Developing Program Curriculum

While bridge program curricula cannot be purchased "off the shelf," the core team will probably be able to identify existing curriculum models and materials upon which to build. This section describes the process of developing curricula for bridge programs. It begins with a discussion of principles of bridge program instruction and presents sample bridge curricula to give a sense of the final product. It then details the steps of developing a bridge curriculum. This section concludes with a discussion of topics related to creating an effective learning environment for bridge training, including career exploration, and a discussion of types of assessments.

Understand the Principles of Bridge Instruction

Bridge programs should be designed to emphasize the following instructional principles.

- Competency-based curricula
- Teaching in context
- Learning by doing or "project learning"
- Teacher as learning coach

Competency-based curricula. Bridge curricula are defined in the terms of the competencies or knowledge and skills students should be able to demonstrate once they have completed the course. A competency is defined as "demonstrated ability to perform a task successfully." Mastery of competencies is more important than coverage of subject matter. The competencies that provide the learning objectives for bridge programs are based on the requirements of entry and success at the next levels of education and employment. Examples of competency statements include:

- Demonstrate basic workplace math skills.
- Describe general workplace safety.
- Identify and match appropriate social skills with multiple workplace settings.

In all cases, these statements contain a verb that indicates a demonstrated ability as well as workplace context and reference to a basic skill. When writing competencies for bridge programs, it is important to remember to include each of these elements.

Teaching in context. Research in cognitive science indicates that adults learn basic skills faster and more effectively when they are taught in the context of preparation for employment or some other meaningful activity.[8] Studies of efforts to prepare low-skilled adults for jobs that pay more than subsistence wages find that teaching adults basic skills in the context of training for jobs leads to better job outcomes than does focusing only on basic skills or providing job-placement assistance without any education or training.[9]

In bridge programs, the teaching of basic skills is integrated with instruction in job skills or exploration of college and careers. So, for example, students might improve their reading comprehension, vocabulary, and study skills in the context of exploring career options and charting their desired career paths. Or, in a field-specific bridge program in manufacturing, students learn about fractions in the context of solving problems that a machinist or other manufacturing worker might face. Organizing teaching around problems, situations, or tasks of interest to students motivates them to learn and shows them they can learn. For native speakers who have received substandard education in elementary and secondary schools, or for immigrants who must overcome language barriers, this approach engenders the confidence and self-esteem that are critical to success both in securing a good job and pursuing further education and training.

Learning by doing or project learning. Following the principle of teaching in context, bridge programs are structured so that students learn by doing through a process that enables them to comprehend new skills and concepts, apply them to different situations or problems, draw conclusions and make clearly substantiated judgments based on evidence, and solve problems by taking ideas from various places and coming up with something new. So, for example, to learn fractions, students might learn the new concept and operation (comprehension), apply it in a variety of relevant word problems (analysis and applications), make up hands-on problems in student teams for the class to solve (application), comment on each other's work (evaluation), and design a class problem for other classes to solve

(synthesis). To learn to write better essays, students are taught and given the chance to practice the different essay parts (comprehension), read student partners' essays and make suggestions for improvement on each essay part (analysis), incorporate those suggestions into a rewritten draft (application and synthesis), and evaluate the whole revision (evaluation).

Lesson plans are structured in a way to guide students through this process so they increasingly become accustomed to thinking critically and independently. Units consist of a series of "mini-projects" culminating in larger projects with meaningful outcomes or products. Examples of the products of bridge program projects include:

- A resume developed by the student that required new vocabulary and the ability to write sentences
- A career-path plan developed by the student that required research, summarizing, interviewing, computer, and essay-writing skills
- A piece of furniture that is built using students' new blueprint-reading and measuring skills
- A spreadsheet that tracks the work hours and patient contacts of nurses in the ward of a local hospital

Guiding students in this way helps them become self-directed learners and critical thinkers, qualities that are highly valued in today's workplace.

Teacher as learning coach. Teaching in a contextual, project-oriented way requires teachers to abandon the conventional "talk and chalk" methods. The role of the teacher in the bridge program is more as a learning coach than a purveyor of knowledge and skills. This creates a teacher-learner relationship that resembles the relationship between a team leader and team member in the workplace. Moreover, it respects and capitalizes on the extensive practical knowledge and experience that adults bring to the learning situation. (See "Staffing," pp. 76–80, for suggestions on selecting instructors qualified for this teaching approach.)

Review Sample Bridge Curricula

The following sections describe examples of curricula for actual bridge programs, including their overall structure and sample course outlines. The "career" bridge program piloted at West Side Technical Institute, part of the City Colleges of Chicago, consisted of two levels, Career Bridge I and Career Bridge II; the former corresponds to the lower-level bridge program and the latter corresponds to the higher-level bridge program, as described in "Identifying Bridge Program Models," pp. 7–10.

The Manufacturing Technology Bridge developed by Instituto del Progreso Latino is an example of a field-specific higher-level bridge program. These curriculum examples are briefly described in this section; the following section, "Develop the Bridge Curricula," pp. 44–51, outlines the six-step curriculum development process.

Lower-Level and Higher-Level Bridge Program Examples: West Side Tech Career Bridge I and II

The West Side Technical Institute Career Bridge was a two-level bridge program designed to help applicants scoring below 9.0 on the TABE to build their basic skills to the point where they could access career-path employment and be eligible for and succeed in college-level career programs. Career Bridge I (an example of the lower-level bridge model) was designed to prepare students who tested between 4.0 and 5.9 on the TABE to acquire skills needed to advance to better-paying jobs and prepare for further education; Career Bridge II (an example of the higher-level bridge model) was designed to prepare students who tested between 6.0 and 8.9 on the TABE to explore the occupational training programs at West Side Technical Institute and the career paths to which they lead, and to enter and succeed in a student's program of choice.*

Figure 8, p. 42, shows the structure of the West Side Tech Career Bridge programs. Each program level consisted of three courses: math, communication, and test-taking. The curricula for both Career Bridge programs were intended to be offered on a fairly intensive schedule, each running four hours per day, four days a week for 10 weeks. The two Career

* The West Side Tech Career Bridges were designed using a developmental learning framework appropriate for native and advanced ESL students. In the West Side Tech pilots, about two-thirds of the students were immigrants from Mexico while one-third were native English speakers. Although all were seeking to enter college-level training in career fields, about 40 percent did not have a high school diploma or GED. West Side Tech also conducted a successful pilot of the career bridge with a smaller group of young people from the Chicago Job Corps program.

Bridge levels were designed so that when offered together, they could be customized to fit individual students' skill profiles. For example, students with low skills in math but higher language skills could be scheduled to take both levels of math, one level of communication, and test-taking. Thus, the length of stay within the program when both bridges were offered together could be significantly shortened.

In addition to incorporating key bridge features already described, the West Side Tech curriculum also incorporated GED instruction.

The following are summary descriptions of each course-type in the curriculum.

Career Bridge 1 (lower-level bridge): Communication 1
The Communication 1 course focused on word and sentence skills and introductions to multi-paragraph forms. The course emphasized vocabulary, punctuation, and work with the various tenses in the context of speaking, reading, and writing about personal goals and job skills. Through integrated reading and writing exercises and peer editing techniques, students learned how to recognize and build paragraph structures. The final products of the course included a completed job application, resume, simple cover letter, and a multi-paragraph theme where students described who they were in the past, their current values, and what they want in their future. Students also learned basic computer skills, as all these products must be entered and saved on a computer. In addition, students completed an in-class mock interview presenting these materials to either a prospective employer or a mock interviewer.

Career Bridge II (higher-level bridge): Communication 2
The Communication 2 course focused on paragraph and essay forms and group research skills. Students in this course charted their short- and long-term personal, work, and community goals. They worked in career interest groups to do research in newspapers, in the library, and over the phone to find out the specific employment and training information they needed to develop career plans. Students also interviewed employers and student and faculty representatives from community college career programs to determine what training they would need for the careers they decided to pursue. The final products of this course included a report, presentation, and formal essay on the career path each student chose, as well as a completed (reworked) resume, cover letter, and follow-up letter created and saved on a computer. Exercises on vocabulary and punctuation were also offered as needed.

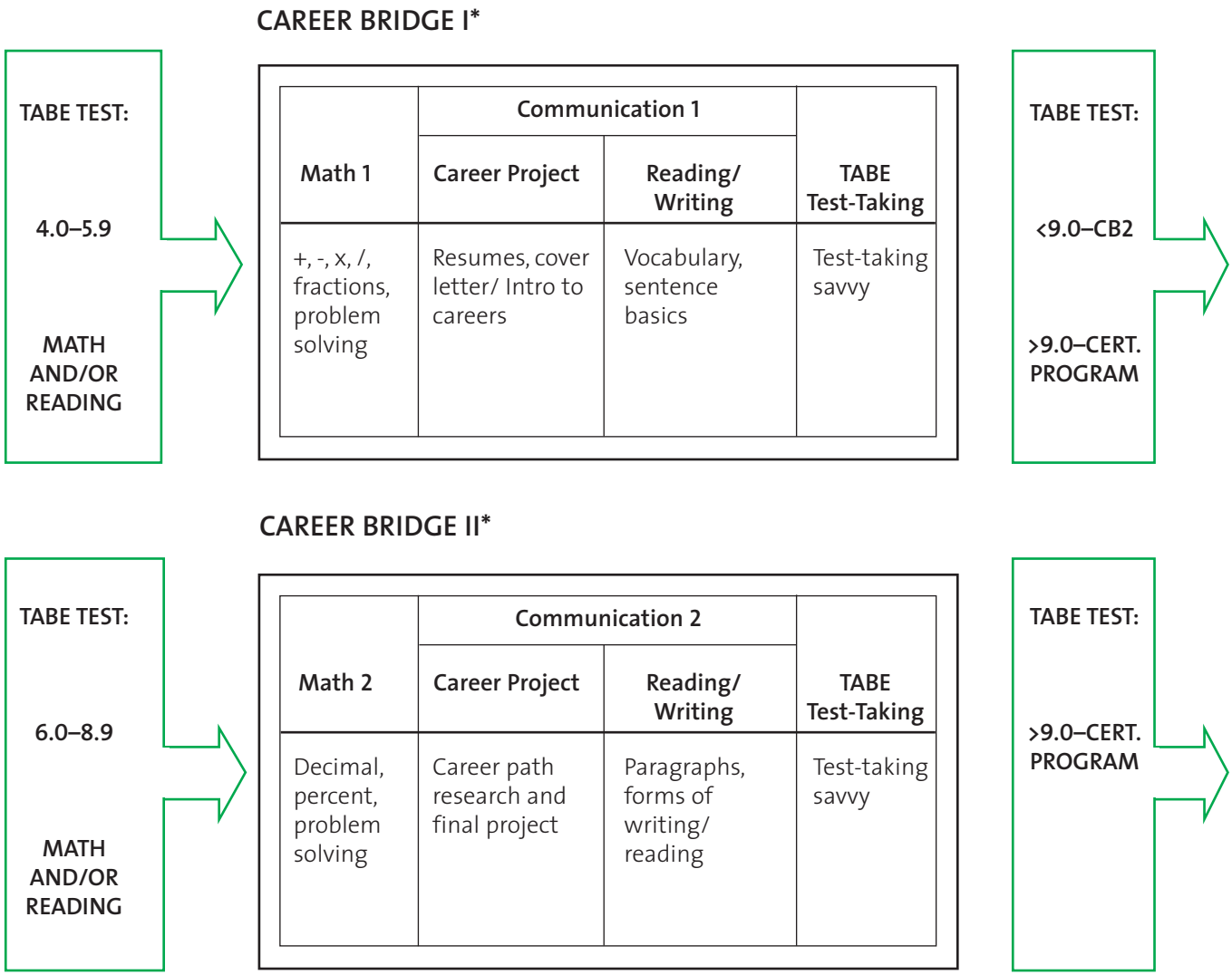
Career Bridges I and II: Math 1 and 2
The math courses were presented in a modular fashion so instructors could target skills needed by a particular class. Modules were defined by specific themes, and each theme came with recommended materials and hands-on classroom activities that instructors could choose from to teach specific skills. Also included were lab projects that allowed students to apply the skills they were learning to problems drawn from the workplace.

Career Bridges I and II: Test-Taking Strategies
The test-taking course was comprised of a set of strategies for working with TABE test materials. Students studied question and answer types, rated test questions in terms of how sure they were of their answers, ranked the likelihood of various test answers, and gave the reasons why they got specific answers right or wrong. Once students mastered test-taking strategies, they were asked to make up TABE tests for each other. The class analyzed and evaluated each mock TABE test. Students also devised techniques for completing tests quickly and checking their work when they have extra testing time. Similar strategies can also be used for preparation for the GED and other standardized tests.

Field-Specific Bridge Programs

Both lower-level and higher-level bridge programs can be field-specific, that is, designed to prepare students for positions in a particular occupation or set of related occupations. The curriculum for the Manufacturing Technology Bridge program (an example of a field-specific higher-level bridge program developed by the Instituto del Progreso Latino in Chicago) includes job-related conversation, technical vocabulary, job-related reading, and words and phrases that assist workers in resolving problems on the job. The curriculum is delivered in an intensive, five-days-per week/five to six hours per day format for 16 weeks to accommodate the needs of individuals who are either working or available for job shadowing or a paid internship during second or third shift. Figure 9: Structure and Flow of Field-Specific Higher-Level Bridge Curriculum, p. 43, shows the organization of the course.

Figure 8: Structure and Flow of Career Bridge Curriculum



Students received individualized schedules depending on Math and Communication courses they tested into. Delivered at West Side Technical Institute, part of Richard J. Daley College, City Colleges of Chicago, in 2001–2003.

*Figures 11, 12, and 13, pp. 49–50, provide excerpts from the syllabi of the communication, math, and test-taking strategies courses.

Figure 9: Structure and Flow of Field-Specific Higher-Level Bridge Curriculum

	Technical Literacy		Technical Specialty
	Four days per week		One day per week
Hours	Weeks 1–7	Weeks 8–14	Weeks 1–16
1 2	Workplace Mathematics (2 hrs x 28 days = 56 hours)	Principles of Technology (Applied Physics) (2 hrs x 28 days = 56 hours)	Blueprint Reading (2 hrs x 14 days + 2 hrs x 8 days = 44 hours)
3 4	Workplace Communication (1.5 hrs x 56 days = 84 hours) • Careers in Manufacturing • Employment Skills • Principles of Quality Management		Metrology* and Machining (3.5 hrs x 14 days + 4 hrs x 8 days = 81 hours)
	Lunch		Lunch
5 6	Industrial Computer Applications (2 hrs x 28 days = 56 hours)	Workplace Mathematics (Computer Applications) (2 hrs x 28 days = 56 hours)	Metrology and Machining

2ND OR 3RD SHIFT	Current job student has upon entering program (if employed)	Job Shadowing or Paid Internship with a Partner Company

*Metrology-the scientific study of measurement

Manufacturing Technology Bridge Curriculum, Instituto del Progresso Latino

Employability Skills Curriculum

Because bridge program students often have little or no successful work history, it is especially important to incorporate employability skills into the curriculum. The Adult Learning Resource Center in Des Plaines, Illinois, developed a 16-week course to address this need.* Detailed in figure 10: Employability Skills for Adults, pp. 46–48, the course is divided into four phases to correspond with the classroom, field studies, job shadowing, and internship components. Competencies fall into five key areas of workplace literacy: self-awareness and advocacy; communication; social and interpersonal; career awareness, development and exploration; and workplace culture.[10] This curriculum can be adapted and integrated into either the lower-level or the higher-level bridge program type.

Develop the Bridge Curricula

This section presents a step-by-step guide for developing a bridge program curriculum. Ideally, a team of program developers will carry out this process. It is important that the program is jointly designed and developed by instructors with expertise in vocational content and those with expertise in basic skills, including ESL if appropriate. Employers and, as appropriate, labor union representatives, should be involved as well (see worksheet 2, p. 20, and "Building and Sustaining Employer Relationships," pp. 34–38). The products of this process will include a curriculum summary describing each course and showing the relationships among them and, for each course, an outline syllabus and daily lesson plans. The main steps in developing bridge curricula are:

Step 1: Identify the competencies needed by the target population to enter the next level of employment and education in the target sector

Step 2: Organize competencies into courses or instructional modules

Step 3: For each course, draft a summary and syllabus

Step 4: For each course, draft a course outline or schedule

Step 5: For each course, draft daily lesson plans (this step may be further informed as the schedule (Step 6) is developed).

Step 6: Determine a schedule for the full set of modules or courses (in some circumstances, this may also be Step 1)

Step 1. Identify the competencies needed to advance

This step builds on the process of determining the bridge program model as described in "Designing the Program," pp. 16–27; worksheet 3, p. 21, and worksheet 6, p. 25, can be modified as the program detail is developed. Once the program designers determine the jobs or higher education level that the bridge program will prepare the target audience for, the next step is to identify the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that the target audience will need to enter and succeed in those jobs. Often this will involve preparing the target audience for further education or training that in turn leads to the target jobs. So the competencies identified should include those needed for the target jobs as well as for any intermediate training.

There are well-established methodologies for analyzing the skills and knowledge needed for particular jobs, such as DACUM and WorkKeys profiles.[11] These tools are generally useful, although some can be expensive to implement. Even if these more formal methodologies are used to identify work competencies, curriculum development teams should interview workers in these jobs to see how they got them and what they think are the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in them. Employers should also be interviewed to find out what they look for in a successful applicant. If, for example, employers require applicants to take some sort of test or assessment and go through an interview process, the required competencies ought to include being able to pass the sort of test actually given and to interview effectively.

Just as important, bridge program designers should identify the competencies that the target audience will need to advance to the next level of education or training. Here again, it is essential to identify the specific entry

*This curriculum was developed by the Adult Learning Resource Center/The Center (ALRC) specifically for adults with learning difficulties/learning disabilites; however, it may be used with adults needing employability skills training. Title change with permission from ALRC.

requirements and the process by which applicants are screened and to interview faculty and staff at the next level to identify the requirements for success in their programs. Ideally, faculty from the next level of education or training will work with the bridge designers to identify competencies required both for their programs and for the jobs to which these programs lead. Where applicable, union representatives should be interviewd about entry-level qualifications for both training programs and jobs.

Other sources include existing technical or professional advisory boards. Also, skill standards developed by some state workforce or economic development agencies can be useful in gaining an understanding of the necessary education and training requirements and basic skill levels required to perform specific jobs.

Step 2. Organize competencies into courses or instructional modules

Identify the competencies that students will be expected to master as part of each course. Specify the requirements for entry into the course as well as the assessment methods and tools that will be used to determine whether applicants meet these requirements. For example, the Workforce Education Division of The Center: Resources for Teaching and Learning in Illinois developed this list of course competencies for a new hire training program at a local company:

1. Read a production outline
2. Read product sheets
3. Summarize facts from a product sheet
4. Read bar and line production and quality charts
5. Write a memo that lists key facts
6. Listen and take notes at a staff meeting
7. Use notes to write a summary of a staff meeting
8. Take a phone message
9. Skim and scan newsletter
10. Read Employee Stock Option Purchase and Savings Plan

Step 3. For each course, draft a summary and syllabus

List the competencies that students will be expected to master through the course, and designate and describe the final products. Sequence units in a developmentally appropriate manner and assign a theme to each unit that matches with specific competencies that will be learned in the course of studying that theme. Write a syllabus that lists the specific assignments that will go along with that theme. Figure 11, p. 49, shows a syllabus for one week of a communications course in a lower-level bridge program, the West Side Tech Career Bridge I.

Review relevant resources for use in the course. This can be done alongside the sequencing activities to suggest interesting or useful ways to structure the competencies. Use tables of contents of promising books to get ideas about how to order and group necessary competencies and search resources for innovative ideas for classroom projects.

Brainstorm projects that could result from work completed as a result of learning the competency sequences. Projects can be completed by individuals or by teams of students with similar career or job interests. A project could also have specific presentation requirements and could require computer-skills learning as a part of the process. Clearly state how each assignment will help prepare students for their final projects.

As another example, figure 12, p. 49, presents an excerpt from Week 3 of the mathematics course of the West Side Tech Career Bridge program. The math course is an eight-week, four-days-per-week, two-hours-per-day course (total of 64 hours). This particular unit teaches math concepts drawing on problems and materials from jobs in manufacturing. Figure 13, p. 50, shows the syllabus for the test-taking strategies course.

Figure 10: Employability Skills for Adults Sequence of Introduction of Competencies

PHASE I: COMMITMENT TO WORK	PHASE II: EMP. SKILLS AND COMPENSATIONS	
CLASSROOM	**FIELD STUDIES**	
WEEK 1 1. Identify and describe expectations and implications of program participation at each stage of project. 2. Identify, describe, and demonstrate an understanding of individual learning strengths and challenges. 5. Identify, describe, and prioritize short and long term goals.	WEEK 5 12. Identify and demonstrate strategies for self-correcting mistakes. 13. Identify and demonstrate strategies for handling criticism. 15. Describe and demonstrate the steps in teaching others new skills.	
WEEK 2 3. Identify, describe, develop, and implement individual compensation strategies needed to meet learning challenges. 4. Describe and demonstrate effective approaches to decision making through anticipating problem areas and identifying solutions. 6. Identify, describe, and demonstrate an understanding of individual strengths, skills, and interests as they relate to life and job goals.	WEEK 6 16. Identify and demonstrate how to join or initiate a group task appropriately. 17. Identify and match appropriate social skills with multiple workplace settings.	
WEEK 3 18. Identify and describe the necessary job skills, qualifications, and outlook of various jobs. 23. Identify and describe the elements of succeeding on the job and job retention strategies. 20. Identify and describe the characteristics an employer seeks in a prospective employee.	WEEK 7 19. Identify and describe effective approaches to conducting a job search.	
WEEK 4 7. Identify, describe, and demonstrate effective oral and written communication strategies. 11. Identify, describe, and demonstrate effective approaches to interacting with supervisors and co-workers. 14. Identify and demonstrate effective approaches to conflict resolution.	WEEK 8 25. Describe the functions of the workplace "chain of command" and working as a team member. 26. Identify and describe how individual jobs are related within various workplaces and how they collectively impact the workplace's mission.	

Developed by Adult Learning Resource Center (Des Plaines, IL). Numbers correspond to groupings by competency, as shown on page 48.

Figure 10 (Cont.) : Employability Skills for Adults Sequence of Introduction of Competencies

	PHASE III: CONNECTING CLASS TO WORK	PHASE IV: EXPERIENCING THE JOB
	JOB SHADOWING	INTERNSHIP
WEEK 9	24. Identify and describe where and how to gather and exchange information at the workplace. 8. Give and receive oral instructions and job information. 9. Respond appropriately to written materials, including general directions, procedures, forms and charts.	WEEK 13 Integration and application of all competencies within internship.
WEEK 10	27. Identify and describe general workplace safety. 10. Demonstrate basic workplace math skills.	WEEK 14 Integration and application of all competencies within internship.
WEEK 11	28. Identify and describe general employee rights and responsibilities. 29. Identify and describe examples of cultural diversity in the workplace and their impact on today's workforce.	WEEK 15 Integration and application of all competencies within internship.
WEEK 12	21. Develop and write a job history and/or résumé. 22. Demonstrate effective approaches to job interview situations.	WEEK 16 Integration and application of all competencies within internship.

Developed by Adult Learning Resource Center (Des Plaines, IL). Numbers correspond to groupings by competency, as shown on page 48.

Figure 10 (Cont.) : Competencies for Instructional and Work-based Experience Components

Self-Awareness and Advocacy competencies enable learners with special needs to make informed decisions, set goals, and take responsibility for their own decisions and advocacy:

1. Identify and describe expectations and implications of program participation at each stage of project.
2. Identify, describe, and demonstrate an understanding of individual learning strengths and challenges.
3. Identify, describe, develop, and implement individual compensation strategies needed to meet learning challenges.
4. Describe and demonstrate effective approaches to decision-making through anticipating problem areas and identifying solutions.
5. Identify, describe, and prioritize short- and long-term goals.
6. Identify, describe, and demonstrate an understanding of individual strengths, skills, and interests as they relate to life and job goals.

Communication competencies include the ability to use oral and written information on the job:

7. Identify, describe, and demonstrate effective oral and written communication strategies.
8. Give and receive oral instructions and job information.
9. Respond appropriately to written materials, including general directions, procedures, forms, and charts.
10. Demonstrate basic workplace math skills.

Social and Interpersonal competencies enable learners to interact with others in a workplace setting and participate as members of a team:

11. Identify, describe, and demonstrate effective approaches to interacting with supervisors and co-workers.
12. Identify and demonstrate strategies for self-correcting mistakes.
13. Identify and demonstrate strategies for handling criticism.
14. Identify and demonstrate effective approaches to conflict resolution.
15. Describe and demonstrate the steps in teaching others new skills.
16. Identify and demonstrate how to join or initiate a group task appropriately.
17. Identify and match appropriate social skills with multiple workplace settings.

Career Awareness, Development, and Exploration competencies develop an understanding of learners' place in the world of work through the identification of their own strengths and challenges and consideration of how these relate to identified job goals:

18. Identify and describe the necessary job skills, qualifications, and outlook of various jobs.
19. Identify and describe effective approaches to conducting a job search.
20. Identify and describe the characteristics an employer seeks in a prospective employee.
21. Develop and write a job history and/or resume.
22. Demonstrate effective approaches to job interview situations.
23 . Identify and describe the elements of succeeding on the job and job-retention strategies.

Workplace Culture competencies develop learners' understanding of their roles within specific workplaces and awareness of the appropriate behavior in a given workplace situation:

24. Identify and describe where and how to gather and exchange information at the workplace.
25. Describe the functions of the workplace "chain of command" and working as a team member.
26. Identify and describe how individual jobs are related within various workplaces and how they collectively impact the workplace's mission.
27. Identify and describe general workplace safety.
28. Identify and describe general employee rights and responsibilities.
29. Identify and describe examples of cultural diversity in the workplace and their impact on today's workforce.

Specific Job Skills will be added to the curriculum based on each program's needs and resources.

Developed by the Adult Learning Resource Center (Des Plaines, IL), www.thecenterweb.org

Figure 11: Excerpt from Syllabus for Communication Course

WEEK 1 THEME: JOB SKILLS
COMPETENCY: ESSAY STRUCTURE EXERCISES FOR STUDENTS

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
Classroom activities: ■ Read summaries aloud. ■ Job skills exercise.	■ Introduce basic essay structure (*teacher*). ■ Write a simple introduction.	■ Determine best job skills. ■ Write a simple conclusion.	■ Vocabulary contest and last vocabulary list. ■ Complete writing paragraph set.
Homework: ■ Write a paragraph on your strongest every-day skills.	■ Complete job skills checklist.	■ Complete the conclusion. ■ Write 1-2 paragraphs that describe best job skills.	■ Vocabulary words exercise due Monday.

Source: Stephanie Sommers, workforce consultant, designed this curriculum for West Side Tech.

Figure 12: Excerpt from Syllabus for Math Bridge Course

WEEK 3: MORE DECIMALS, CALCULATORS

A) Introduce scientific calculators	**B) Continue Arithmetic with 3-place decimals. Do calculations manually and verify answers with calculator.**
(TI-30xa or TI-30x-IIs recommended) *(Developer's comment: TABE does not allow use of calculator, but industry requires speed, and that means using calculators.)* Scientific calculators vs. plain calculators: Hierarchy of operations use the equals key to bypass hierarchy Multiple memories The fraction key (A-b/c) Fraction-decimal conversion key (F-D)	1) Add and subtract with 3-place decimals. 2) Round 3-place decimals to nearest 2-place and 1-place decimal. 3) Understand rules for multiplying decimals. 4) Understand rules for long division with decimals. 5) Estimating answers in decimal problems.

Source: Adapted by Stephanie Sommers from a course designed by Ray Prendergast, October 2000, for the Instituto del Progreso Latino Manufacturing Technology Bridge program.

Figure 13: Syllabus for Test-Taking Strategies Course

INTRODUCE THE PURPOSES OF THE COURSE
Present and explain the following set of course objectives to the class:

> To understand and be able to identify direct and indirect comprehension questions on a TABE test.
> To understand and use the appropriate strategies for answering TABE questions.
> To be able to gauge your level of understanding for each TABE question in a test-taking situation.
> To understand and use strategies for finding the best answer.
> To practice taking and analyzing the results of TABE tests.

I. DETERMINE TEST-TAKING PROBLEMS AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- Write about a difficult test-taking experience
- Do an introduction exercise
- Write tips for test takers
- Apply tips to a test-taking situation

II. BECOME GOOD AT DIRECT COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

- Recognize different types of comprehension questions
- Identify and answer comprehension questions on a TABE test
- Create a comprehension question protocol
- Write comprehension questions

III. ANALYZE ANSWERS

- Evaluate knowledge levels on past tests and define test anxiety
- Analyze responses to TABE test questions and answers
- Create answering protocols

IV. TAKE TABE TESTS

Source: Stephanie Sommers.

Step 4. For each course, draft a course outline or schedule

Create a grid for each day of the week and write the theme and competency or competencies that will be the focus of each week. Use one row for the day of the week the course will be taught, one for basic classroom activities, and one for homework. Think through how the skill competency will be contextualized and how critical skill sequences will be played out during the week. Design homework that follows up on classroom activities and prepares for the activities the next day.

Step 5. For each course, draft daily lesson plans

For each day on the curriculum outline, write a daily lesson plan. The daily plan should state the week, day, theme, and competency that have been assigned for that week. The classroom objectives and materials can be listed at the top of each page. Activities can be described step by step. Writing lesson plans can be a good way for teachers to get creative and specific about what they are trying out in their classes.

Teachers who develop complete lesson plans can use them later as the basis for identifying what did and did not work in the classroom, and for communicating new ideas about a potential new approach. Courses that are taught multiple times can allow teachers to collect their proven best practices in a growing and changing curriculum file that can, in turn, be used to help orient and train new teachers.

Step 6. Determine a schedule for the full set of courses or modules

Work with all partners to determine the number of courses in the program and the number of hours per week per course. Also decide which course will take place on which days per week. Create a table that clearly presents the program schedule with all courses integrated. Note that the course schedules may be constrained by the academic calendar of the providing institution or by funding requirements. For these reasons, some program designers may need to develop the course schedule prior to undertaking Steps 1 through 5.

Increasingly colleges and other educational institutions are experimenting with ways of breaking down courses into modules or "chunks" that can be offered in an accelerated manner or according to the schedules of students. This approach should be considered when developing the schedule. Some programs have also found that student mastery and retention increases when classes are broken up into shorter credit-hour segments.

Enrich the Learning Experience

Career Exploration

Career planning is a fundamental element of bridge programs. Often, people at this academic level have never had the chance to step back and consider a career plan. This can be a powerful motivator for program participants. Adults with little prior attachment to the paid labor force and those working in low-wage jobs often have less access to career exploration and planning services than those from more affluent backgrounds. As a result, they may have:

- Limited knowledge of the range of careers available
- Less contact with or knowledge of the labor market
- A limited knowledge of career paths, including the qualifications necessary to advance
- Lack of job satisfaction, often leading to problems with job retention

The **College Gateway** program at Skyline and Cañada community colleges prepares under- and unemployed adults and transitioning foster youth for education programs in allied health and bioscience. The Gateway Program consists of 12 to 14 weeks of intensive contextualized basic skills preparation in English and Math, along with life counseling and career planning. In the Career Preparation course, students explore the career planning process and gather information about their interests, personality type, and values. The information helps students determine their career options, make decisions and plans, write resumes, and prepare for interviews. Students create, present to the class, and submit a final career-related project.

- Few opportunities for employment leading to family-supporting wages
- Barriers to employment such as low literacy, learning disabilities, and low skills requiring an employment plan that incorporates education, training, and support services

Career exploration and planning help students gain a more realistic picture of how to secure a job and advance in a career, and thus a greater commitment to a particular job and greater individual willingness to undertake ongoing education and training. Lack of career-planning information and skills is a fundamental barrier to envisioning a meaningful series of steps to move from low-paying jobs to better employment.

However, simply transferring employment materials designed for other populations, such as teens in high school or adults with a lot of work experience, may not be effective in meeting the career-development needs of low-skilled adults. Career-development materials must take into account their resources, life circumstances, and experiences to be effective.

There are many appropriate career indexes available. Some are available online and are free of charge, such as America's Job Bank, and others may be purchased. One tool, Career Coach, provides free online career planning and is the only tool that specifically addresses the needs of adults with lower literacy levels.* This Web-based career development tool takes users through a process of expanding their knowledge of different careers, narrowing down a career choice, exploring and choosing the right education and training, and building skills on the job. The tool, available in both English and Spanish, is written for those below an eighth-grade reading level, supports users through a step-by-step process, and is available free over the Internet to anyone who wishes to use it. Importantly for working adults who may also be parents, it also allows users to develop, save, and refine their career exploration work, returning to their saved information as time allows. The Career Coach is an ideal tool for bridge programs in a community college, community-based organization, or workplace setting.

Importantly for bridge program designers, Career Coach can be incorporated into both the lower- and higher-level bridge curricula in a variety of ways, such as in a writing assignment or a class presentation on potential careers.

The Career Coach:

- Expands the career knowledge of users
- Provides step-by-step support for incremental career planning
- Shows how to accumulate career assets
- Encourages more education, but also provides ways for those who cannot go to school to advance
- Shows that people from similar backgrounds have been successful in careers
- Is accessible to people with low literacy levels and includes information in a variety of modalities—visual, auditory, and through stories
- Provides a step-by-step planning function that can be used in short increments, for example, after children are asleep or at a school, library, or community technology center
- Can be used with little supervision, when career counselor-to-student ratios are stretched thin
- Allows users to organize and store necessary information

The Career Coach is available for free at www.womenemployed.org. For more information or a demonstration, call 312-782-3902.

* The Career Coach Web site is a partnership between Women Employed and One Economy Corporation. http://www.womenemployed.org.

Cohorts and Peer Mentors

Bridge program participants can benefit from a variety of support structures that can be built into the program delivery model. Some bridge program providers believe that students have greatest success when they are able to go through programs as a cohort. Being in a cohort encourages students to help one another and engenders esprit de corps. Organizing students into cohorts means, however, that all students have to attend at the same time. Cohorts also may make it difficult to serve students with a wide range of needs. As a result, some bridge programs are designed to be self-paced, with instruction provided by teachers/tutors and computers. Some programs are using peer mentors very successfully. Bridge program designers should weigh the benefits of different ways of organizing bridge training and, over time, experiment with various approaches to see what works best.

Job and College Exposure

Bridge programs should expose students to employment and postsecondary education as much as possible. The following are some activities that provide such exposure ("Building and Sustaining Employer Relationships," pp. 34–38, provides more detail on the employer role in providing such exposure).

Field trips to worksites can help students get a clearer picture of their post-bridge options. These trips can be linked to classroom exercises where students prepare interview questions about career opportunities and business practices. Students can also be required to write reports on these trips based on the information they learn.

Job shadowing offers a non-threatening, substantive opportunity for individuals with little or no previous work experience to observe and learn about a particular job. Typically, the students identify positions in which they are interested and spend time with an incumbent worker observing how the work is done. It is often a good idea to have the student develop a list of questions prior to the activity and to report back in a written assignment or class presentation. It is also helpful to prepare the worker who is being shadowed; this can make the experience more useful for both parties. Job shadowing can be enhanced when the student is paired with an employee who has had to overcome some of the same types of barriers the student faces.

Role model panels are made up of small groups of employed bridge program completers who return to report on their experiences at work. Such panels can give current students insight into the kinds of life changes they can expect, the obstacles they are likely to face, and tips on how to deal with them. Role model panels are highly effective because students identify strongly with the panel members.

Internships or work experience provide students with the opportunity to try out work behaviors such as teamwork and reliability that they are learning in class, while getting assistance from bridge program staff with work behavior issues that may arise. Although paid internships are preferable, unpaid internships should be considered when paid positions are difficult to obtain. Another option is providing internal internships at the lead institution for those students who need more time to develop workplace skills. Student interns should have a class assignment (written report and/or class presentation) in which they reflect on what they have learned through the internship or work experience.

The **Essential Skills Program (ESP)** at the Community College of Denver uses paid internships to achieve its goal of preparing low-income individuals for jobs in high-demand occupations. The program emphasizes building student skills in the transactional environment of the world of work. Students begin internships in their chosen field, one of six occupational tracks, in the second month of the program. They are in class two days a week, with contextualized instruction specialized to the selected field, and serve their internships three days a week. Internships are credit-bearing and count toward a degree if the student stays in the same vocational area.

The relationships between the program, the employer, and the student need to be charted in an internship agreement. Such an agreement should reflect all the specifics of the internship program, including work expectations and evaluation procedures.

A fully detailed internship agreement should incorporate the expectations of each party regarding:

- Tasks and responsibilities
- Job goals and expected outcomes
- Number of hours and length of time of the internship
- Attendance/promptness expectations on the job and consequences for violations of these expectations
- Communication pattern between the program and the employer
- Intervals for employer/supervisor evaluations
- Conditions for permanent employment opportunities

Bridge students need **exposure to college** and can get a flavor for college-level study touring a college campus and visiting a class, or, even better, from a college-level faculty member teaching a class or seminar for bridge students on introductory topics. Bridge students should also meet with college counselors and financial aid staff. The goal should be to ensure that bridge students who are interested in progressing academically have applied for admission and for financial aid before they complete the bridge.

Bridge program coordinators may decide to have students document their work and achievements in a **portfolio**. Portfolios are compilations of materials created by the student, such as final projects, transcripts, and certificates. They give students confidence in interviews, as they help students present themselves in a structured manner using tangible displays of their accomplishments and skills.

Computer Skills Through Course Content

Since computer use is a must in today's knowledge economy jobs, bridge programs can provide an important job skill for participants by integrating computer use into the curriculum. Following are ways that programs can integrate computer use into course content:

Lower-Level Bridge:

- Writing a resume (product: resume on disk)
- Using computers at home and on the job

Higher-Level Bridge:

- Computer applications (word processing, spreadsheet, presentation software) taught in the context of exploring careers and postsecondary training options and preparing a career plan
- Using the Internet to research career information, including using resources such as Women Employed Institute's Web-based Career Coach
- Computer applications taught using problems, tools, materials, and situations taken from state-of-the-art workplaces in the given field (for field-specific bridge programs)

Students in the **Access College Education (ACE)** program at Portland Community College develop research, writing, and computer skills in the context of career exploration. For example, for one math exercise, students calculated what they would need to earn to become completely self-supporting, an exercise that was very motivating for students. The information gathered in this and other similar life-related tasks culminated in student-generated PowerPoint presentations, many of which included percentages, pie charts, and graphs.

Computerized Instruction to Complement Bridge Instruction

Basic skills, GED, and vocational computer software can sometimes improve the effectiveness of bridge programs.

Basic skills software can help strengthen math, reading, and writing skills. Teachers can assign lessons in specific programs as homework to help students meet program competencies or use portions of these programs as teaching materials. Software selected should be able to introduce concepts in small increments, allow for plenty of interaction, give good explanations to right and wrong answers, and have a user-friendly student tracking system. Computer labs should have the personnel necessary to help students learn computer skills and to answer questions that arise, and teachers should have good relationships with the personnel so all work can be monitored carefully.

GED skills can be targeted objectives of bridge programs, and **GED software** can be used as required supplements. Certainly the math, reading, writing, and technical skills taught in the bridge program can strengthen students' ability to prepare for the GED. Test-taking courses can teach GED test-taking skills for the various skill areas, and GED software can supplement course work. Bridge programs that serve students older than 16 with this approach should be sure to give students a GED practice test, meet with students to help them interpret their scores and create study strategies, and give specific GED software assignments. As always, it is critical that the software is able to track student progress and that teachers require updates on this progress frequently.

An effective GED software program will provide readings, test materials, and feedback on right and wrong answers, and will introduce concepts, provide opportunities for interaction while the concepts are being learned, and enable students to build their skills and knowledge incrementally.

Vocational software comes in a wide variety of types, and each should be evaluated in relation to the primary course materials and carefully integrated with coursework. Some software provides a good introduction to a field, some can be used for research purposes, and some can help students practice vocation-specific skills.

Develop Student Assessment

Assessment is a key component of any bridge program. Ideally, an assessment will:

- Help determine the placement level of a student within a program
- Determine the student's career and advancement interests or goals
- Determine the student's support service needs
- Determine the student's strengths and weaknesses
- Inform curriculum and instruction
- Measure student learning gains

Pre- and Post-Testing

Assessment testing should occur prior to entry (placement or pre-testing) and upon completion of the program (exit or post-testing). Program designers will need to determine the type of assessment instruments the bridge program will use. Practices to test basic literacy as well as those used as a gateway for college entry vary among states and between specific institutions within states.

Standardized instruments such as the TABE, BEST-Literacy, BEST-Plus, Accuplacer, and COMPASS tests can be effective and appropriate. The same test is often used for both placement and exit testing to determine level gains. Any instrument that is selected should align with the course content to afford more accurate placement of students into the program. The assessment process and tools also need to align with the requirements of the funding source(s). In addition, the program could offer a test that measures the specific competencies taught in the bridge program.

Since many bridge program students have negative histories with assessment and testing, it is also important to integrate assessment (testing) into the curriculum. Exemplary bridge programs intersperse assessments throughout the program so that students develop test-taking skills and become comfortable with the idea of assessment (see figure 13, p. 50, for a sample test-taking syllabus). For higher-level bridge programs, it is important to prepare students for the college entrance exam. One useful resource is the COMPASS practice test on the American College Testing (ACT) Web site (http://.www.act.org/compass/index.html).

Student Career Goals

The core team will have gathered information about the career and advancement goals of potential students during the program development phase ("Designing the Program," pp. 16–27). "Career Exploration," p. 51, describes a free career-exploration tool that students can use either prior to program entry or as part of the bridge program curriculum. In addition, bridge program participants should take a short questionnaire at the beginning and end of the program, to ensure that the program remains relevant to students' career and advancement goals.

Student Support Service Needs

The focus groups described in "Targeting Student Services," pp. 56–63, will provide a general idea of student support service needs. However, the person responsible for intake will also need to determine the specific needs of the individuals enrolling in the program. An outside referring agency or the program itself may do this. Necessary adjustments should be made during the program depending on the needs of enrolled students. Some programs have found that a staff member dedicated to student support is a critical program component.

Targeting Student Services

A host of barriers may confront students, including child-care responsibilities, tuition costs, lack of knowledge about financial aid, lack of transportation, learning disabilities, physical disabilities, lack of family commitment or support, fear and anxiety, substance abuse, and domestic violence.

Student services are the linchpin that holds together a successful bridge program. Without them, the barriers can make program completion impossible. Student services can address these barriers and make it possible for learners to succeed. It is important to think about the target population and how to make services as accessible as possible given their needs and circumstances. This section will help determine the target population's needs in order to maximize the effectiveness of your support services.

Student services generally consist of:

- Career counseling, including aptitude assessment, career exploration, and career and educational plan development
- Academic guidance, including orientation to the institution or organization, the program, and available services; advising in course planning and selection; and transfer counseling
- Academic support, such as tutoring, help developing effective study skills, and time-management coaching
- Personal guidance, including crisis intervention, personal counseling (mental health and life skills). and peer mentoring
- Supplemental resources such as subsidies or vouchers for child care, transportation, books and supplies[12]

Prioritize and Adapt Services for Target Population

While there is a vast menu of student services, every program and every student population is different. With limited resources for these services, it is important to prioritize services that are most important to the target

The **Greater Cincinnati Health Professions Academy's** "multi-entry, multi-exit" system enables applicants to enter specific programs at different levels based on their interest and capacity and supports them in advancing towards their healthcare career goals. The Academy program assesses skill levels as well as individual issues that may present barriers to participating and succeeding in the program. The Academy employs two Career Coaches to guide students through the program. They begin with vocational, educational, and personal assessments to help place the students in appropriate programs and determine their need for support services. The Career Coaches then provide career guidance and planning, life-skills training, placement assistance, and retention support for a full year after employment.

population and the program. It is also important to consider ways of delivering these services that specifically meet the needs of the target population. A number of factors can lead to different priorities and different strategies for delivering student services, including student characteristics, local geography, and infrastructure. Some priorities may be obvious. For example, if the program is located in an area that is geographically spread out without public transportation, transportation subsidies are probably important. If the target population includes a number of parents, child care will likely be a priority.

However, there are less obvious student-service needs that may be particular to the target population and area. There may also be ways to better structure and deliver services to meet students' needs. By holding focus groups, the program designers will learn about the primary barriers targeted students may face in accessing and persisting in the program. Focus groups will help identify the most effective services and how best to target them so they ultimately contribute to better retention and completion outcomes.

Ideally, program designers will be able to hold focus groups with the three populations described below. Local foundations may be able to provide funds for the costs associated with focus groups, which may include a facilitator and participant stipends. If multiple focus groups prove too costly, one can be sufficient or program designers can use the instruments below to develop surveys or questions for one-on-one interviews. Suggestions on how to prioritize are discussed below.

To the extent possible, select focus-group participants based on the population the bridge program will target. For example, if the program will serve adults with children, the focus group should be made up of adults with children. If the target population is ESL or low-literacy students, the focus group should reflect this as well.

It is helpful to hold a separate focus group with each of the following:

Potential students are individuals who have never been to postsecondary education or training but are seriously considering it. These individuals will help program designers understand how to get people started in the program.

Former students are those who were enrolled in a program but have not completed it or a degree because they have had to take time off for some reason. These individuals will help identify the major precipitating factors that lead students to take time off and potentially not return. Targeting services to alleviate these factors can help keep students in the program.

Current students who match the target population demographics will inform program designers about what has helped them succeed. It may be that certain services, if marketed better, could help more students. It may also be that students have developed informal services — such as peer mentoring — that could be explicitly systematized in the program model.

Tip: If holding only one focus group, it is likely that the former students will provide the information that is most useful in identifying priority services.

Worksheets 9-11, pp. 58–63, will help in conducting focus groups. There is a separate worksheet for each category of students: potential, former, and current. Using these guides with groups of eight to 12 participants, the focus group will take between one and a half and two hours.

Focus groups will yield a wealth of information for the core team to consider. It is important that as many members of the team as possible observe the focus groups. Former students in particular can offer a wealth of information about how services can be made more accessible or targeted in meeting their needs.

Worksheet 9: Student Service Focus Group Discussion Guide Potential Students

A. Introduction

1. Staff/organization introductions

2. Explanation of focus groups

- Focus groups are a technique used in business to find out what consumers want and need.
- Since students are consumers of education or training, our goal is to find out what you need to be successful in our program.
- First, we will talk about your life and your daily experiences, and then we want to find out more about your educational goals and needs.

3. Purpose of this focus group

4. Participant introductions

Ask each participant to share:

- Name
- Basic family information (kids, ages, etc.)
- Current job, if employed
- Career goal

B. Discussion

1. A day in your life

The purpose of this section is to get an accurate picture of the daily responsibilities of your potential students. Having a good sense of what they are balancing, what kinds of things can interfere with their day, and what kind of support networks they have will help you identify places where your program can offer support.

- What is your morning like? What time does it start? What does it take to get everyone out the door?
- What is your day like?
- What time do you get home in the evening? What needs to get done? When do you go to sleep?
- What are your child-care arrangements during the day? What happens if your child is sick?
- What makes you feel like you have had a successful day?
- What kinds of things throw your day off?
- When these things happen, what is your back-up? Do you feel like you have a network of support? What does that network look like?

2. Reasons for seeking education and training

The purpose of this section is to find out what students' motivations are for seeking education and training. Understanding these motivations is helpful because program staff can reinforce these throughout the program, while helping students find other motivations for staying in school. These questions will also help you determine whether participants generally have people in their lives who will reinforce their motivation or work against it.

- When you finished high school, did you seek out further education and training immediately or wait? If you waited, tell us about some reasons for waiting.
- Now that you've started thinking about continuing your education or improving your skills, we'd like to get a good understanding of what is motivating you to do this.
  - Task: Please take a moment to think about your top three or four reasons for continuing your education or building your skills. Write them down.
  - Have participants share their reasons and discuss.
- If you decide to continue your education, how do you think people in your life will respond? Are they supportive? If so, how are they supportive? If not, what makes you feel they will be unsupportive?
- Let's talk about specific people and how they might or might not support you:
  - Spouse
  - Extended family — parents, siblings, aunts, uncles
  - Kids
  - Employer

3. The path to further education and training

The purpose of this section is to help illuminate students' prior knowledge of the process of getting started in college or a training program. This will help you determine how much initial outreach, orientation, and assistance you will need to provide.

- What colleges or job-training programs are available in your area?
- Do you know anyone who has taken part in any of these? Who — relatives, friends, coworkers?
- Have you talked to them about how to get started? Could you talk to them about how to get started? If not, do you know of anyone you could go to for advice?
- What are the basic things that someone has to do to apply to and get into college or a job-training program?
  - What is the first thing you would do?
  - Where would you go and who would you talk to?
  - If someone you know wanted to go to college or get job training, what would you advise them to do?
- Have any of you ever started the process of applying to college or registering for a job-training program but had to stop? Tell us about that. What happened?
- Take a moment to think about the following sentence: "I want to get started in college, but there are just a few things I need to do, or things that need to happen, or things I need to get into place before I can get started." What are those things?
  - Task: Please take a moment to think about this and write down what is getting in the way of getting started.
  - Have participants share their reasons and discuss.

4. Expectations of college or job training

This section will help you learn about students' notions of what college or training will be like. If common misperceptions arise, you will be able to address these with incoming students. If common fears arise, you will also be better able to preempt these concerns when students begin a program.

- When you picture yourself in college or a job-training program, what do you imagine it will be like?
  - What will it be like to be in a classroom? Do you think you will enjoy that experience? Why or why not?
  - What about homework? How much time do you think you will spend on homework?
  - Do you picture college as a social experience? Do you see it as a place to make friends?
- What excites you the most about the thought of going to college or job training?
- What worries you the most? Do you have any concerns? What are those concerns?

5. Wrap-up

- If you go to college or a job-training program, how do you picture your life in 10 years? What are your hopes? What would success look like to you? Describe the life you want to have.

Worksheet 10: Student Service Focus Group Discussion Guide Former Students

A. Introduction

1. Staff/organization introductions

2. Explanation of focus groups

- A focus group is a technique used in business to find out what consumers want and need.
- Since students are consumers of education, our goal is to find out what you need to be successful in school.
- First, we will talk about your life and your daily experiences, and then we want to find out more about your educational goals and needs.

3. Purpose of this focus group

4. Participant introductions

Ask each participant to share:

- Name
- Basic family information (kids, ages, etc.)
- Current job, if employed
- When they were in school and what program they were in

B. Discussion

1. A day in your life

The purpose of this section is to get an accurate picture of the daily responsibilities of students. Having a good sense of what they are balancing, what kinds of things can interfere with their day, and what kind of support networks they have will help you identify places where your program can offer support. Note that for former students, you may want to ask them to think back to when they were in school or training when they answer the following questions.

- What is your morning like? What time does it start? What does it take to get everyone out the door?
- What is your day like?
- What time do you get home in the evening? What needs to get done? When do you go to sleep?
- What are your child-care arrangements during the day? What happens if your child is sick?
- What makes you feel like you have had a successful day?
- What kinds of things throw your day off?
- When these things happen, what is your back-up? Do you feel like you have a network of support? What does that network look like?

2. Reasons for going to seeking education or training

The purpose of this section is to find out what students' motivations are for seeking education and training. Understanding these motivations is helpful because program staff can reinforce these throughout the program, while helping students find other motivations for staying in school. These questions will also help you determine whether participants generally have people in their lives who will reinforce their motivation or work against it.

- When you finished high school, did you apply to college or job training immediately or wait? If you waited, tell us about some reasons for waiting.
- We want to understand your motivations for continuing your education. When you decided to go to college or enter a job-training program, what were your reasons?
  - Task: Please take a moment to think about your top three or four reasons for continuing your education. Write them down.
  - Have participants share their reasons and discuss.
- When you decided to enroll in college/job training, how did people in your life react? Were they supportive? If so, how were they supportive? Talk about specific things they did.
- If not, in what ways were they unsupportive? Talk about specific things they did.
- Probe specific people:
  - Spouse
  - Extended family — parents, siblings, aunts, uncles
  - Kids
  - Employer

3. Expectations of college/job training

This section will help you learn about what students expected and how that differed from their experience. If common misperceptions arise, you will be able to address these with incoming students. If common fears arise, you will also be better able to preempt these concerns when students begin a program.

- When you started college or job training, did you know what you wanted your career to be? How did you figure that out?
- If you didn't know what you wanted your career to be, how did you pick your major or program of study?
- How did you figure out which classes to take?
- Did you feel like the classes you were taking were moving you toward your goal? Why or why not?
- Think back to how you pictured college or job training before you started. What were your greatest fears? What excited you the most?
- Once you were there, was it what you expected it to be? How was it different?

Probes:

- Classes
- Homework
- Difficulty of work
- Schedule
- Social life/sense of community

4. Reasons for leaving/taking time off

The purpose of this section is to understand why students leave their programs. By identifying these factors, you can use your services to target these events before they become a barrier to persistence.

- We would like to understand what kinds of things make it difficult for students to continue in a program or force them to take time off. Please take a moment to think about your reasons for taking time off from or leaving your program.
  - Task: Please write your reasons down.
  - Have participants share their reasons and discuss.
- Were there any resources or people at the college or program you were in who could have helped you with these things?
  - Probe specific services depending on the barriers that were raised. Example: You mentioned that you left your program because you were failing a class. Did your program have tutoring services available? Were you able to take advantage of that service? What would have made it easier for you to use the tutors that were available? *Your goal here is to find out if the service existed, and if it did, why it did not work (e.g., too far away, or hours weren't convenient, or didn't know about it).* This may help you adapt your services to particular needs. Specific services to probe include:
    - Financial aid and financial-aid counseling
    - Academic advising
    - Tutoring
    - Mentoring
    - Career counseling
    - Job placement
    - Personal counseling
    - Child care
    - Student support groups/clubs
- Do you plan to re-enroll in your program or a different program? If so, what needs to happen before that is possible for you?

5. Wrap-up

- If you go back to college or a job-training program, how do you picture your life in 10 years? What are your hopes? What would success look like to you? Describe the life you want to have.

Worksheet 11: Student Service Focus Group Discussion Guide Current Students

A. Introduction

1. Staff/organization introductions

2. Explanation of focus groups

- A focus group is a technique used in business to find out what consumers want and need.
- Since students are consumers of education and training, our goal is to find out what you need to be successful in school.
- First, we will talk about your life and your daily experiences, and then we want to find out more about your educational goals and needs.

3. Purpose of this focus group

4. Participant introductions

Ask each participant to share:

- Name
- Basic family information (kids, ages, etc.)
- Current job if employed
- What education or training program they are currently in and career goal

B. Discussion

1. A day in your life

The purpose of this section is to get an accurate picture of the daily responsibilities of students. Having a good sense of what they are balancing, what kinds of things can interfere with their day, and what kind of support networks they have will help you identify places where your program can offer support.

- What is your morning like? What time does it start? What does it take to get everyone out the door?
- What is your day like?
- What time do you get home in the evening? What needs to get done? When do you go to sleep?
- What are your child care arrangements during the day? What happens if your child is sick?
- What makes you feel like you have had a successful day?
- What kinds of things throw your day off?
- When these things happen, what is your back up? Do you feel like you have a network of support? What does that network look like?

2. Reasons for seeking education and training

The purpose of this section is to find out what students' motivations are for seeking education and training. Understanding these motivations is helpful because program staff can reinforce these throughout the program, while helping students find other motivations for staying in school. These questions will also help you determine if participants generally have people in their life who will reinforce their motivation or work against it.

- When you finished high school, did you apply to college or job training immediately or wait? If you waited, tell us about some reasons for waiting.
- We want to understand your motivations for continuing your education. When you decided to go to college or enter a job training program, what were your reasons?
  - Task: Please take a moment to think about your top three or four reasons for continuing your education. Write them down.
  - Have participants share their reasons and discuss.
- When you decided to enroll in college/job training, how did people in your life react?
- Were they supportive? If so, how were they supportive? Talk about specific things they did.
- If not, in what ways were they unsupportive? Talk about specific things they did.
- Probe specific people:
  - Spouse
  - Extended family — parents, siblings, aunts, uncles
  - Kids
  - Employer

3. Expectations of college/job training

This section will help you learn about what students expected from college or job training and how that differed from their experience. If common misperceptions arise, you will be able to address these with incoming students. If common fears arise, you will also be better able to preempt these concerns when students begin a program.

- When you started college or job training, did you know what you wanted your career to be? How did you figure that out?
- If you didn't know what you wanted your career to be, how did you pick your major or program of study?
- How did you figure out which classes to take?
- Did you feel like the classes you were taking were moving you toward your goal? Why or why not?
- Think back to how you pictured college or job training before you started.
- What were your greatest fears? What excited you the most?
- Once you were there, was it what you expected it to be? How was it different?

  Probes:
  - Classes
  - Homework
  - Difficulty of work
  - Schedule
  - Social life/sense of community

4. Knowledge/use of student services

The purpose of this section is to help you learn about students' knowledge of available services, their experiences with those services, and how the services can be adapted to better fit their needs. You may also learn about informal supports that students provide for each other that can be systematized.

- Have you ever had to miss a class? What caused you to have to miss a class? Did you share the reasons with anyone at your school?
- Have you ever had to drop a class? What caused you to have to drop a class? Was there anyone at the college or in the program who could have helped you stay in the class? Did you seek their help? What happened?
- Have you ever had to leave in the middle of a term? What caused you to have to leave? Was there anyone at the college or in the program who could have helped you stay? Did you seek their help? What happened?
- What kinds of services did/does your college or program offer? Did/do you ever use them? How were they useful? How could they be improved?

  Probes:
  - Financial aid and financial aid counseling
  - Academic advising
  - Tutoring
  - Mentoring
  - Career counseling
  - Job placement
  - Personal counseling
  - Child care
  - Student support groups/clubs

5. Wrap-up

- How do you picture your life in 10 years? What are your hopes? What would success look like to you? Describe the life you want to have.

Placing Students in Jobs and College

Bridge programs prepare students to advance both educationally and in their careers. Some programs may emphasize one aspect more than the other, but ideally the program leads to both job and educational advancement. This section focuses on placement of students into a job or a college track. (Internships are a related option discussed in "Building and Sustaining Employer Relationships," pp. 34–38, and "Job and College Exposure," p. 53.)

Job Placement

Bridge program participants generally will need activities that connect them to potential jobs both during the bridge program and upon its conclusion. In-program activities like internships and job shadowing, described elsewhere in this guide, build students' workplace competencies and expose them to places they might want to work and employers who might want to hire them. Job placement then becomes a natural extension of the bridge program. Committing program resources to job placement, for instance by designating a placement coordinator, is an important program-development step (see "Staffing," pp. 76–80).

Bridge programs should create clear policies to structure follow-up activities with employers, designating exactly what needs to happen before, during, and after a placement; how long post-placement activities need to continue; and what aspects of the whole process must be tracked. With a fully articulated placement system, the bridge program will be able to measure results and, subsequently, hone placement and post-placement efforts.

Program graduates who move into and are successfully performing on their jobs may be ready to advance to the next step in their career paths with the necessary education or training. But they may not have the confidence, resources, or information to take that step. Programs may help these graduates make the transition by periodically following up with them to not only determine how they are doing, but also to encourage those who are ready to consider additional training and to provide assistance in identifying and accessing opportunities.

College Placement

As noted above, a bridge program ideally leads to both job and educational advancement. "Developing Program Curriculum," pp. 39–56, describes how to design the curriculum to consciously lead to the next educational level. Besides curriculum articulation, there are other concrete steps that can make the educational transition seamless for students:

- Arrange for students to apply for college financial aid while still enrolled in the bridge program.
- Work with student support services to have students arrange for necessary support services, such as child care assistance, for which they are eligible.
- Take a campus tour during class time.
- Enroll students in the next level of classes before the bridge program ends. (Program designers may need to work with the college credit department to provide more flexible scheduling that meets students' needs.)
- Invite program graduates who have continued to credit programs to speak to the class about how the program prepared them to succeed in college.
- Continue to monitor the bridge program graduates' success at the next level, looking at the areas in which they are succeeding and at those in which they are not, to continually revise the curriculum to achieve the best results for the students. (See "Bridge Program Evaluation and Continuous Improvement," pp. 83–88.)

The **Child Development Associate** program at Tacoma Community College prepares people with very low basic skills to secure the Child Development Associate (CDA), an industry-recognized credential, and to enter a one-year paraeducator certificate program or a two-year associate of applied science (AAS) degree program. The CDA is a national accreditation and targets a high-demand occupation — there are not enough certified child-development associates in Tacoma to meet the need. This program has an active advisory board, which includes representatives from large human service agencies, a private-sector child care center, and the public schools. Board members assist in recruiting students from among their own employees and help place students who need new jobs.