

# The North America Career Development Partnership: Experiment in International Collaboration

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*This article describes how career development programs became the focus of an international partnership between the United States and Canada. Beginning in 1976 in the United States, the National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee (NOICC) and its State Occupational Information Coordinating Committees (SOICCs) developed training and materials that promote the use of occupational and labor market information. Similarly, in the early 1970s, Canada began to explore the feasibility of creating a computer-based career information delivery system. What follows is the story of an unusual and significant international collaboration. It concluded with identification of lessons learned.*

In June 1975, Stuart Conger, then director of the Occupational and Career Analysis and Development Branch of Employment and Immigration Canada, asked a young project officer on his staff, Phil Jarvis, to explore the feasibility of creating a computer-based career information delivery system. Jarvis first established a set of desirable criteria, then visited the authors and the development teams of the leading systems at the time. Two were in Canada; the balance were in the United States. None of the systems met the criteria that Jarvis proposed and none of the developers (Canadian or American) was willing to collaborate in new development. Consequently, by the spring of 1976, Jarvis established detailed specifications for an entirely new system to be developed in Canada. It was called *Choices*.

*Choices* was initially developed by Employment and Immigration Canada. The initial version was piloted coast-to-coast across Canada in 1977 and 1978, but the first large-scale adoptions of *Choices* occurred in Florida (1978), North Carolina (1979), and Kansas (1980). When Canadians saw a strong interest in *Choices* in the United States, wide scale implementation began across Canada.

While working with the States on *Choices*, Canadian career professionals became increasingly impressed with, indeed envious of the National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee (NOICC) / State Occupational Information Coordinating Committee (SOICC) network. The first step in

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establishing a national network in Canada was taken in 1977 with the convening of the first National Consultation on Career Development in Ottawa. What began as regular meetings of 20 to 30 federal, provincial and territorial career development leaders from across Canada quickly became Canada's major annual career conference, National Consultation on Career Development (NATCON), in which 1,500 or more attendees participate. An annual meeting, even of such significance as NATCON, does not however, constitute a network.

Concrete progress toward development of a Canadian/American partnership occurred 10 years later at NATCON '88 when Juliette Lester, who became the second executive director of NOICC in 1986, joined with the late Lionel Dixon, Director General of Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), to meet with a group of provincial and territorial officials. Dixon left the meeting determined to create a Canadian counterpart to the NOICC/SOICC network; Lester left intent on creating a support entity, modeled after the University of Toronto's role with NATCON. The results were the NOICC Training Support Center (NTSC) in the United States (1990) and the Canada Career Information Partnership (CCIP) in Canada (1990). CCIP's first project was the creation of a national career newspaper in tabloid format, *Canada Prospects*. This activity had been suggested to Jarvis as a good "starter project" by Walt Webb of NOICC. Just as Canada's idea of a career information system, Choices, had gone south in 1978, so did America's concept of professional tabloids come north in 1991.

In 1995, a further step was taken. Lester accepted an invitation from Jarvis, on behalf of Bill Barry, author and president of The Real Game Inc., and Robert Goguen, president of Canada's National Life/Work Centre (NLWC), to pilot in the U.S. an innovative career development resource, *The Real Game Series* (Barry, 1999). Lester assigned her career development specialist at the time, Nancy Perry, to coordinate early U.S. involvement. Subsequently, Burton Carlson of NOICC became the U.S. Coordinator of the *The Real Game Series* (Barry, 1999). The first prototype of the program was piloted in all Canadian provinces and territories and in three U.S. border states: Vermont, North Dakota, and Arizona (wrong border!). Since then, The Real Game has become a series of six K-12 and adult programs that is used in schools and other settings throughout both countries.

A third step in development of a Canadian/American career development partnership took place in 1996, when NOICC approved a request from NLWC to adapt NOICC's National Career Development Guidelines (1996b) for Canada. The resulting adaptation, *The Blueprint for Life/Work Designs* (National Life/Work Centre, 1999) was first introduced in the spring of 1997 and is rapidly becoming an essential resource for career practitioners and policy makers from coast to coast across Canada.

Thus began an exchange between the United States and Canada that has expanded to mutual benefit over the ensuing years and has recently become formalized.

## **BASIS FOR RELATIONSHIP**

Any partnership depends on commitment to a common purpose and mutual trust and respect among partners. In the case of the Canadian/American career development partnership, both the common purpose and necessary trust and respect shared initially by Stu Conger, Lionel Dixon, Phil Jarvis, and Juliette Lester has expanded to include a great many additional professionals on both sides of the border (see Endnote 1). That purpose and trust has also been supported by significant policy events in both countries.

## **THE UNITED STATES**

The United States in 1976 established by statute the NOICC. The most recent authorizing language is contained in the Carl D. Perkins Vocational & Applied Technology Education Act Amendments of 1990 and in the Job Training Reform Amendments of 1992, the purpose of which was to coordinate the development and dissemination of occupational information to youth. Russell Flanders became the first executive director. Parallel state organizations, the SOICCs, were established in each of the 56 states and territories by 1077. Together the NOICC and the SOICCs constituted what came to be known as the NOICC/SOICC Network. Over the years, the network expanded its target audience to include both youth and adults, added a training function specifically directed to users of occupational information, and used technologies to increase public access to training information. A final addition to the NOICC/SOICC role has been development of competency-based career development classroom resources such as, the *National Career Development Guidelines* (NOICC, 1996b) and the Get-a-Life Career Development Portfolio (NOICC, 1993) that integrate career development subject matter into academic curricula.

The strength of the NOICC/SOICC enterprise lies in five basic accomplishments achieved by the NOICC/SOICC Network before partnership. These are (a) an independent federal / state network devoted to and funded through the federal Departments of Labor and Education for a single purpose (see Endnote 2); (b) sophisticated print and computer-based occupational and career information delivery systems functional at state and national levels; (c) a nationally accepted set of career development competencies around which activities at national, state and local levels may be organized; (d) a carefully managed support system that controls the development and distribution of NOICC/SOICC systems,

products, and practitioner training; and (e) direct involvement by national professional organizations in the development and delivery of NOICC services.

The information systems developed with the support of NOICC included two kinds. The Occupational Information System (OIS; see Endnote 3) was developed for planners and administrators and focused primarily on such things as industrial trends and occupational supply and demand. Career Information Delivery Systems (CIDS; see Endnote 4) were developed as a support to vocational guidance and counseling. They provided information for use in self-assessment, career exploration, and educational preparation. Together, these systems provided a comprehensive array of occupational and career information accessible to users in a user-friendly format. James Woods directed these efforts along with Harvey Ollis and Pamela Frugoli, all of NOICC. The CIDS are complemented by printed presentations of similar information in the form of career tabloids. (More than 46 states produce more than 3 million tabloids annually.)

The career development competencies and indicators developed by NOICC in cooperation with major national counseling and career development organizations are contained in the *National Career Development Guidelines* (NOICC, 1996b). First published in 1989 and led by NOICC program officer Mary Beth McCormac, the importance of the guidelines is that they formed the basis around which NOICC/SOICC products were subsequently developed and became the standard around which career development activities are organized and assessed at the state and local events. The guidelines have been adopted by most state departments of education and are incorporated in the American School Counselors Association's (1997) *The National Standards for School Counseling Programs*.

NOICC's support system includes a Crosswalk and Data Center that supports SOICCs with information and technical assistance and a Training Support Center that provides logistical support to NOICC's congressionally mandated Career Development Training Institute (CDTI). Fourteen national professional associations are represented on NOICC's CDTI board; among these, the American School Counselor Association, the National Career Development Association (NCDA), the Association for Career and Technical Education, the National Association of Workforce Development Professionals, and the International Association of Personnel in Employment Security have either directly delivered NOICC services or are working with NOICC to implement a specific career development agenda.

In considering how the partnership between the U.S. and Canada got started, it is important to recognize the U.S. accomplishments that encouraged Canadian organizations to seek partnership. By the same token, it is important to identify Canadian accomplishments that led NOICC to positively respond.

## CANADA

Canadian strengths brought the partnership to include a long history of governmental leadership, inclusive activity, and unceasing innovation. Major career information initiatives began in Canada in the early 1970s. Employment and Immigration Canada, now HRDC, took the lead. Early projects included the *Canadian Classification and Dictionary of Occupations* (1971), the *Careers Canada* series of 700 Occupational Monographs that provided local labor market information for each province and territory (1976), and the "*Red Seal Trades*" series of about 70 interprovincially certified occupational analyses (1977). The databases developed and maintained for these projects served as the foundation for the development of the Canadian government's *Choices* computer-based career exploration systems, previously described.

Through the decade of the 1980s, HRDC national headquarters and regional head offices in all provinces and territories continued to provide leadership and funding for the creation of career development resources. Major initiatives during this period included funding of the Creation and Mobilization of Counseling Resources for Youth (CAMCRY) initiative in 1985 and starting in 1988, establishments of a network of Human Resources Sector Councils in 23 major industry sectors. In 1988, the CAMCRY initiative, inspired by Conger and led by the Canadian Career Development Foundation, supported a 5-year national Stay-In-School campaign with publication of diverse career development and information resources.

Among major developments in the 1990s were establishment of the Canada Career Information Partnership in 1990 and the Canadian Labor Force Development Board (CLFDB) in 1991 with equal management and labor representation and equity group participation from across Canada; introduction of the National Job Bank and Electronic Labor Exchange in 1993, National Graduate Register/Campus WorkLink in 1995, and WorkSearch Web sites by HRDC and Industry Canada in 1998, establishment of the National Life/Work Centre in 1994; initialization of a number of classroom and web-based career development resources, including *The Real Game Series* (Barry, 1999) in 1994, *Career Explorer* in 1995, the *WorkinfoNET* national web-based "gateway" network in 1996, the *Blueprint for Life/Work Designs* (National Life/Work Centre, 1999) first drafted in 1997, and establishment of the *Canadian Career Consortium* linking HRDC, CLFDB, CCIP, and the Sector Councils in 1997. Initiatives currently under way include development of *Realm* magazine for youth inclined toward self-employment and entrepreneurship, *The Edge* magazine for employment-bound youth, *National Career Development Standards and Guidelines* for practitioners, *National Electronic LMI Quality Standards*,

the *Career Circuit* project to connect and train staff in 5,000 youth-serving agencies across Canada, and *C-Rex*, a web-based, searchable career resource database.

Budget cuts throughout the 1990s resulted in a new readiness to partner among Canadian public and private sector agencies. In fact, the not-for-profit National Life/Work Centre (NLWC) was created specifically as a vehicle to refine new models and processes for inclusive partnerships on pan-Canadian projects involving organizations that traditionally had been competitors. For example, although NLWC is the "executing agency" for *The Real Game Series*, *The Blueprint for Life/Work Designs* (National Life/Work Centre, 1999), and Life/Work Television, the following Canadian agencies are all partners or advisers: Human Resources Development Canada, Industry Canada, the Canada Career Information Partnership, the Canada Career Consortium, *WorkInfoNet*, the Canadian Career Development Foundation, Industry Sector Councils, Bridges Initiatives, and the Canadian Foundation for Economic Education (CFEE). NLWC is partnering with the Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF) and HRDC on *The Edge* career magazine project for employment-bound youth. CCDF is partnering with HRDC and CFEE on the Career Circuit project developing resources and training for community-based, youth-serving agencies.

Far from an inclusive list, these exemplify the new mood of partnership among the leading career resources producing agencies in Canada. Yet, the new, formalized partnership between NLWC and NOICC, with each bringing great partners from their respective countries "to the table," is the most exciting of all.

## **JOINT U.S./CANADIAN ACTIVITY**

### **The Agreement**

In July of 1997, the National Life/Work Centre and NOICC signed an agreement at the NOICC/SOICC conference in Tacoma, Washington in which they committed to jointly develop, promote, and sell high quality career development resources and to share equally in after cost revenues generated by the sale of these resources (NOICC appropriation languages authorizes NOICC to charge fees for products and training and to reallocate revenues derived to statutory purposes without going through the appropriations process). Included in the collaboration between the NLWC and NOICC were not only the development and dissemination of specific products, but also the provision of training and technical assistance.

The NLWC expressed, early on, its interest in carrying the benefits of the North American partnership to other countries. NOICC, as a U.S. federal agency, focused primarily on the benefits such a collaboration could bring to U.S. citizens. From the start, both parties recognized that many other entities, private and governmental, would be interested in the workings of the partnership and would have to be indirectly involved at the national level in both countries. Initial priorities for collaboration were adaptation of the U.S. *National Career Development Guidelines* (NOICC, 1996b) for a Canadian audience and continued development of the Canadian-initiated *The Real Game Series* (Barry, 1999) of products.

### **Adaptation of the Guidelines**

NOICC's guidelines have now, through a long and inclusive process, been adapted to Canadian application in the *Blueprint for Life/Work Designs* (National Life/Work Centre, 1999). The Canadian version differs from the U.S. version primarily in the way competencies are organized and stated. (Counselor competencies have also been deleted, because development of those competencies has been accepted as the responsibility of the Canadian Career Development Foundation.) The competencies contained in the *Blueprint* are, as the guidelines in the United States, incorporated into all products developed by the National Life/Work Centre and have been accepted by a number of provinces as the standard for school guidance and counseling programs.

The significance of this achievement is that all states and provinces in the United States and Canada may now operate within a single set of agreed-on career development competencies and indicators. That framework will allow more effective communications by professionals across the border, facilitate increased international collaboration in development of resources and delivery of training, and create on the North American continent an international labor force equipped to operate successfully in the highly competitive and constantly changing international marketplace.

### **The Real Game Series**

*The Real Game Series* (Barry, 1999) is a series of games that allow participants to access and apply career information, make career choices, and live through the consequences of choice in assumed roles. Thousands of games within the series are currently being used across the United States and Canada in tens of thousands of classrooms and with hundreds of thousands of students. Upon completion of the series, there will be at least five, and maybe six, K-12 versions and one adult game, each with a different focus, but all building on each other. All versions will be *Guidelines* and *Blueprint* compliant,

appropriately designed for use with specific grade levels or settings, conducive to flexible delivery, and easily linked to other career development resources.

All versions will have involved thousands of students, teachers, counselors, and parents across the United States and Canada in design, piloting and delivery. Indeed, it is the involvement of these many potential users that has created the phenomenal market that this product now enjoys.

The latest development in *The Real Game Series* (Barry, 1999) story is the agreement between NOICC and the National Life/Work Centre to create a single international Web site for *The Real Game Series* that would include a description of each of the versions, provide ordering information, suggest training tips, identify trainers certified in the various versions, notify users of available training, and offer a chat room for trainers and persons delivering *The Real Game Series*.

Although the original version of *The Real Games Series* (Barry, 1999) started in St. John's, Newfoundland, with Bill Barry, a father, and Mara, his daughter, the subsequent development would not have occurred without the involvement of HRDC, a federal agency, and the NLWC partnership with the NOICC/SOICC Network. Interest in *The Real Games Series* has, in turn, sparked renewed interest in the *Guidelines* and *Blueprint* (National Life/Work Centre, 1999) and many other career development resources available through HRDC, NLWC, and NOICC. In fact, Lester and Jarvis presented these products at the 1999 International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance (IAEVG) Conference in New Zealand. Now, of course, interest in the *Guidelines* and *Blueprint* (National Life/Work Centre, 1999) and *The Real Games Series* (Barry, 1999) is being expressed in England, France, Australia, New Zealand, Holland, and Japan.

### **Curriculum for Career Development Facilitators**

This curriculum was originally developed by the Continuum Center and Adult Career Counseling Center at Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan under a grant from NOICC (1998). Its purpose, based on two surveys related to career development training, was to provide a basic level of formal training for those providing employment-related services who had received no education in the theory and practice of career development. The Curriculum, originally made available in 1996, has now been tied to a national professional certificate supplied through the Center for Certification and Education (CCE; see Endnote 5), is taught at both graduate and undergraduate levels, and is being adapted for instruction through the Internet.

Responsibility for instruction and training now resides in the United States with the NCDA. NOICC, in the fall of 1998, signed a memorandum of understanding with the CCDF, CCE and NCDA allowing the CCDF to adapt, and deliver the curriculum to its Canadian audience while retaining the certification available through CCE. (Key figures in this collaboration include Lynn Bezanson, Tom Clawson, Juliet Miller, and Juliette Lester, respectively the executive directors of CCDF, CCE, NCDA, and NOICC.)

### **International Career Development Library (ICDL)**

NOICC, beginning in 1997, began development of what was called a "virtual career development library" under a grant to the Educational Resources Information Center on Counseling and Student Services (ERIC/CASS) at the University of North Carolina in Greenboro where Gary Walz is director. The intention was to develop an Internet site through which key career development reference materials and important research reports might be made accessible to career development instructors and practitioners. Over the years, as technology has changes, the vision of this resource has grown and become more sophisticated. The library is now projected to include several forms of database searches, a "magazine" function, and a variety of interactive educational forms. NOICC, ERIC/CASS, and the NLWC have recently initiated conversations regarding how this Web site might, like the Real Games Web site, be converted to an international site that would contain U.S. and Canadian "rooms" where the "shelves" would be managed by representatives of the respective countries, but whose catalogue of listings would be searchable by anyone holding a "library card". In keeping with its international flavor, the library will not be operational until 2000, you may visit the current ICDL at <http://icdl.uncg.edu>.

### **LESSONS OF THE NORTH AMERICAN PARTNERSHIP**

What have we learned for policy and practice from this international experiment in career development programs by the United States and Canada? Others might choose different factors, but we want to focus on a few lessons:

1. Bring all stakeholders to the table. At a national level, both countries routinely invited broad participation and shared ownership in the brainstorming, development, and implementation of career development programs. The degree of acceptance and use of products depends, to a large extent, on the participation of major professional associations and relevant foundations and agencies in their development and their dissemination. The International Advisory Committee for *The Real Games Series* (Barry, 1999), chaired by Canada, enables key players from present and future member countries to be partners at the table.

2. Build on successful national, state, and local or provincial/territorial models. The Canadian *Blueprint for Life/Work Designs* (National Life/Work Centre, 1999) is an adaptation of the *National Career Development Guidelines* (1996b). Building on successful models is both economical and avoids duplication of efforts, nationally and internationally.
3. Develop integrated and related products. Originating in Canada, *The Real Games Series* (Barry, 1999) of products has been jointly developed, tested, and disseminated. Equally important are the training programs for each of the series. One result of the international partnership has been the linkage of programs such as the *Guidelines/Blueprint* (National Life/Work Centre, 1999), *The Real Games Series*, and portfolios, such as the *Get a Life* portfolios distributed by the American School Counselor Association in the U.S. (NOICC, 1993)
4. Invest in professional development and practitioner training. NOICC working with the SOICCs has been able to develop state training teams and thus reach more clients. Also, the network has been able to respond to initiatives and specific legislation; for example, the School-to-Work Act, which emphasizes career guidance. Canada embarked on a very substantial program, Distance Training of Career Counselors. Both countries have emphasized targeted training to specific needs and groups and have used new technology to reach appropriate audiences more effectively.
5. Provide incentive funds or seed money. Although there were different sources for funds to support these initiatives, pooled resources and expertise enabled the countries to accomplish more than they could have alone. A related factor is a strong and unique legislative mission. NOICC's mandate addressed national and state prototypes that provided a framework for programs in other countries. At the same time, understanding the government's structure and funding sources of collaborating countries increases the success of partnership.

The participants, programs, and products of this North American career development partnership exists ultimately to help each person in the United States and Canada to make his or her own career decision. Helping young people with the transition from school-to-work is on both countries' agenda. We have provided them with the information resources and the tools to make informed choices about jobs, occupations, and careers. We have also established an international framework for the interaction between clients and producers.

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## ENDNOTES

1. The names of Helen Hackett, Yves Boutot, Cal Stotyn, and Kate Burton-Gough immediately come to mind in Canada; Nancy Perry, Linda Kobylarz, Ethel Keeley, Pat Hendrickson, and Cathy Van Dyke in the U.S. There are however, many more.
2. The funding history of the NOICC/SOICC network may be found in the latest NOICC Status Report (1996a) available through the NOICC Training Support Center (NTSC).
3. The OIS has been incorporated by the U.S. Department of Labor into America's Labor Market Information Net System (ALMIS) and made a part of America's Career Information Net (ACINET), both available on the World Wide Web: ALMIS, [www.lmi.net.org](http://www.lmi.net.org); ACINET, [www.acinet.org](http://www.acinet.org).
4. Many of the career information delivery systems are proprietary and available only through the purchase of a license.
5. CCE is a subdivision of the National Board for Counselor Certification. The requirements for career development facilitator certification are stated in the application form available from CEE or NCDA.