overhead costs are provided can yield a higher unit cost estimate (closer to \$8K). For example, if the lower cost is used, the estimated gain in income over a four year timeframe, specifically the earnings gains, exceeds the program costs by nearly 2:1. If the higher program costs estimate is used, the income gains are virtually identical to the costs. However, the tracking of earnings over time indicate that these earnings gains are retained in the four and even fifth year after the program. As such, by extending earnings modelling results for the third year to the fourth year and applying the appropriate discount factor, the total income gain would be \$10,475. Thus, even using the higher program cost estimate, the gains exceed the costs in the longer term. It is important to keep in mind that the modelling estimation is based on the best available data and methodology, however, the approach does not eliminate potential self-selection bias.

**Table 5.12**  
**Estimated Incremental Gains/Losses Based on Modelling Results and a**  
**Five Percent Discount Rate – 2001 Participants Only**

	<b>Program Start Year</b>	<b>1 Yr Post</b>	<b>2 Yr Post</b>	<b>3 Yr Post</b>	<b>Total Gain/ Loss</b>
Earnings	\$1,250	\$1,953	\$2,346	\$2,566	\$8,116 <sup>a</sup>
SA	-\$511	-\$355	-\$516	-\$65	-\$1,447
EI	\$266	\$347	\$309	\$257	\$1,179
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,005</b>	<b>\$1,945</b>	<b>\$2,140</b>	<b>\$2,758</b>	<b>\$7,848</b>

Source: Administrative Data

<sup>a</sup> A discount rate of 1 percent and 7 percent was used to test the sensitivity of the results to the selection of the discount rate. The discounted earnings gain ranged from \$7.9K to \$8.7K and the total (earnings, SA and EI) ranged from \$7.6K to \$8.4K.

## 6. Summary and Conclusions

The evaluation relies on the combined results from program administrative information databases, clientele survey information, EI database and CRA income tax information and the qualitative assessment on overlap and duplication. Combined, these data sources provide a useful information base from which to draw findings on the overall effectiveness, impacts and relevance of the program. It must be recognized, however, that the findings are based on evidence that has some inherent limitations. These include the lack of a true comparison group and a delayed data-sharing agreement with Ontario that would have more definitively assessed the issue of overlap and duplication between OF and LMAPD clientele.

### 6.1 Program Rationale and Relevance

*The objectives of the Opportunities Fund continue to remain relevant due to programming gaps and varying eligibility criteria across programs for persons with disabilities.*

While the relevance of the Opportunities Fund has declined slightly due to the evolving nature of other programs and services for PWDs, the objectives of the Opportunities Fund continue to remain relevant due to potential programming gaps and varying eligibility criteria across programs. The diverse nature and complex needs of PWDs requires a broad spectrum of program responses in order to increase their income level from and participation in the labour force.

*OF has the potential for complementarity as well as overlap and duplication, however, there are both policy and management processes in place to facilitate program complementarity and to avoid overlap and duplication<sup>22</sup>.*

The literature and document review found that while a number of Federal and Provincial programs offer similar types of support services and programs for PWDs, the services and programs offered, the eligibility criteria and even the definition of disability used, varies. A qualitative review of the OF and LMAPD programs, conducted by the HRSDC evaluation unit, concluded that the OF and the LMAPD are mainly complementary from a process, clientele, eligibility and intervention perspective rather than truly overlapping or duplicating LMAPD.

Most expert and key informants reported that while there is a potential for overlap with other programs, OF addresses service gaps that are either not met through other programs, or complements the activities of other programs. The case studies provided examples of how funding can be coordinated at the local level.

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<sup>22</sup> The terms “overlap” and “duplication” are often used interchangeably to describe a program that may be similar in nature. There is, however, a significant difference between the two. Overlap occurs when two levels of government provide, in part, similar programs. When overlap does occur, it is generally complementary, and fills an existing gap in program or service delivery. Duplication, on the other hand, refers to one program being completely unnecessary due to the other order of government’s involvement. Evidence suggests that true ‘duplication’ is rare.

There are, however, issues to be resolved in order for the results of the OF to meet their full potential. For example, the lack of a formal consultation process with the provinces and other departments and agencies to identify gaps and needs may increase the risk of unnecessary overlap with other federal and provincial programs. However, as mentioned previously in the report, informal, working level exchanges of information are present in most jurisdictions.

***There was minimal overlap between OF and other HRSDC employment program, based on results from interviews, expert opinions and the qualitative analysis of this issue.***

An analysis of the overlap between OF interventions and other HRSDC employment programs found only 6.6% of the OF interventions overlapped with other HRSDC employment program interventions. The majority of the overlap was with EAS interventions which are considered complementary rather than overlap or duplication. For the years 2001 to 2006, if EAS interventions are removed, only 2.3% of the OF interventions overlap with other HRSDC programs.

## **6.2 Program Implementation and Objective Achievement**

***The social equity impacts of OF extend beyond the basic program design and impacts on the clients to include impacts on the Canadian workplace.***

According to the employers surveyed, 91 % noted broader social benefits extended to their organizations, 31.9% saw enhanced openness to hiring persons with disabilities, 22% indicated improved employee morale, 20.9% agreed that the OF helped to enhance corporate image/good publicity and 15.7% saw an increase of diversity in the organisation.

The survey also found that 63% of firms changed their hiring practices towards PWDs as a consequence of partnering with the Opportunities Fund.

***Leveraging is a key principle of the OF design and implementation and evaluation findings confirm this is a common practice.***

Leveraging funding, where possible, is incorporated into the design of the OF program. Some representatives of funded organizations and employers who were surveyed reported that, given the small amount of OF funding, they had no choice but to leverage other sources to provide a fuller range of employment services for the disabled. Similarly, most project sponsors and community coordinators surveyed had developed partnerships with other organizations to serve OF clients.

OF funding provided to employers also leveraged expenditures and services beyond the amounts covered by the program. For nearly half (45%) of the employers OF leveraged funding in the form of additional costs being covered by the employer – these were costs not covered by OF.



*The literature provides some indication that the Opportunities Fund supports services to PWDs that could be considered innovative or promising practices, but there have been constraints and limitations to achievement of this objective.*

Program management encourages innovative approaches to programming and service delivery. They indicated that innovative programming is often used as a funding criterion to allocate scarce program resources. However, experience has dictated that opportunities for such approaches are limited. As such, management accepts programs that use ‘promising practices’ such as holistic approaches, programs that fill in gaps in core programming and “best practices” that are adapted to meet local needs, in its definition of innovative approaches. Program management understand the need for innovation, however they stressed that the need to fill in program gaps far outweighs the need for new types of programming and service delivery.

At the same time, there was limited evidence of any systematic information provided by OF management to service providers on the results of innovations or promising practices funded under OF. This means that there could be an improvement of shared learning.

*There was not extensive evidence of awareness and promotion of the OF program to clients, employers and service providers.*

Specific projects may build in awareness activities into their projects, however, there is generally no systematic approach to promote the OF program to clients, employers and service providers. According to OF program officials, demand for programs currently exceeds program funding, which partially explains why promotion of the Program is not extensive. Special project funding to promote the program and build networks with service providers, similar to an initiative developed in Quebec and describe in Section 3.0, were seen as potential strategies to make the program better known.

## **6.3 Program Monitoring and Client Profile**

*Performance monitoring information and reporting is in accordance with the specifications of the RMAF.*

The performance measurement framework has 20 performance indicators for the outputs, short-term outcomes, intermediate-term outcomes and long-term outcomes identified in the program logic model. The majority of these performance indicators (16) are collected and reported upon on a monthly basis. Indicators that relate to the long-term outcomes such as the increase in the weeks employed, reduced dependence on passive income support and percentage of participants with ongoing attachment to the labour force are collected at different times throughout the evaluation cycle.

The indicators and measures selected for less frequent reporting are appropriate given this information is not easily accessible except on a longer term basis. Consideration should be given, however, to an annual update to the evaluation to measure increased earned income, reduced dependence on passive income and increased labour force attachment by using linkages with CRA data.

***The quality of the OF administrative data has improved since 2000-2004.***

The OF administrative data for the earlier years (i.e. 2000 – 2004) had significant gaps. These included very little information on the type of interventions the participants received and types of disabilities. The quality and completeness of this data has improved significantly, although some data on type of disability is missing. Other improvements could include providing fields for multiple disabilities and severity of disability.

***Available data illustrates that the OF serves a broad spectrum of persons with disabilities in terms of types and severity of disability.***

The profile of the program participants showed a relatively even distribution across many key socio-demographic variables. For example, the proportion of males and females was relatively equal and there was reasonably equal distribution across all age groups (with the exception of the oldest age group 55 and older). The educational profile from the survey showed approximately 21% of the respondents had not completed high school while 32% graduated high school and 47% had some post-secondary education. Regional distributions changed over time, with large increases in the percentage of clients from the Prairies and the Atlantic.

In terms of the types of disability, the respondents were again almost equally divided between mobility, agility, and pain related disabilities (49.2%) and learning, memory, and psychological related disabilities (52.2%). Other, less frequent, disabilities included sight (13.0%), speech (5.7%) and hearing (5.6%).

There was a relatively even distribution in the severity of the disability reported by the survey respondents – 28.1% rated their disability as mild, 36.8% rated their disability as moderate, 31.73% rated their disability as severe or very severe.

***The OF clientele consists of clients with very low labour market experience and earnings in the years prior to their program participation and relatively high dependency on SA income.***

There was a notable shift in OF clientele after the year 2000, when EI eligible clients were reduced to a very small percentage of the participants. The findings confirm the program has significantly improved the enforcement of the eligibility criteria that excludes individuals who qualify for assistance under Part II of the *Employment Insurance Act*. The earnings profile of the OF clientele has been consistently very low. Between program start years 2001 to 2005 the average earned income was approximately \$2.4K and over 55% of respondents reported no earned income at all. This low level of earned income was similar up to three years prior to the program start year.

EI income was negligible. For example, in the program start years 2001 to 2005, the average EI income did not exceed \$200. SA income, on the other hand, played a much more prominent role in the earnings of the OF clients. Approximately 55% survey respondents had some SA income and the mean SA income for the year prior to their program participation was \$3.8K – higher than the earned income for the same year.

***Post year 2000, only a very small percentage of OF participants were active or former EI clients.***

After the year 2000, there was clear shift away from including either active or former EI clients as clients of the OF program. For participants with a program start year in 2000, nearly 22% were active EI clients and another 11% former EI clients and 68% were non-insured. In the following years, only 6% were either active or former EI clients while the vast majority, 94%, were non-insured.

## **6.4 Impacts and Effects**

***Overall, the majority of clients reported the programs and services they participated in had positive impacts on their skills and employability in the post program period, although the perceived impacts have been lower in recent years.***

According to client survey respondents, the programs and services they participated in were useful for: gaining job-specific skills (66%); increasing their ability to find work in the future (59%) and gaining work experience on-the-job (54%). While these responses are relatively high, in all cases, the ratings were lower in the more recent years - 2004-2005 than in earlier years. For example, the percentage of respondents who rated their programs and services as very useful for gaining work experience on-the-job was 36% for the 2002 and 2003 start years compared to 29% for 2004 and 2005 start years. Similarly, the percentage of respondents rating programs and services as very useful for gaining specific job-related work skills was 43% for the 2002 and 2003 program start years – this fell to 35% for those with 2004 and 2005 start dates.

When asked about their skill improvements and ability to find or keep a job, 66% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the skills they can bring to a job increased or improved, and 54% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their ability to get and keep a job improved as a result of their participation in the OF. However, the percentage of respondents who agreed with these statements was lower for respondents with a program start date of 2004 or 2005 compared to previous years.

***There was a substantial and sustained increase in the percentage of OF participants with paid employment compared to pre-program levels and the percentage of OF participants with ongoing labour market attachment doubled in the post-program period.***

The percentage of participants with paid employment (at least one employer) increased from 44% in the year prior to the program start year to approximately 62% in the program start year. Year two after the start date yielded an 18 percentage point increase over the year prior to the program start year. By four years after the start date, however, this percentage slowly declined reaching 54% four years after the program start year - 10.4 percentage points higher than the year prior to the program start year.

The gains in labour market attachment, as measured by the percentage of participants with three consecutive years with paid employment, were even larger. In the three years prior to program participation the percentage of participants in the 2001 cohort with at least one employer in three consecutive years was 21%. In the most recent three years available for this analysis, 42% of these same participants had at least one employer in three consecutive years – a 21 percentage point increase doubling the pre-program percentage.

***OF participants reported a 15-percentage point gain in paid employment.***

***Survey respondents reported just over six months of paid employment in the most recent 12 months. This is a gain of 1.8 months when compared to the pre-program period. This included an increase of 1.1 months for full-time employment, and an increase of 0.6 months for part-time employment.*** This represents a 15-percentage point gain in paid employment for the survey respondent (paid employment accounted for 36 percent of activities 12 months prior to program participation and 51 percent in the most recent 12 months).

***OF participants had a substantial and sustained increase in earned income compared to their earnings in the year prior to program participation.***

The evaluation findings showed a very clear pattern of strong growth in earnings for the OF participants beginning in the program start year. Compared to the year prior to the participants' program start year, earnings rose from \$2,425 to \$5,401 by one year after the program start year. This signifies a more than doubling of earned income. By the fourth year after the program start year, earnings reached \$7,002. In total, the earnings gain across the five years compared to the earnings in the year prior to the program start year was \$15,683.

***Despite the increase in earnings in the post-program period, there was little change in the amount of SA income over the same years. Relatively small decreases in SA income in the post-program years were offset by small increases in EI income***

SA income dropped slightly from the pre-program level in the initial years but rose slowly again. In total, the SA income decrease across the five years compared to the earnings in the year prior to the program start year was \$1,632. Although EI increased slightly, EI was not an important source of income for the participants in the pre-program or post-program years. And while EI income was substantially lower than SA income, since the changes in both sources of income were relatively small, the income increase in EI offset the income decrease in SA. Compared to the EI income pre-program start year, total increase in EI was \$1,691, and the total decrease in SA income was \$1,632.

***Participants with the most intensive interventions had the highest gains in earnings.***

Two analyses of participants sub-groups were conducted to examine the possibility of using a "limited treatment" group as a comparison group to measure the incremental impacts of the OF program. One analysis segmented the participants into short duration (*low intensity*) APEs less than one month in duration and longer duration (*higher intensity*) APEs. A second analysis examined survey respondents who reported receiving only Employment Assistance Service (EAS) types of interventions (*low intensity*) as a

comparison group against participants who received higher intensity interventions such as SD, TWS, and SE.

There were two consistent findings from this analysis. Participants with the most labour market challenges, as indicated by lower average pre-program earnings, were more likely to receive more intensive treatments. Both the participants with APEs exceeding six months and the survey respondents who reported receiving both TWS and SD, had the lowest pre-program earnings compared to other groups of participants. The participants in the most intensive treatments also had the largest total gains in earnings - \$16,070 for the participants receiving TWS and SD and \$17,900 for participants with APEs longer than six months. This finding is notable since program participants with the most labour market challenges often have the poorest program outcomes. However, the findings from this analysis may be confounded with program selection bias and should be interpreted with this caveat in mind.

***The majority of participants indicated the employment programs and services they received were important to obtaining employment.***

Overall, two out of three respondents rated the employment programs and services as very important (48%) or somewhat important (19.0%) to obtaining their longest job since program participation.

Just over 61% of the respondents stated their job required a specific diploma or certificate or a specific set of skills and 30% of the respondents reported their job required specific skills or education and they obtained the necessary skills and education from their programs and services.

***Overall, the clients, employers and sponsors were satisfied with the programs and services received, although sponsors expressed lower levels of satisfaction with the Program.***

Seventy-one percent of the clients surveyed were satisfied or very satisfied with their participation with OF, while 14% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. The results, however, also show a relatively large segment of the clients face problems getting the services they want. For example, twenty percent of respondents were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the extent to which they were informed about the training and employment programs and services that are available and how to access them.

Overall, the employers, project sponsors and community coordinators expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the program, although project sponsors and community coordinators expressed lower levels of program satisfaction than the employers.

***The estimated incremental earnings gains exceed the program costs in the longer-term.***

Based on modelling results to estimate incremental gains/loss in earnings, EI and SA, the total gain in earnings for the OF participants, discounted over the four years, was \$8.1K. OF program management provided an average cost of \$4K to \$8K as being appropriate for this timeframe. If the lower cost is used, the estimated gains in income over a four-year time frame exceeds the program costs by nearly 2:1. If the higher program costs

estimate is used, the income gains are virtually identical to the costs. However, the tracking of earnings over time indicated that these earnings gains are retained in the four and even fifth year after the program. Extending earnings modelling results for the third year to the fourth year, and applying the appropriate discount factor, the total income gain would be \$10,475. Thus even when using the higher program cost estimate, the gains exceed the costs in the longer term. It should be noted that these estimates may still be affected by selection biases or other behavioural changes that may be occurred at the beginning of the start year for the program participants and resulted in higher earnings compared to their pre-program earnings.

### ***Conclusions***

The summative evaluation findings indicate that the program continues to be relevant by filling gaps in services and assisting PWDs who are not fully served by other federal or provincial government programs. The evaluation also indicates positive results in terms of client satisfaction, leveraging of funds, learning from other partners and programs by exploring promising practices and social equity impacts for persons assisted as well as for employers and workplaces.

The evaluation's client profile indicates that the program assists a broad spectrum of PWDs in terms of types and severity of disabilities. OF clients also tend to have low labour market pre-program experience. The evaluation shows post-program gains among clients in terms of their paid employment, earning levels and skill levels. In addition, employers and sponsors were generally satisfied with the programs and services received.

An identified weakness in the evaluation findings was the minimal evidence of awareness and promotion of the program to clients, employers and organizations. While positive post-program employment, earnings and skill-level gains are seen among participants, the evaluation does suggest the need for improved ongoing monitoring of client outcomes. Another challenge is that the findings are based on a methodological approach that has some gaps, such as the lack of a true comparison group and a delayed data-sharing agreement with Ontario that would have more definitively assessed the issue of program relevance. At the same time, however, the methodological approaches used provide a useful and important information base from which to draw findings on the overall effectiveness, impacts and relevance of the program.

### ***Future Considerations***

The evaluation findings, while comprehensive, identified a number of potential areas for further research. These future considerations are described below.

*Follow-up on the overlap and duplication with LMAPD:* At the time the evaluation was concluded, no LMAPD data was available from any of the provinces. As a result, this evaluation does not include a comparison of the two databases to assess the degree of overlap between OF and LMAPD clients. While results from this comparison would have provided useful information, the issue of overlap and duplication of programs and services between OF and LMAPD would not have been fully resolved even with the comparison. To enhance this analysis, a sample of clients who have participated in both

programs should be selected and a review of these cases conducted to assess the degree to which the programs and services received by clients from the two programs were complementary, versus duplicative, of one another.

*Annual updates of the longer-term outcomes:* The evaluation highlighted the potential use of annual CRA data to address key longer-term performance indicators identified in the OF RMAF. Consideration should be given to replicating this analysis on an annual basis to provide more up-to-date information on these longer-term outcomes, rather than waiting until the next full evaluation is completed.

*Examining the impact of more intensive program interventions:* The evaluation findings suggest that longer-term interventions yield the largest earnings gains. This is an important finding - the clientele for these more intensive interventions were those with the least labour market experience. However, the basis for this analysis was limited in that a more thorough analysis, using administrative data controlling for factors such as the type of intervention, type of disability or severity of the disability, was not possible. Once more CRA data becomes available, it will be possible to conduct a thorough analysis using administrative data for more recent years. Consideration should also be given to implementing a more thorough analysis of the impacts of more intensive interventions in the next 2 to 3 years as a separate evaluation activity prior to the next full summative evaluation.

*Monitoring the quality of the administrative data:* Program management should be provided with regular reports on the completeness of the OF administrative data, particularly for key data elements such as the type of intervention and amount of expenditures. Any new data fields that may be added, including capturing multiple disabilities and the educational attainment of the participants, should also be monitored to ensure data gaps are minimized.





# *Appendix A: Evaluation Issues, Information Sources/Indicators and Methodologies*

<b>Evaluation Issues and Questions</b>	<b>Information Sources/Indicators</b>	<b>Methodologies</b>
<b><i>Rationale and Relevance</i></b>		
1. Are the objectives of the <i>Opportunities Fund</i> still relevant in the context of other Federal and Provincial programming to integrate Pads into the labour force?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy and program changes</li> <li>• Relevant legislation</li> <li>• Labour market for PWDs</li> <li>• Expert/Informant interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of literature</li> <li>• Review of program documentation</li> <li>• Expert and informant interviews</li> <li>• Case studies</li> </ul>
2. Does the <i>Opportunities Fund</i> complement, overlap or duplicate other federal and provincial employment programs for persons with disabilities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy and program Design/Implementation</li> <li>• Relevant legislation</li> <li>• Expert/Informant opinion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of literature</li> <li>• Review of program documentation</li> <li>• Expert and informant interviews</li> <li>• Case studies</li> <li>• Sponsor, community coordinator and employer survey</li> </ul>
3. To what extent are clients in receipt of other services and programs (e.g. EAPD/LMAPD and LMDA employment programs for PWDs) that may explain in part the results observed in OF clients?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Related research</li> <li>• Expert/Informant opinion</li> <li>• Sponsor and community Coordinator opinion</li> <li>• Client opinion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of literature</li> <li>• Expert and informant interviews</li> <li>• Sponsor, community coordinator and employer survey</li> <li>• Survey of clients</li> </ul>
<b><i>Program Implementation and Objective Achievement</i></b>		
4. To what extent are social equity objectives met by the program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Description of project, partner and client selection process</li> <li>• Expert/Informant opinion</li> <li>• Sponsor and community coordinator opinion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of program documentation</li> <li>• Expert and informant interviews</li> <li>• Sponsor, community coordinator and employer survey</li> <li>• Case studies</li> </ul>

<b>Evaluation Issues and Questions</b>	<b>Information Sources/Indicators</b>	<b>Methodologies</b>
5. To what extent has the program leveraged its services with other levels of government and organizations?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of partnerships</li> <li>• Determinants of success and barriers to partnerships</li> <li>• Sponsor and community coordinator profile and opinion</li> <li>• Expert/Informant opinion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of program documentation</li> <li>• Expert and informant interviews</li> <li>• Sponsor, community coordinator and employer survey</li> <li>• Case studies</li> </ul>
6. To what extent has the program used innovative approaches and demonstrated best practices?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification of innovative approaches and best practices</li> <li>• Expert/Informant opinion</li> <li>• Sponsor and community coordinator opinion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of literature</li> <li>• Review of program documentation</li> <li>• Expert and informant interviews</li> <li>• Case studies</li> <li>• Sponsor, community coordinator and employer survey</li> </ul>
7. What types of alternative design and delivery approaches could the program adopt to improve outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Related research</li> <li>• Expert/Informant opinion</li> <li>• Sponsor and community coordinator opinion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of literature</li> <li>• Expert and informant interviews</li> <li>• Case studies</li> <li>• Sponsor, community coordinator and employer survey</li> </ul>
8. How do clients and partners become aware of the program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expert and informant opinion</li> <li>• Sponsor, community coordinator opinion and employer opinion</li> <li>• Client opinion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expert and informant interviews</li> <li>• Sponsor, community coordinator and employer survey</li> <li>• Client survey</li> </ul>
<b>Review of Administrative Databases and Program Monitoring</b>		
9. Has the <i>Opportunities Fund</i> performance monitoring complied with the RMAF and is the design of the RMAF appropriate?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• OF RMAF</li> <li>• Expert/Informant opinion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of program documentation</li> <li>• Expert and informant interviews</li> <li>• Workshop</li> </ul>
10. To what extent has the program improved the use of administrative databases and data collection to report performance monitoring activities and track clients?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Description of improvement efforts</li> <li>• Comparison of previous efforts to present</li> <li>• Expert/Informant opinion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of program documentation</li> <li>• Expert and informant interviews</li> <li>• Analysis of administrative databases</li> <li>• Workshop</li> </ul>

<b>Evaluation Issues and Questions</b>	<b>Information Sources/Indicators</b>	<b>Methodologies</b>
11. What is the profile of clients by type of intervention, type of disability and relevant socio-economic variables?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Type of intervention and type of disability</li> <li>• Relevant socio-economic variables</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of program documentation</li> <li>• Analysis of administrative databases</li> <li>• Client survey</li> </ul>
12. What is the client profile, by reasons and circumstances, of those persons with disabilities who were eligible for assistance under EI Part II but because of exceptional circumstances, were approved to receive assistance under the <i>Opportunities Fund</i> program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Profile information by reason and circumstance</li> <li>• Number of EI Part II eligible clients served under OF</li> <li>• Description of exceptional circumstances</li> <li>• Expert/Informant opinions</li> <li>• Sponsor and community coordinator opinion</li> <li>• Client opinion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of program documentation</li> <li>• Expert and informant interviews</li> <li>• Analysis of administrative databases</li> <li>• Sponsor, community coordinator and employer survey</li> <li>• Client survey</li> </ul>
13. What is the profile of sponsors, community coordinators and employers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Profile information</li> <li>• Number of partners</li> <li>• Case study descriptions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of program documentation</li> <li>• Analysis of administrative databases</li> <li>• Sponsor, community coordinator and employer survey</li> <li>• Case studies</li> </ul>
<b>Impacts and Effects</b>		
14. What are the changes in employability by type of intervention and type of disability as a consequence of <i>Opportunities Fund</i> interventions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expert/Informant opinion</li> <li>• Sponsor and community coordinator opinion</li> <li>• Client opinion</li> <li>• Percentage of the total OF clients served who attribute the OF program as the means to enhancing their employability</li> <li>• Percentage of <i>Opportunities Fund</i> clients with ongoing attachment to the labour force</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of program documentation</li> <li>• Expert and informant interviews</li> <li>• Sponsor, community coordinator and employer survey</li> <li>• Client survey</li> <li>• Employment and employability impact analysis</li> </ul>
15. What are the changes in employment by type of intervention and type of disability as a consequence of <i>Opportunities Fund</i> interventions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expert/Informant opinion</li> <li>• Sponsor and community coordinator opinion</li> <li>• Attitude of clients</li> <li>• Increase in weeks of employment subsequent to participation in OF program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of program documentation</li> <li>• Expert and informant interviews</li> <li>• Sponsor, community coordinator and employer survey</li> </ul>

Evaluation Issues and Questions	Information Sources/Indicators	Methodologies
15. (cont'd)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage of OF participants with ongoing attachment to the labour force</li> <li>• Percentage of the total <i>Opportunities Fund</i> clients served who attribute the program to enhancing their employability</li> <li>• Client acquisition of skills and training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Client survey</li> <li>• Employment and employability impact analysis</li> </ul>
16. What is the change in income earned from employment after <i>Opportunities Fund</i> interventions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expert/Informant opinion</li> <li>• Sponsor and community coordinator opinion</li> <li>• Client experience</li> <li>• CCRA data</li> <li>• Increase in percentage of income support that comes from earned income of OF beneficiaries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of program documentation</li> <li>• Expert and informant interviews</li> <li>• Sponsor, community coordinator and employer survey</li> <li>• Client survey</li> <li>• Employment and employability impact analysis</li> </ul>
17. What changes in the level of social income support are a consequence of <i>Opportunities Fund</i> interventions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expert/Informant opinion</li> <li>• Sponsor and community coordinator opinion</li> <li>• Client opinion</li> <li>• CCRA data</li> <li>• Proportion of <i>Opportunities Fund</i> clients with reduced dependence on passive income support</li> <li>• Change in passive income support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of program documentation</li> <li>• Expert and informant interviews</li> <li>• Sponsor, community coordinator and employer survey</li> <li>• Client survey</li> <li>• Employment and employability impact analysis</li> </ul>
18. What are the degree of and types of skills training sought by program clients after <i>Opportunities Fund</i> interventions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expert/Informant opinion</li> <li>• Sponsor and community coordinator opinion</li> <li>• Client opinion</li> <li>• Number and type of skills training sought</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of program documentation</li> <li>• Expert and informant interviews</li> <li>• Sponsor, community coordinator and employer survey</li> <li>• Client survey</li> </ul>
19. What are the relevant societal outcomes as a consequence of <i>Opportunities Fund</i> interventions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expert/Informant opinion</li> <li>• Sponsor and community coordinator opinion</li> <li>• Client opinion</li> <li>• Change in participation in community activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of literature</li> <li>• Review of program documentation</li> <li>• Expert and informant interviews</li> <li>• Case studies</li> <li>• Sponsor, community coordinator and employer survey</li> <li>• Survey of clients</li> </ul>

<b>Evaluation Issues and Questions</b>	<b>Information Sources/Indicators</b>	<b>Methodologies</b>
20. To what extent are clients satisfied with services delivered under the <i>Opportunities Fund</i> ?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Client opinion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey of clients</li> </ul>
21. To what extent is the program cost-effective?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comparison of costs by output and outcome</li> <li>• Expert/Informant opinion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of literature</li> <li>• Review of program documentation</li> <li>• Expert and informant interviews</li> </ul>



# *Appendix B: Evaluation Objectives, Issues and Questions*

## **B.1 Evaluation Objectives and Issues**

### ***B.1.1 Evaluation Objectives***

The program's Results-Based Management and Accountability Framework (RMAF) completed in January 2003, specifies that an evaluation is to take place in 2004-05. The main focus of this summative evaluation will be to assess impacts and effects in the areas of employability enhancement, employment, and change in income that can be attributed to the program. The evaluation will review the appropriateness of the RMAF and the feasibility of collecting performance measures on an on-going basis. The evaluation activities will complement OF's on-going program performance monitoring activities and address gaps identified in previous evaluations. Other issues as identified in the Request for Proposals include the following:

- Program relevance in the context of other Federal and Provincial programming accessible to Persons with Disabilities (PWDs);
- Overlap and duplication;
- Social equity;
- The use of innovative approaches and best practices;
- Areas for improvement for alternative design and delivery approaches;
- Cost-effectiveness;
- Awareness of the program;
- A review of the RMAF and the extent to which performance measures can be measured on an on-going basis;
- The collection and use of administrative data;
- A profile of clients, sponsors, community coordinators and employers;
- Societal outcomes and the extent to which recipients achieve self-sustaining lifestyles; and
- Client satisfaction.

There are many definitions of social equity found in the literature. In one source<sup>23</sup>, social equity is defined as the “fairness in the delivery of public services; It is egalitarianism in action – the principle that each citizen regardless of economic resources or personal traits deserves, and has a right to be given, equal treatment by the political system.” In a study on sustainable development conducted by a team from the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi<sup>24</sup>, social equity is defined as the “Principle of sustainable and human development that strives to satisfy essential needs and improve quality of life for all social groups and communities, particularly the most vulnerable, through access to employment, education, medical care, social services, and quality housing.” Social equity can also be associated with the concept of social inclusion – or exclusion. In a paper by Peter Evans and Marcella Deluca (*Social Exclusion and Children, Creating “identity capital”: some conceptual issues and practical solutions*) produced for the OECD, the concept of social exclusion is defined as the inability to participate in and be recognized by society. In a model, the authors specify that the social inclusion includes participation in the labour market, global income, family life, housing, health services and the community overall.

For the purposes of this study, social equity will be defined as the equal access of people with disabilities to public services (including education, health and government services overall) and the labour market, and participation in the community overall, as compared to other individuals in the Canadian society.

The Terms and Conditions for OF require the program to achieve its objective by leveraging, where possible and appropriate, with other levels of government and organizations and using innovative approaches that demonstrate best practices in promoting the economic and social integration of persons with disabilities. This evaluation will address the extent to which this objective has been attempted and achieved or has displaced potential provincial contribution.

The evaluation will assess the awareness of the Opportunities Fund program by sponsors, community coordinators, employers and clients. It will also provide a client profile (by reasons and circumstances) of those persons with disabilities who were eligible for assistance under EI Part II but because of exceptional circumstances received assistance under the Opportunities Fund.

As previously noted, the collection of administrative data has been an on-going challenge. The evaluation will assess the extent to which the collection and use of administrative data has improved.

Data on the following societal outcomes, as defined by the Treasury Board Secretariat, will be collected and analyzed as a part of developing the client profile in an effort to provide some indication on quality of life and the program’s contribution to social equity:

- Employment Rate;
- Educational Attainment;

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<sup>23</sup> Shafritz and Russell, *Introducing Public Administration*, 2003

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.uqac.ca/msiaa/Rapport%20Final/anglais/html/RAPPORT-52.html>



- Self-Rated Health Status; and
- Volunteerism/Unpaid Work.

*Finally, the evaluation will confirm and collect qualitative and quantitative (including financial) data on the following program outputs as identified in the RMAF:*

- Project agreements;
- Assistance to persons with disabilities:
  - Wage Subsidies;
  - Self-Employment;
  - Skills Development;
  - Employment Assistance Services;
  - Work Experience; and
  - Individual Counselling.

### **Performance Indicators**

The following performance indicators will also be measured by the full summative evaluation:

- Change in Employability
  - % of the total OF clients served who attribute the OF program as the means to enhancing their employability.
  - Proportion of OF clients that undertook additional skills and training.
- Change in Employment
  - Increase in weeks of employment subsequent to participation in OF program.
  - % of OF participants with ongoing attachment to the labour force.
- Change in dependence on social income support
  - Proportion of OF clients with reduced dependence on passive income support.
- Change in Income
  - Increase in percentage of income support that comes from earned income of OF beneficiaries.

Change in employability as a result of Opportunities Fund interventions will be addressed in the summative evaluation. The success criteria for interventions with regard to this key indicator will be based on improvement in job readiness through educational, occupational and/or trade skills acquisition. This assessment will be based on a review of a sample of individual action plans, program follow-up documentation and a survey of program clients.

Change in employment will be measured by determining the increased participation of persons with disabilities in the labour force following assistance received under the program. Assessment of this particular indicator will also consider the change in the percentage increase of their income from employment and the change in dependence on social income support. This information will be supplemented by qualitative self-assessment as a consequence of their intervention by their efforts to further enhance their skills and training after program assistance. Pre-post analysis will be used to determine attribution to program interventions.

### ***B.1.2 Evaluation Issues and Questions***

The following issues and questions are to be addressed in the summative evaluation. The issues and questions were chosen based upon four criteria:

- to cover gaps identified by previous evaluations;
- to satisfy reporting requirements under the RMAF;
- to satisfy commitments to the Treasury Board Secretariat; and
- to include suggestions from program managers and regional coordinators and steering committee members.

#### **Program Rationale and Relevance**

1. Are the objectives of the Opportunities Fund still relevant in the context of other Federal and Provincial programming to integrate PWDs into the labour force?
2. Does the Opportunities Fund complement, overlap or duplicate other Federal and Provincial employment programs for persons with disabilities?
3. To what extent are clients in receipt of other services and programs (e.g. LMAPD and LMDA employment programs for PWDs) that may explain, in part, the results observed in OF clients?

#### **Program Implementation and Objective Achievement**

4. To what extent are social equity objectives met by the program?
5. To what extent has the program, where possible and appropriate, leveraged services with other levels of government and with organizations?
6. To what extent has the program demonstrated innovative approaches and best practices?
7. What types of alternative design and delivery approaches could the program adopt to improve outcomes?
8. How do clients and partners become aware of the program?

## **Program Monitoring and Client Profile**

9. Has the Opportunities Fund performance monitoring complied with the RMAF and is the design of the RMAF appropriate?
10. To what extent has the program improved the use of administrative databases and data collection to report performance monitoring activities and track clients?
11. What is the profile of clients by type of intervention, type of disability and relevant socio-economic variables?
12. What is the client profile, by reasons and circumstances, of those persons with disabilities who were eligible for assistance under EI Part II but because of exceptional circumstances, were approved to receive assistance under the Opportunities Fund program?
13. What is the profile of sponsors, community coordinators and employers?

## **Impacts and Effects**

14. What are the changes in employability by type of intervention and type of disability as a consequence of Opportunities Fund interventions?
15. What are the changes in employment by type of intervention and type of disability as a consequence of Opportunities Fund interventions?
16. What is the change in income earned from employment after Opportunities Fund interventions?
17. What changes in the level of social income support are a consequence of Opportunities Fund interventions?
18. What are the degree of and types of skills training sought by program clients after Opportunities Fund interventions?
19. What are the relevant societal outcomes as a consequence of Opportunities Fund interventions?
20. To what extent are clients satisfied with services delivered under the Opportunities Fund?
21. To what extent is the program cost-effective?

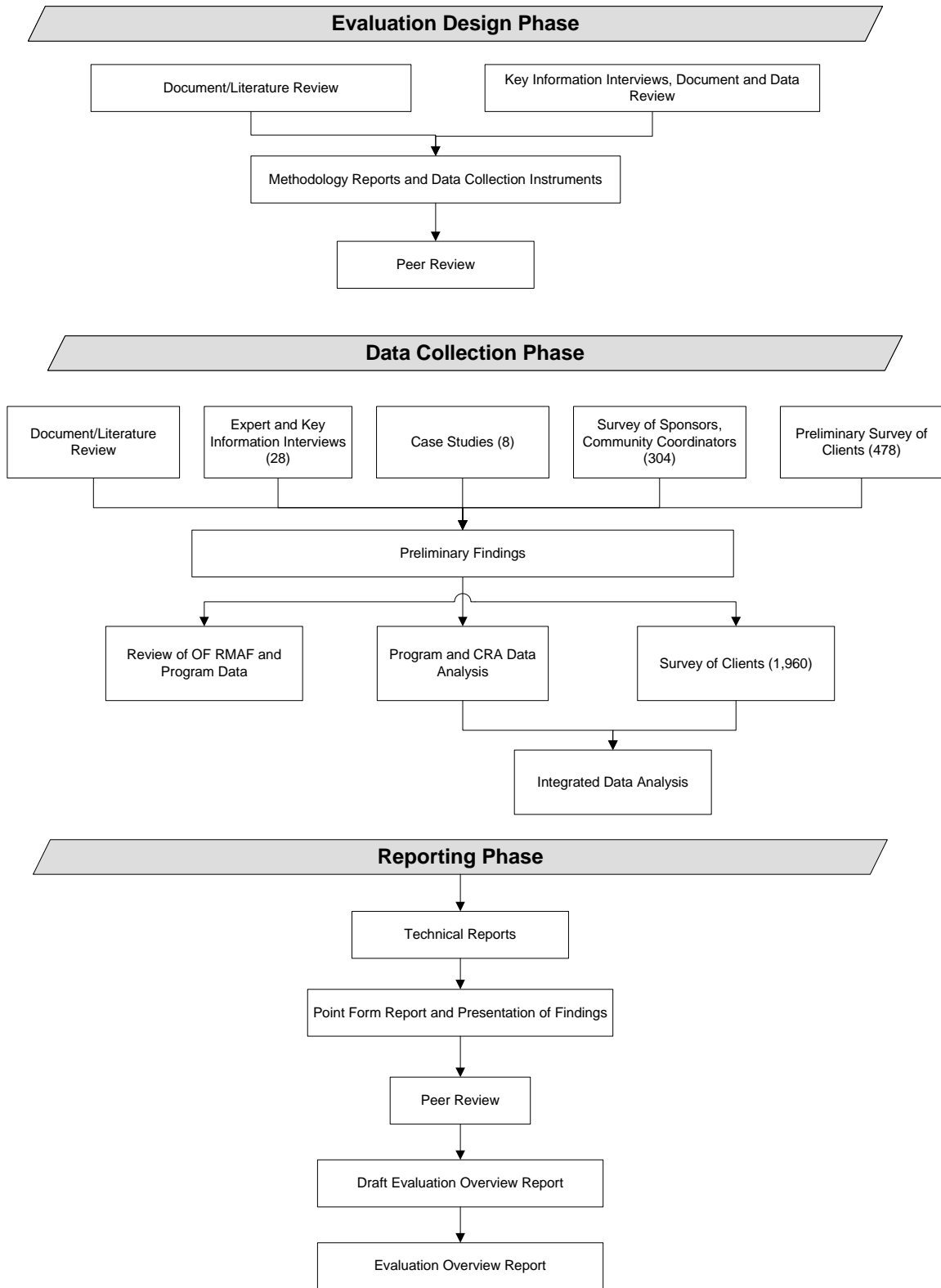


# *Appendix C: Evaluation Methodologies*

## **C.1 Evaluation Methodologies**

The methodology for this evaluation is based on multiple lines of evidence as shown in the evaluation methodology overview below. The main focus of research design and data collection was to address program rational, program relevance, and program implementation issues. During the initial data collection stages, preliminary information was obtained on other variables such as the client profile and impacts and effects. Subsequent data collection activities provided detailed quantitative evidence on program monitoring, client profile and the impacts and effects of the program.

The evaluation relies on the combined results from program administrative information databases, clientele survey information, EI database and CRA income tax information and the qualitative assessment undertaken by the HRSDC evaluation unit. Combined, these data sources provide a useful information base from which to draw findings on the overall effectiveness, impacts and relevance of the program.



## **C.1.1 Phase I Methodologies**

### **Document Review**

Documents reviewed included those which focused on program rationale, relationship to other programs for persons with disabilities, program implementation and objective achievement.

### **Literature Review**

A review of relevant literature was conducted to provide evidence on the complex nature and status of persons with disabilities in Canada and the labour market challenges they face. The literature review also examined programs, practices and experiences in similar OECD countries. The review focused on studies conducted since the publication of the Human Resources Development Canada November 2000 report, “Disability Policies and Programs: Lessons Learned.” Extensive online and bibliographic searches and suggestions from experts in disability issues research yielded a total of 15 studies/documents to be reviewed.

### **Expert and Key Informant Interviews**

Expert and key informant interviews were used to address a majority of the evaluation questions. The individuals interviewed were drawn from the following four categories:

- Opportunities Fund program officials (n=10);
- Representatives of funded organizations and employers (n=10);
- Other federal (n=4) and provincial representatives (n=3) involved in delivering employment services to persons with disabilities; and
- Leading academics and researchers in the field (n=5).

In addition to ensuring adequate regional distribution, the selection of expert and key informants was based on in-depth knowledge of one or more of the following aspects regarding programs for persons with disabilities:

- Rationale and linkages with provincial programming;
- Design;
- Results;
- Program monitoring and eligibility; and
- Best practices.

## **Survey of Sponsors, Community Coordinators and Employers**

Nine hundred and four sponsors, community coordinators and employers with active files in the 2002-2003 fiscal year were identified as potential telephone survey participants. A total of 304 respondents completed the questionnaire. Of these, 213 were characterized as employers and 91 as sponsors.

### **Phase I Survey of Clients**

A telephone survey of program participants was conducted to gather information on issues related to participant experiences and client satisfaction. In order to capture a sufficient number of appropriate comparison cases for a planned comparison group analysis, participants with a start date in fiscal year 2002/2003 were contacted. The focus of the client survey was on:

- The types of programs and services received;
- Experiences with the programs and services received;
- Satisfaction with the programs and services received; and
- Socio-economic characteristics of respondents.

The survey also collected information on outcomes such as employment and perceived program impacts/outcomes.

Out of the 1,321 participants in the sampling frame with a valid telephone number, 478 completed the survey. The data was weighted by region, urban/rural distribution and age to more closely match the population distribution as approximated by the sampling frame.

Considering the smaller sample size, and since the intent of this survey was to provide preliminary findings that could be useful to program management until the Phase II survey could be completed, very little of the Phase I survey results were brought forward in this integrated report. Only selected questions not addressed in the Phase II survey of program participants (i.e. client satisfaction related questions) have been cited in this integrated report. The purpose of this integrated report is to provide the most relevant data available for the evaluation. As such, only relevant Phase I findings will be discussed.

### **Case Studies**

Three sources of information were used for a total of eight case studies: 1) Program files, 2) Project representatives (recipients of contribution agreements and external project coordinators) and 3) External respondents. The program files were used for background information. In order to ensure an adequate regional and project-type representation, a selection grid was used to provide an initial selection of the case studies.

For each case study, at least three informant interviews were conducted over the phone using a structured guide. At least one of the interviews was conducted with an external respondent who was not directly involved in the project – they were aware of the activities and results of the funded project activities, but were not employed by the



organization who received funding from OF for the project. These individuals were interviewed to provide more objective views and feedback on the success of the project. In addition, individual participants were interviewed for six (6) case studies.

### **C.1.2 Phase II Methodologies**

#### **Review of the Opportunities Fund RMAF**

The evaluation team collected all of the relevant program documentation, including the OF RMAF and monitoring reports. These documents were analysed to assess both their relevance and appropriateness. In order to promote the exchange of staff views on the documents, a workshop was held at Headquarters. The following issues were addressed:

- Adequacy of the performance and monitoring measures (i.e., does it adequately measure outputs, outcomes? Are the indicators clear and appropriate? Are the data sources appropriate?);
- Gaps in the current measurement system (What information is being collected? Are the key performance issues and indicators specified? Is there other information that should be collected / not be collected? What types of information would be most useful?);
- Is the information appropriately collected and analyzed?
- Are there mechanisms in place to ensure data quality?
- Administrative data issues (Is there missing data for key data fields?);
- Appropriateness of reporting (Is the information accessible for reporting? Can the reporting requirements be met? Is there missing information? Is information sufficiently rolled up and disseminated? Are reporting requirements in line with the RMAF? Are any changes to the reporting requirements required?); and
- Suggestions for improvement with respect to performance, monitoring and reporting.

Results from this workshop enabled the evaluation team to update the Opportunities Fund performance measurement framework, identifying key sources of data and their availability.

#### **Administrative Data Analysis**

One key step in the evaluation was to identify all individuals who participated in at least one OF intervention. To ensure the data used for the evaluation were consistent with the Employment Insurance (EI) Monitoring and Assessment Reports (MARS), the data file of OF interventions used to generate the counts for the MARS was provided to the evaluation team for the fiscal years 1999/2000 to 2006/2007. Since the survey covered the years 2000 to 2005, and CRA data was only available up to 2005, the administrative data analysis was restricted to the calendar years 2000 to 2005, unless otherwise stated in the text.

In addition, in order to assess the degree of overlap between OF and other employability programs, only OF interventions were included in the analysis. In other words, any other Employment Benefits and Support Measures (EBSMs) interventions, Youth Employment Strategy (YES) interventions, and interventions associated with Aboriginal funding, were extracted for all individuals who were identified to have OF interventions in these years.

One of the main tasks in the database preparation process was to develop Action Plan Equivalents (APEs). An action plan typically provides details on the types of interventions a participant needs to undertake in order to obtain the skills necessary to return to work, as well as the start and end date for this set of activities. Since action plan details are often inconsistently recorded, an APE was created for each individual based on the start and end dates for their individual intervention records. If any interventions occurred within six months of each other, they were considered to be part of the same action plan.

The resulting administrative database was then linked to CRA data, which included T1 and T4S data<sup>25</sup>. The T4S was particularly useful in that it fills potential gaps in T1 information, such as when individuals do not file an income tax form in a given year. T4S forms, on the other hand, must be submitted by employers. As such, although approximately 10% of the individuals receiving OF interventions were missing T1 data in a given year, by using T4S data to *augment* the results, we can assume almost complete earnings data for all OF participants.

CRA annual data is based on a calendar year. As such, for the purpose of this report, all CRA and OF data was defined based on the program start year – the year the first intervention an APE occurred. As such, the age of the participant was converted to age at APE start year. Earnings, SA and EI data from the CRA T1 and T4S files were also calculated relative to this start year. Examples of earnings' measures are:

- Earnings 3 years to 1 year prior to program participation;
- Earnings in the program start year; and
- Earnings 1 year to 5 years after the program start year.

This provided information on each OF participant at different points in time relative to their program participation. However, not all participants had the same amount of post-program start year data. For example, only participants with a year 2000 start date had up to five years of data after their program start year. As mentioned, due to the virtual elimination of EI eligible clients after the year 2000, OF participants accessing OF before 2000 were quite different from the subsequent years. As a result, the detailed administrative analysis focused on the participants with a 2001 program start year. These participants provided up to four years of post-program start year data and yield crucial information on the longer-term outcomes of the OF participants.

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<sup>25</sup> The data available from the T1 files includes the information provided on the T1 tax form submitted by tax filers, the T4S data includes the information provided in the T4S forms submitted by employers to CRA.

## **Phase II Survey of Program Participants**

### ***Survey Implementation***

In order to ensure that relevant areas were addressed in the questionnaire, the research team developed a draft questionnaire based on mapping questions to the Matrix of Evaluation Issues, Information Sources/Indicators and Methodologies. (Please refer to Appendix A) The questionnaire was largely based on the Phase I Survey of Clients. However, the job-by-job questions were removed because they were considered unreliable (job history exceeded five years in most cases). Client satisfaction and detailed program experience questions were also removed as they were addressed in the first survey.

As part of the pre-test, 10 questionnaires were completed and frequencies were run on the responses. As a result, there were some minor wording and structural changes to the questionnaire prior to implementation.

Once the survey questionnaire was finalized, the consultant mailed a letter informing potential interviewees of the survey, its purpose, etc. and to provide a number linked to HRSDC staff that was available throughout the process, to answer any questions. The survey team also made arrangements to provide the interview through TTY lines. If required, a proxy respondent was allowed to complete the survey in circumstances where the OF participant was not able to complete the interview personally.

Following the completion of the survey, all responses were linked to the administrative database - if the survey respondents agreed to this linkage. Just over 82% of the survey respondents agreed to the linkage of administrative data to the survey data.

## **Limitations**

### ***Survey Response Rates***

The OF survey participant outcomes are provided in Tables 1.1. Initially, the intent of the survey was to include participants from the 2001/2002 fiscal year. However, due to low response rates, the scope of the survey was expanded to include participants who had a start date between 2000 and 2005. It took 11,834 contact attempts to yield 1,960 completed interviews. Lower than expected completion rates were largely due to bad contact information – 4,719 (39.9%) of the telephone numbers provided in the database did not have valid contact information (the number was no longer in service or the participant could no longer be reached at that number).

The response rate for the survey was based on the calculation methodology used for HRSDC's Canadian Out of Employment Panel (COEP) Survey. This calculation divides the total cooperative contacts by the total eligible contacts. The total eligible contacts are equal to the total number of participants in the database minus those who had invalid contact information. For the OF participants this number was 7,115 (11,834 – 4,719). The total cooperative contacts include survey respondents and individuals who were not eligible to complete the survey. For the OF participants this number was 2,665 (1,960 + 705). Thus, the result was a 37.5% response rate.

**Table 1.1  
Survey Outcomes**

Survey Outcome	Number	Percent
Wrong # / Not in service	4,719	39.9%
Number Blocked	141	1.2%
Unable to contact after repeated attempts	2,500	21.1%
Refused	1,809	15.3%
Ineligible (did not recall participating in any programs or services)	705	6.0%
Completed survey	1,960	16.6%
<b>Total participants called</b>	<b>11,834</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

The profile of respondents was compared to the population profile on variables in the administrative database including the CRA income information. Based on this comparison, the survey data was weighted to ensure that the distribution of the survey respondents was close to the population distribution for several key variables. These included:

- Start year for programs and services;
- Gender;
- Region;
- Social assistance in the year prior to the program start year; and
- Earnings one year post program start year.

Although the weighting procedures were implemented to correct for non-response bias, it is based only on observable variables available in the administrative data, including CRA data, such as earnings. Given the difficulties reaching participants and the resulting survey response rate, it is possible that there are biases in the survey data due to other factors that could not be corrected for by using the weighting procedures, such as motivation to return to the labour market.

***Gaps in the Administrative Data***

In order to examine longer-term outcomes for the OF participants, the data analysis for this report contained a substantial amount of data for the years 2000 to 2002. However, there was a substantial amount of missing data for key variables in the OF administrative data, including disability type and the types of interventions received. Consequently, the administrative data did not assist the analysis of the program outcomes based on the types of interventions received or the type of disability for the entire population. This analysis could only be conducted for the respondents who responded to the survey. This severely limited the number of cases available for this analysis and, unlike information gleaned from administrative data; this data is subject to response biases.

As noted previously, due to individual tax filing habits, T1 data on earnings, social assistance income and EI income may not sufficiently capture an individual’s employment history. However, analysis illustrated that most individuals file income tax reports even if

they have no taxable income - this allows them to take advantage of tax rebates and other tax benefits available for individuals with lower incomes. The T1 earnings data, however, can be supplemented by T4S earnings data. Employers must submit the T4S forms if the employee's length or amount of employment meets the requirements for filing their earnings information. Consequently, while approximately 10% of the individuals were missing T1 data in a given year, we can assume almost complete earnings data are available for all OF participants. This also provided an employment indicator to identify all participants who had an employer in any year and also the number of employers for the entire OF population.

### ***Lack of a Comparison Group***

The absence of a comparison group means that the results of the survey will be used to measure the outcomes and perceived impacts of the program.<sup>26</sup> However, it is important to note that other approaches were developed in an attempt to create a comparison situation. For example, one approach was to compare the changes in earnings, SA and EI received in the program year and subsequent years, to the earnings in the year prior to the program start year. The prior year start outcomes were in effect assumed to be the baseline. While this provides an accurate measure of the outcomes in terms of gains or losses in income, without a comparison group, it may be in itself an inefficient measure of the incremental impacts of program participation.

The evaluation team also examined the possibility of using the survey data to create a "limited treatment" comparison group. This approach is often used when no comparison group of individuals who received no assistance is available. As a substitute, participants who received minimal assistance are used as a comparison group against participants who receive more intensive assistance. For the OF evaluation, the evaluation team tested using individuals who received only Employment Assistance Service (EAS) types of interventions (*low intensity*) as a comparison group against participants who received higher intensity interventions such as Skills Development (SD), Targeted Wage Subsidies (TWS), and Self Employment (SE). The results indicated similar results and outcomes across the different types of treatments, even for those who only used resource centres. Based on these results, it was concluded that there was a high degree of selection bias into the various interventions – either the participants self-selected based on need or the service providers streamed participants into low versus higher intensity interventions based on their needs. This resulted in similar positive outcomes for low intensity and high intensity interventions.

A similar approach was attempted using only the administrative data, segmenting the participants into short duration (*low intensity*) APEs and longer duration (*higher intensity*) APEs. The results were the same as above, suggesting selection bias made this an inappropriate comparison group.

The final approach tested was to use the pre-program results for later year program participants to create a comparison group for participants who had an earlier program start year. Table 1.2 shows how this was accomplished for the earnings data.

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<sup>26</sup> There was little evidence at the time that an adequate comparison group could be developed for the evaluation without incurring considerable cost and potential delays in completing the evaluation.

**Table 1.2**  
**Alignment of Earnings Data of Post-2001 Program Participants to create a Comparison Group for the Participants with a 2001 Program Start Year**

<b>Outcome Measure</b>	<b>2001 Participants</b>	<b>Comparison Group</b>
Start Year Earnings	Earnings in 2001	Earnings in 2001 for participants in 2002
1 Year Post-Program Start Year	Earnings in 2002	Earnings in 2002 for participants in 2003
2 Years Post-Program Start Year	Earnings in 2003	Earnings in 2003 for participants in 2004
3 Years Post-Program Start Year	Earnings in 2004	Earnings in 2004 for participants in 2005

Using this alignment of data, the earnings for the 2001 participants from 2001 to 2004 was compared to the earnings of participants who have programs and services start dates one year later. While this yields certain outcome measures, it does not provide comparison results for more than three years, and it was not possible to create a comparison group for the 2001 participants' earnings four years post-program start date<sup>27</sup>.

Unlike most comparison groups, the individuals in this case changed depending on the outcome year analyzed. This can be problematic if the characteristics of the clients who receive OF programming changes substantially over time. To reduce differences in the outcome measures between the participants and the comparison group, a regression model was developed for each outcome measure that included outcome measures as predictors of the variable for membership in the participant and comparison group and variables for gender, age, region, visible minority, aboriginal status, person with a disability, and marital status.

This approach substantially reduced the earnings gains compared to the analysis using a simple post-program versus pre-program analysis. Consequently the results of this analysis were selected for inclusion in the cost-effectiveness analysis.

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<sup>27</sup> This would have required 2006 participant data for the comparison group and, at the time the database was constructed, the database was not complete for the 2006 participants.