

Bridge Programs

Bridge programs prepare adults with limited academic or English skills to enter and succeed in postsecondary education and training leading to career-path employment in skilled jobs. The goal of bridge programs is to bridge the gap between the initial skills of individuals and what they need to enter and succeed in postsecondary education and career-path employment. Bridge programs help students obtain the necessary academic, occupational, and technical skills through contextualized instruction, career development, and support services.

Bridge programs help individuals bridge the gap between their skills and what they need to succeed in postsecondary education and career-path employment.

Program Components

The Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) have adopted a definition of bridge programs that applies across a diverse set of providers (e.g., adult education, community college developmental education, and Workforce Investment Act, (WIA)). The definition outlines three core elements:

- **Contextualized instruction** that integrates basic reading, math, and language skills and industry/occupation knowledge.
- **Career development** that includes career exploration, career planning within a career area, and understanding the world of work.
- **Transition services** that provide students with the information and assistance they need to successfully navigate the process of moving from adult education or remedial coursework to credit or occupational programs. Services may include: academic advising, tutoring, study skills, coaching, and referrals to individual support services.

Bridge programs may be designed to respond to differences in the population served, the targeted occupation or industry, and/or the roles of program partners. Programs can be structured as one course or as a series of courses. Single course options move higher level students quickly into credit-bearing postsecondary education, while multi-course programs focus on bridging participants into courses to prepare them for jobs.

Under the Illinois definition, programs are open to adults 16 and older who have math and reading skills at the 6th grade level or have at least low-intermediate English as a Second Language proficiency. Participants do not need a high school diploma to participate, and can be employed or unemployed at the time of enrollment. To align the development of bridge programs in Illinois with other career and technical education initiatives the Illinois definition requires that bridge programs prepare students to enter credit-bearing courses and programs within one of the 16 nationally recognized career clusters (see: <http://www.careerclusters.org/16clusters.cfm>).

Bridge programs assist students in obtaining the necessary academic, employability, and technical skills through three required components:

- Contextualized instruction
- Career development
- Transition services

Resources for Developing Bridge Programs

While there isn't a dedicated source for bridge funding, ICCB and DCEO are expanding bridge programs within their existing workforce and education programs. For example, ICCB has made grants to nineteen Adult Education programs to design bridge programs in three industries: manufacturing, health care, and TDL. Another example is DCEO's RFP to fund sector partnership, in which they gave priority to applicants that included bridge programs. Creative organizations use existing funding, public funding, and foundation or other private funding to develop and run programs.

The following resources will provide more information on funding and program development:

- ICCB's website: http://websrvr1.state.il.us/shifting_gears.html
- Instituto del Progreso Latino's bridge program guide: www.iccb.state.il.us/pdf/shifting%20gears/Instituto2010_HowToBuildBridgePrograms.pdf
- Women Employed's bridge program guide: www.womenemployed.org/docs/BridgeGuideFinal.pdf
- OCCRL's directory of bridge programs: http://occril.illinois.edu/projects/shifting_gears/bridge_directory

For more information contact the Chicago Jobs Council at (312) 252-0460 or visit us at www.cjc.net