



BRIDGE PROGRAM PLANNING GUIDE

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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OVERVIEW

Increasingly jobs that pay more than subsistence wages and offer opportunities for career advancement require at least some training beyond high school, even at the entry level. Bridge training programs are designed to prepare individuals without the requisite basic skills for postsecondary training leading to career-path employment and further learning in a specific industry or occupational sector. This guide is intended to help teams representing community colleges, community organizations, employers, unions, and other partners plan the development of bridge programs.

Bridge programs are distinguished from traditional job training programs in that they seek to provide a broad foundation for career-long learning on-the-job and through formal postsecondary education and training. Some of the key features are as follows:

- Curriculum defined in terms of competencies needed to succeed in postsecondary training leading to career-path employment and further learning in a target field.
- Focus on the basics of communication, problem-solving, applied mathematics, technology applications, and technical fundamentals taught in the context of training for employment and further learning in the given field.
- Instruction emphasizing learning-by-doing through projects, simulations, labs, and internships.
- Exposure of students to opportunities and requirements of employment and education in the target sector through career and college exploration and planning, in-class projects and simulations, field trips, job shadowing, internships and other means.
- Programs offered at times and places and through media convenient to working adults.
- “Wrap-around” support services, including assessment and counseling, case management, child care, financial aid, job and college placement and follow-up.
- Active cooperation between degree-credit and non-credit divisions within colleges and between colleges and outside partners such as community groups, social service agencies, and high schools to recruit students and provided needed supports.

The questions under the headings that follow are intended to guide bridge program developers through the main considerations involved in planning and launching a bridge training program.

MAPPING JOB/TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES AND GAPS

JOB OPPORTUNITIES AND REQUIREMENTS¹

What jobs within the target sector in your area offer opportunities for entry-level employment and job advancement for workers without extensive education or skills?

- What are these jobs and what are the next steps up the job ladder?
- What wages and benefits do the jobs at each level offer?
- What is the current and projected demand for these jobs among local employers?
- What employers in your area hire for these jobs?
- Do local employers have difficulty hiring for any of these jobs? If so, why?
- Do local employers have trouble retaining or advancing workers in these jobs? If so, why?
- From what sources and with what methods do local employers hire for such jobs?
- What qualifications do local employers seek in applicants for the jobs at each level?

EXISTING TRAINING PROGRAMS AND REQUIREMENTS

What programs in your area prepare individuals for the jobs identified above?

- Which institutions or organizations offer these programs? What curriculum and support services (including job placement and follow-up) do these programs provide? How long is each program and what methods of instruction are used?
- What is the cost of these programs? How are they funded?
- How many students enroll in each program annually? What is the demographic profile of students in each program? How are students recruited for these programs?
- What are the requirements for entry into each of these programs? How well do these requirements reflect the qualifications actually needed to succeed in these programs and in the jobs and further education to which they lead?
- What assessments and other methods are used to screen applicants?
- What are the most common reasons that applicants are rejected from such programs, if applicable?
- Are there remedial programs for individuals who do not qualify for these programs? If so, whom do they serve, what training and support do they provide and how effective are they?
- Do the target sector programs have trouble retaining students? If so, why?
- How many students complete these programs each year and at what rate?
- Where do graduates from these programs end up? What

data are available on the job- and further education outcomes of each program? Which programs are most effective in preparing students for employment and further learning in the target sector?

- Are these programs operating at or near capacity?
- Is there sufficient demand on part of employers and enough capacity in these programs to warrant the building of bridge or feeder programs into them?

DESIGNING BRIDGE PROGRAMS TO FILL GAPS

CURRICULUM

What bridge training programs are needed to prepare and motivate individuals in your region with inadequate basic skills for education and training programs that lead to career-path employment and further learning in the target sector?

- Which training programs and jobs should the proposed bridge programs be designed to bridge into?
- What are the basic competencies or qualifications needed to enter and succeed in the target training programs and jobs to which they lead?
- What curriculum and instructional methods are most appropriate for teaching these competencies?
- What should the entrance requirements be for the bridge curriculum?
- What methods should be used to assess applicants?
- What should be the duration of these programs and what sort of schedule and delivery methods should these programs use to accommodate students who may be working in low-wage jobs and have difficulty balancing work, family and school?

MARKETING AND RECRUITMENT

Who should be recruited as students for these bridge programs and what methods are needed to market the programs to them?

- What sorts of individuals might be readily recruited for bridge programs in the given sector? Such student markets might include, for example:
 - Individuals who apply, but do not qualify, for postsecondary education and training programs in the target sector.
 - Existing employees in low-level jobs in the target industry.
 - Low-skill individuals in other sectors who are seeking to advance to better jobs.
 - Students in adult literacy, developmental/remedial, workplace training, and other non-credit community college programs.
 - Students taking degree-credit courses who have not selected a major field of study.
- What methods are most appropriate for marketing bridge programs to the target audiences identified?

SUPPORT SERVICES

What support services – for example counseling, case management, child care, transportation, job placement assistance, etc. – are needed to ensure that students are retained in bridge programs?

What steps need to be taken to ensure that students are enrolled in the target education programs (with the necessary financial aid in place) before they complete the bridge training?

PARTNERSHIPS AND DIVISION OF LABOR

Which organizations (or divisions within them) are best equipped to offer particular components of the proposed bridge program? ²

- To what extent do these organizations or divisions currently work together?
- What are the barriers to cooperation?
- What needs to be done to enable these organizations to collaborate in developing and offering bridge training in the target sector?

What needs to be done to develop support for and “ownership” of the proposed bridge programs from key constituencies within each partner organization?

- Which leaders would agree to champion the proposed bridge programs?
- Whose buy-in and participation are needed for successful development and implementation of the bridge programs?
- What are the likely sources of resistance to bridge programs in the partner organizations?
- How can bridge program advocates persuade skeptics of the benefits of such programs to the organization?

What organization and staff within that organization will lead the bridge program partnership and coordinate its activities?

EMPLOYER INVOLVEMENT

What will be the role of employers in the proposed bridge program?

- How can employers be persuaded to assist with the development and operation of the program, for example in curriculum design, instructor recruitment, donation of equipment and supplies, participant recruitment, participant funding, participant release time, and program evaluation?
- Which employers will play these roles initially?
- How can these employers be encouraged to get other employers involved in the program?

FUNDING

What is the cost of each program component, including recruitment, assessment, case management, and job and college placement, as well as training?

How can the various program components be funded?

- What funds are needed to develop and launch the proposed bridge programs?
- What funds are needed to operate the proposed programs?
- What funding sources could be tapped to support program development and operation?
- What steps need to be taken to secure the necessary funding?

PROGRAM EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT

What steps need to be taken to measure the performance and impact of the bridge programs?

- How will the progress of students in bridge programs best be measured?
- How will the labor market and further education outcomes of bridge program participants be tracked?
- What mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure that data on program outcomes are used to improve program performance?

ENDNOTES

1. This and subsequent sections assume that an industry or occupational sector of importance to your local area has already been identified for the development of bridge programs.
2. Bridge program partnerships might include, for example:
 - representatives from various community college departments: noncredit, credit (including developmental education), counseling, adult education, and contract training departments;
 - multi-institutional partners including a college partnering with a community-based training organization or a social service provider; or
 - a training provider partnering with an employer that offers on-the-job training and advancement opportunities.