

About The Research

learn\$ave is a project designed to evaluate the effectiveness of Individual Development Accounts for learning to help low-income Canadians save to finance a learning opportunity. The project is being undertaken by Social and Enterprise Development Innovations (SEDI), with the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation and community agencies in 10 communities across Canada. The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) is responsible for the evaluation component of the demonstration. SRDC is recognised, within Canada and internationally, as a leader in social policy research and experimentation. Working with community agencies and the program designers, SRDC has designed a 3-part research and evaluation strategy for **learn\$ave** to test Individual Development Accounts for adult learning.

For nearly 10 years, SRDC has conducted large-scale demonstrations of new social policy ideas in Canada. Like other demonstrations before it, **learn\$ave's** research component includes the very best principles of social research:

- participation in **learn\$ave** is fully voluntary and all eligible applicants have an equal opportunity to take part in the demonstration project;
- project staff take time to walk through a process of "informed consent" with all participants to make sure they fully understand their rights and responsibilities before agreeing to take part;
- participants are treated with respect at all times during the project; and,
- the confidentiality of participants' information is protected at all times and will be used by researchers only for the purposes of project evaluation.

National demonstration

Poverty isn't uniform across Canada, but it is a reality in different communities, local economies and socio-cultural groups. That's why researchers will look at how **learn\$ave** works in different kinds of communities and for different groups of participants. Included in the 10 project sites are smaller, rural locales, as well as some of the largest metropolitan centres in Canada. **learn\$ave** participants will come from diverse backgrounds - selected only on the basis of basic eligibility requirements and a desire to take part in saving to access greater learning opportunities.

Long-term findings

learn\$ave is planned to run for a total of 9 years, to 2009. June 2000 - May 2001 was a start-up year during which project partners developed and finalised the project's operational evaluation, and research details. **learn\$ave** will be delivered from June 2001 - May 2007 but participants will only be accepted between June 2001 and May 2003. Each **learn\$ave** account holder will have up to 3 years to build their savings and matching savings credits. After saving, each account holder has up to one year to make use of his or her total account holdings, bringing an end to the delivery phase in May 2007. The follow-up and evaluation period will begin June 2006 and continue to May 2009.

This will allow researchers to study the impacts of the IDAs beyond the short-term effects on participants' savings behaviour during the course of the project. By looking at changes one or two years beyond the end of the savings period, researchers hope to find out more about how the **learn\$ave** savings translate into learning through education, training, or starting a micro-enterprise. At that time, SRDC will use the project data to model long-term IDA impacts.

The Impact Study: Random assignment

In Vancouver, Toronto and Halifax, **learn\$ave** will run as a *random assignment* demonstration project. This means that 1,200 eligible participants in each site have an equal chance of being assigned, at random, to any 1 of 3 project groups:

- The “*Comparison*” group : 400 participants in each site who will be interviewed over time so that their experiences may be compared with those in the other **learn\$ave** groups;
- The “**learn\$ave**” group: 400 participants in each site who will receive a **learn\$ave** account and matching savings credits;
- The “**learn\$ave plus**” group: 400 participants in each site who will receive a **learn\$ave** account, matching savings credits, training in financial management and support from **learn\$ave** project staff.

The project parameters in each of these three sites will be identical to allow the pooling of results for statistically significant findings. The design of this project provides the most rigorous determination of project impacts. It should be noted that the type of evaluation envisioned here is underway in only one other Individual Development Account (IDA) project in the world - the American Dream Demonstration project in the United States of America.

In the 3 Random Assignment sites, participants' savings will be matched at a 3:1 ratio - \$3 for each \$1 saved - up to the first \$1,500 saved. Participants will save for a minimum of 12 months and a maximum of 3 years.

By tracking changes over time in each groups' savings, education, training and other learning experiences, researchers will be able to find out if **learn\$ave** is effective in helping participants save and use their savings for learning. This approach should also provide information about what parts of **learn\$ave** are most effective - the account and credits or the financial management training and case support.

Furthermore, by looking closely over time at how each group thinks about savings, about learning and about their future, researchers will be able to test the theory behind **learn\$ave**: Does having savings and assets change the way that people with low incomes think about and plan for their future?

Case studies

There's more than one way to run an Individual Development Account program and more than one way that it can benefit participants. Seven case study sites will each offer slightly different programs to 150 participants each:

Digby & Annapolis Counties	Offering a match rate of 4:1 (up to a maximum of \$4,500 in matching credits)
Fredericton	Increasing the maximum personal savings that can be matched to \$2000
Montreal	Offering a match rate of 5:1 (up to a maximum of \$4,500 in matching credits)
Waterloo Regions	Offering a match rate of 2:1 and offering enhanced counselling services
Grey & Bruce Counties	Offering a match rate to 2.5:1 and bonuses of up to \$750
Winnipeg	Recruiting participants who have significantly lower incomes
Calgary	Reducing the maximum savings period to 2 years

150 participants in each of these sites will all receive a **learn\$ave** account, matching savings credits, financial management training and support from a **learn\$ave** caseworker.

By comparing and contrasting the program experience in these sites to each other and to the findings from the random assignment sites, researchers hope to learn more about how and why Individual Development Accounts for learning work. The case study method will be used, not to gain statistically significant results, but as an opportunity to test out a number of different approaches to delivering Individual Development Account projects.

Implementation Research

SRDC will also conduct implementation analysis to document the project operations. The information gathered should enrich our understanding about the project's impacts. Ultimately the project's success will be measured through participant observation, in-depth interviews and focus groups, as well as examining data from the project management information system. Context for understanding the project's operations will be drawn from research using secondary sources of data on local socio-economic conditions. Implementation analysis will be conducted in all 10 project sites with a view to building a body of "best practices" knowledge for IDA practitioners.

Benefit-cost Analysis

The benefit-cost analysis will give a detailed account of key project benefits and costs, drawing on information for the analysis of the project impacts from estimates of the project costs, from survey responses and other sources. The analysis will aim to provide information on whether *learn\$ave* produces net gains for participants, is cost-effective from the standpoint of taxpayers and governments, and how it benefits or costs society as a whole.

Reporting results

The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) is collecting information through a variety of sources including:

- a series of surveys with participants;
- a project-wide management information system tailored to *learn\$ave*;
- administrative records; and
- in-depth interviews and focus groups with participants and staff.

SRDC will publish findings throughout the project. The first findings may be available after the first 18 months of the program delivery.

For more information about *learn\$ave*'s research and evaluation, contact SRDC at:



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