

## Bridge Definition and Core Elements

Bridge programs prepare adults with limited academic or limited English skills to enter and succeed in credit-bearing postsecondary education and training leading to career-path employment in high-demand, middle- and high-skilled occupations. The goal of bridge programs is to sequentially bridge the gap between the initial skills of individuals and what they need to enter and succeed in postsecondary education and career-path employment.

### Core Elements

Bridge programs assist students in obtaining the necessary academic, employability, and technical skills through three required components—contextualized instruction, career development, and support services. Required elements include:

- *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 (specific elements depend upon the level of the bridge program and on whether participants are already incumbent workers in the specific field).
- *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 (as needed and available) academic advising, tutoring, study skills, coaching, and referrals to individual support services, e.g., transportation and child care.

*Note:* Career development and transition services should take into account the needs of those low-income adults who will need to find related work as they progress in their education and career paths.

### Eligibility

Bridge programs are designed for adults 16 years and older, who:

- Have reading and math levels at or above the 6<sup>th</sup> grade through pre-college level *or*
- English language proficiency at or above the low-intermediate ESL level
- May or may not have a high school credential
- May or may not be an incumbent worker

Specific eligibility requirements will depend upon the type of provider offering the bridge program and program requirements.

### Program Design Options

A bridge program may be designed as 1) a single course (for students at higher reading and math levels) that moves students directly into credit-bearing courses, with the aim of eliminating the need for remediation or

2) a series of courses, in which students first complete a lower-level bridge course that prepares them to enter a non-credit or credit occupational course or program that leads to an entry-level job. In this case, the student can stop out for needed work/income and return to a higher-level bridge course without having to repeat content.

The bridge program must 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>). That is, the course content must contain the knowledge and skills common for entry-level occupations within a broad cluster (e.g. health sciences, manufacturing, information technology, etc.). This curriculum design element exposes the student to career information and to information about the skills and knowledge required by a broad range of occupational options within a cluster. The bridge program must be of sufficient duration and intensity to produce these transition results.

*Education and Training Providers (and partnerships):*

Bridge programs may be provided by: (1) an Illinois Community College Board-approved and funded adult education program<sup>1</sup>; (2) the credit or non-credit department(s) of a community college; and (3) community-based organizations or other types of provider that offer non-credit workforce training.

Bridge programs may be offered by a single entity (e.g., a community-based organization or a community college) or by a partnership (e.g., a community-based organization and a community college). Regardless of the provider, they:

- May provide opportunities to earn college credit (such as through escrow credit accounts)
- May offer dual enrollment in credit and non-credit programs
- May offer a multi-level program that moves people from an adult education course offered by one provider to a non-credit occupational course offered by the same or another provider.

All bridge program providers will use pre-skill assessments consistent with program requirements to place students into the appropriate courses as well as post-skill assessments to measure progress, and all providers will use data tracking systems to collect and analyze key information about bridge program participants and graduates.

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<sup>1</sup> ICCB-approved adult education providers currently include community-based organizations, community colleges, regional offices of education, public school districts, the Illinois Department of Corrections, and a university.

**Outcomes:***Short-Term*

1. Higher number of low-income working adults enroll in postsecondary education
2. Bridge program graduates who enroll in credit programs will succeed in their courses.

*Long-Term*

1. Higher proportion of low-income working adults attain degrees and/or certificates
2. Higher proportion of Adult Basic Education (ABE)/GED, English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL), Adult Secondary Education (ASE), and developmental/remedial adult learners transition into and completion of associates degrees and/or certificates
3. Increases in earnings and job quality for low-income adults engaged in career pathways work