

**Bridge Programs in Maryland:  
Helping Low-skill Residents Access Postsecondary  
Training and High Wage Jobs**

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Job Opportunities Task Force**

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## Contents

Introduction	2
Key Elements of Effective Bridge Programs	2
The Need for Bridge Programs	3
Bridge Programs in Maryland	4
<i>Magna Baltimore Technical Training Center</i>	4
<i>Good Samaritan Hospital – Coppin State University</i>	5
<i>Montgomery County Refugee Training Program</i>	6
Building a Bridge Program from Current Initiatives	7
A Recipe for a Successful Bridge Program	8
Prospects for the Future	9
Bibliography	10
Acknowledgements	11

## Introduction

Almost half of the adults in Maryland have a high school diploma or less, and many of those with a diploma have low reading and math skills. These individuals don't have the education level needed to enter college, and they don't have the skills to obtain and retain a high wage job. If these individuals don't overcome this deficit, they will be destined to a lifetime of low-wage work and other related economic hardships.

While a large percentage of Maryland's workforce is struggling to get by, many employers are unable to find the skilled workers it needs to compete in a global economy. Employers frequently report difficulty locating trained workers and even more trouble keeping them on the job. The health of the state's workforce and its economy depend upon eliminating the gap between the skill level of its workforce and the skill level required by many Maryland jobs.

In recent years a strategy has emerged to address this problem. Community colleges and businesses have formed partnerships to create programs that teach basic reading, writing, math, English language, and technical skills in the context of a particular occupation. These programs are called "bridge programs" because they are a bridge to post-secondary education and higher skill jobs.

Several bridge programs have recently been created in Maryland. While programs that seek to train low-skilled workers are typically initiated by the public sector, employers have been the driving force in the creation of two of Maryland's bridge programs. This demonstrates employers' heightened interest in taking the initiative to prepare the workforce for high-skilled jobs.

This paper examines the need for bridge programs in Maryland, describes several promising local programs, and lists key factors to consider in designing new bridge programs.

## Key Elements of Effective Bridge Programs

While the components of bridge programs vary somewhat from site to site, the objectives of each program are generally the same: to help the individual access post-secondary education *and* obtain a high wage job through the combination of occupational skills training and developmental (remedial) education. Often, through the program, the individual pursues a certificate or degree through a community college and frequently services are available to address barriers to program participation and employment. Key elements of effective programs are:

- *A developmental education* that teaches basic reading, writing, math, and/or English language skills in the context of a specific occupation that helps the participant enter and succeed in college;
- *Occupational skills training* that leads to employment and prepares the participant for more advanced training and a higher skill position; and
- *Support services* that address problems such as childcare or transportation that might limit or prevent a participant's success in the program.

Bridge programs are especially attractive because they are generally shorter in length and more intensive than other adult education courses, and are often linked to a specific employer.

## The Need for Bridge Programs

High wage jobs require post-secondary education and strong basic skills. Many Marylanders are shut out of opportunities to earn a good salary because they do not have the required education credential or skill associated with the position. Bridge programs offer an opportunity for residents to pick up a credential, increase their skills and make themselves more attractive to employers offering family-supporting wages. Bridge programs are needed to address the following:

*Many Marylanders have a high school diploma or less :* While a growing percentage of jobs require an advanced degree, 43 percent of adults in Maryland age 25 years and over have only a high school diploma, its equivalent, or less ([U.S. Census Bureau, QT-P20, Educational Attainment by Sex: 2000, Census 2000 Summary File 3, Sample Data, Maryland.](#)) Individuals with a college degree earn much more money than those without a degree. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, male workers with a degree earn 75 percent more than those with just a high school diploma. Bridge programs can help residents with a high school degree or less obtain the skills they need to enter post-secondary education.

*Many low-wage workers who are eager to continue their education in college are not adequately prepared:* Statewide in the 2001-2002 school year, 84 percent of recent African-American high school graduates, 80 percent of Hispanic graduates, and 68 percent of white graduates required developmental instruction as they began college ([Maryland State Department of Education, "2003 Performance Report" 2003.](#)) Of new high school graduates enrolling in a Maryland community college, 72 percent required developmental education (remedial) in math, reading or writing – or in all three. At Baltimore City Community College an astonishing 96 percent of the students require developmental education in one or more subjects ([The Abell Foundation, "Baltimore City Community College at the Crossroads." March 2002.](#)) Bridge programs can provide educational assistance to give residents the skills they need to succeed in post-secondary education.

*The state's adult education system is serving only a small fraction, about 4 percent, of the Marylanders in need of services.* The need and the demand for adult education programs in Maryland far exceed the capacity of current programs. According to the Maryland State Department of Education, about 960,000 residents need adult education, current programs have the capacity to enroll fewer than 40,000 at a time, and about 5,000 are on waiting lists.

*Many state residents have very low levels of literacy:* According to the National Adult Literacy Survey, 20 percent of adult Marylanders read at the lowest literacy level. This means that they read at less than a 4th grade level and cannot understand instructions. Another 25 percent of the state's adults read at the second literacy level – approximately the 8th grade level. Literacy experts say these adults are likely to be unprepared to study for the GED and are unable to help their children learn to read ([Maryland State Department of Education, "Literacy Works," 2001.](#))

## **Bridge Programs in Maryland**

Given bridge program's potential, we sought to determine if successful models existed in Maryland. We conducted extensive research and surveyed Maryland's community college system. We found the following three promising bridge programs.

### **Magna Baltimore Technical Training Center**

Magna International Inc. is a Toronto-based designer, developer, and manufacturer of automotive systems, assemblies and components. In 2004, Magna created the Magna Baltimore Technical Training Center (MBTTC), its first training center in the US, in what had formerly been the Park Heights Elementary School in the Pimlico neighborhood. The 48,000 square foot facility has space for classrooms and hands-on training with the latest equipment in the machining and cutting industry. The Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) provides training in machining and tool and die manufacturing as well as a GED preparation program.

The machining and tool and die program is a 5-day a week, 36-month registered Maryland apprenticeship. It includes courses in blueprint reading, CAD/CAM, hand tools, industrial health and safety, industrial mathematics, pneumatics, quality controls, robotics and welding. The program teaches reading comprehension and writing in the context of these courses as well as algebra, geometry and trigonometry. In addition, the program teaches basic math skills such as fractions, multiplication, decimals and percentages.

Upon completion of the program, students become journeymen with a certificate acknowledging that they learned a trade, and they may have earned certification in as many as 28 metalworking competencies. Graduates are qualified to be machinists and tool and die makers making approximately \$30,000 per year to start. They have the opportunity to earn between \$40,000 and \$60,000 per year after gaining more experience. Graduates are also qualified to enter an Associates degree program in Manufacturing and may have 15-17 credits that they can apply toward the degree. The Magna program is designed to admit one class of 25 students each year.

Additional features that help ensure program success include:

- Job readiness training that prepares the students for the workplace. For example, students are required to attend all classes, be on time, and not leave early. This is required for assembly line work, which cannot be done without all workers present.
- Case management that includes personal counseling, referrals to social service agencies when needed, and job placement assistance at the end of the training.

Magna funds almost the entire program, with CCBC contributing some machinery and computers. The instructors, counselors, and program director are CCBC employees, but Magna funds these positions. Students pay no tuition and receive minimum wage in the beginning, with periodic increases. Magna provides them with books, uniforms, steel toe boots, and tools.

Students in the machining and tool and die program must be at least 18 years old, have a high school diploma or GED, and have at least 9th grade reading skills and a 10th grade math level. The first cohort of 25 students started in March 2005 and included residents of the Park Heights neighborhood, the metro Baltimore area, and beyond. All were male, with an average age of about 29 years. In the first six months, thirteen students left the program because of poor performance, poor attendance, or waning interest. When the program began, it was anticipated that most participants would need additional math assistance. Developmental classes were

included in the program design for students who needed help but due to the level and intensity of the program it became clear that some students needed additional services so students were given help with job readiness skills, resume writing, interviewing techniques and career planning.

For more information about this program, contact Joseph Wilkinson, Director of MBTTC, at (410) 664-2226 ext. 300 or [jwilkinson@ccbcmd.edu](mailto:jwilkinson@ccbcmd.edu).

### **Good Samaritan Hospital – Coppin State University**

Good Samaritan Hospital provides a full range of acute and ambulatory medical and surgical services at its 282-bed facility in Baltimore. Like most hospitals, Good Samaritan has had a shortage of nurses in the past. To address this issue, the hospital is partnering with various universities and community colleges to offer additional training and education for its employees. Full-time Good Samaritan employees in good standing and recommended by their manager are eligible to apply to any of the programs. Listed below are the training programs and the schools/universities associated with Good Samaritan.

#### **Type of Program**

Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)  
CNA to Registered Nurse (RN)  
CNA to Licensed practical nurse (LPN) (in development)  
LPN to RN  
RN to Bachelor of Science in nursing (BSN)

#### **Affiliated Program**

Good Samaritan Hospital  
Coppin State University  
Essex Community College  
Prince Georges Community College  
Notre Dame College

Partnering with Coppin State University in Baltimore has helped provide training opportunities for community residents to obtain entry-level health care jobs at the hospital and for current employees to advance to higher skill occupations.

Employees interested in the CNA-RN program must have a high school diploma or GED and must pass the Nurse Entrance Exam (NET) that requires 10th grade reading and math skills. Those who do not pass the NET may take developmental courses to prepare them to take it again. Good Samaritan had 75 hospital employees who wanted to move up from the CNA position the first time it offered this program. Unfortunately, none of the employees could pass the entrance exam. Good Samaritan put together a tutoring program to help the employees improve their math and reading skills. After initial tutoring and passing the NET, the first cohort was qualified to begin the CAN-RN program. Currently, there are 25 students in the program with an average age of about 40 years.

The "bridge" component of this program was created after Good Samaritan and Coppin State saw that none of the 75 hospital employees who wanted to move up from the CNA position could pass the entrance exams for the higher level positions.

Good Samaritan and a local foundation jointly fund the program. The hospital, with assistance from the foundation, pays for books, tuition for full-time employees and a pro-rated tuition for part-time employees. The hospital also provides on-site childcare and 24-hour access to a computer lab. Since the program is intended for full-time employees, they take only two courses per semester. The courses run one day or two days a week at the most to allow for the employees to work full time. The entire program takes about six years to complete. To assist the students, Good Samaritan also developed a mentoring program that pairs each student with an RN. Program directors credit the initiative with raising staff morale, contributing to elimination of the job vacancy rate that once stood at 24 percent, and reducing the hospital's need to use staffing

agencies. Demand remains very high for this program and the hospital maintains a waiting list to enter the CNA-RN program as well as the CNA program.

The incumbent workers generally do not need job readiness training. Two unresolved concerns that still need to be addressed are that some participants may not complete this long program, and that the clinical portion (with no stipend) required for RN certification may force students to work part-time as a CNA versus full-time. This obstacle may be financially burdensome for some participants.

For more information about this program, contact Stacey Brull, Professional Development Director, Good Samaritan Hospital, at (410) 532-4758 or [stacey.brull@medstar.net](mailto:stacey.brull@medstar.net).

### **Montgomery County Refugee Training Program**

The Montgomery County Refugee Training Program provides training and education to political refugees and asylees residing in Montgomery County. The refugees are persons who have fled their country and are unable to return because they might be persecuted. Asylees are persons already in the U.S. who meet the definition of a refugee. The Program combines ESOL instruction with basic workplace skills training and prepares individuals for jobs in healthcare and hospitality. The Office of Refugee Resettlement in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services funds the program. Started in 1979 as part of Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), it was transferred to Montgomery College (a community college) in July 2005. It is in the non-credit Workforce Development & Continuing Education division of the College.

The pre-CNA and CNA programs began in 1996. The pre-CNA program teaches medical and nursing terms to those with limited English skills. There is no minimum education requirement, but students must be able to read, speak and understand English, i.e. a "high beginner" ESOL level. The program offers two pre-CNA courses annually with 20 students each, meeting for two hours twice each week.

The CNA program also has no minimum education requirement, but students must have college-level skills and must be able to speak and read English well. Ten percent of the CNA students have a healthcare background -- some were nurses or doctors in their home country. The program provides education and skills training in areas such as infection control, patient care procedures, patient sensitivity, and professional and ethical behavior. Classes meet on Saturdays for six hours. The course has no formal ending. Class work is followed by a 40-hour practicum at Manorcare nursing homes.

The program does not provide support services for its students but has good relationships with the county's social services (e.g. mental health, childcare, transportation). There is no charge for the program but students must buy their books and a uniform. The program offers two CNA courses per year with 16 students in each course. One-third to one-half of the CNA students comes from the pre-CNA program. Graduates of the program work in hospitals, nursing homes and homecare, and make \$8-9 per hour and receive benefits after 90 days.

Graduates of this program are not qualified to immediately enter a postsecondary training program. However, the program raises participants' basic skills, moving them closer to postsecondary training. The staff reports that some CNA graduates do go on to postsecondary training and become LPNs and RNs.

For more information contact JoAnne Hanlon, Operations Director, Workforce Development and Continuing Education, Montgomery College at (240-683-2581) or [JoAnne.Hanlon@montgomerycollege.edu](mailto:JoAnne.Hanlon@montgomerycollege.edu) .

## **Building a Bridge Program from Current Initiatives**

There are two ways to build a bridge program. One is to start from scratch, bring together partners and create a new initiative that will meet the needs of residents, employers and educational institutions. The Baltimore Magna Technical Training Center is a good example of this type of program. The other way to start a bridge program is to redesign existing programs that work with low-skilled adults and build stronger linkages to post-secondary education and employment. A number of community colleges across the state offer programs that help individuals move up the education and employment ladders. While conducting research to locate existing bridge programs, we found the following initiatives that provide some bridge-like services and could conceivably be expanded with the right partners to become full-fledged bridge programs.

- Wor-Wic Community College offers developmental education labs that are open seven days a week and provide individual and group tutoring.
  - Project Literacy at Cecil Community College offers free one-on-one tutoring in reading to individuals who read below the fourth-grade level.
  - Garrett County Success for Youth, a Garrett College program, provides free tutoring to individuals age 16-21 who need to improve their basic skills. The College also offers courses in basic study skills and a peer-tutoring program.
- Harford Community College offers “supplemental instruction”, a series of free weekly review sessions for students taking difficult courses. Students who have successfully completed the course discuss important concepts and help the other students improve their study skills.
- Chesapeake College offers classes in basic use of computers, research skills, and other basic level skills.
- Anne Arundel Community College offers a 15-hour, non-credit Elementary Computer Skills course for students with limited computer experience.

## A Recipe for a Successful Bridge Program

Bridge programs have lofty ambitions. They target people with relatively little education and low skills and seek to increase their potential by helping them to access post-secondary education and prepare them for a high-skill, high wage career. Educators, employers, policymakers and advocates should consider the following when developing a bridge program:

- *Focus on growing industry sectors where the demand for skilled labor is strong and wages can support families.* Bridge programs need employers as partners. Employers are likely to be most interested in investing resources in a bridge initiative if they have had difficulty finding skilled workers using more traditional methods. Consequently, planners should target growing industry sectors with labor shortages when designing a bridge program.

- *Ensure that the promise of a job is real, meaningful and well publicized within the program and the community.* Many low-income residents have tried training programs before that did not lead to a job and did not raise their income significantly. This leaves people skeptical about any new training program with big promises. To gain prospective participant's attention and trust, the program must fulfill its promise of leading to a high-wage job after successful completion of activities. Participants who advance in careers that pay a high salary will be the program's best marketing tool.

- *Determine the program's target population and tailor services accordingly.* A program designed to help residents with the lowest literacy level will likely need to focus on helping participants enter employment in the short-term with post-secondary education a longer range objective. The program will also need to rely more heavily on services that can resolve participant's barriers to work and education. Programs aimed at participants with higher levels of literacy may be able to concentrate more quickly on preparing participants for college. These individuals may already be working, such as in the Good Samaritan model described above, and need training to advance their careers and increase their wages.

- *When determining the length of the training program, balance the needs of participants and the time needed to teach the skills; provide stipends when possible.* Low-wage workers and job seekers need to earn money to provide for their families. No matter how good the long-term prospects are, many individuals do not have the means to enroll in a lengthy training program that does not provide a wage. Also, if the program is very long, participants may drop out due to barriers to participation or in favor of an opportunity that will provide assistance more quickly. Employers however, need skilled, reliable workers. The program must be long enough to provide adequate training and produce workers with the capacity to do the job. If the training is too short and does not provide skilled workers, employers will quickly lose interest and stop hiring graduates.

- *Secure funding.* Finding sufficient funds can be challenging. Possible state government sources include the Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation, the Maryland State Department of Education, and the Department of Business and Economic Development. Federal funds through the Workforce Investment Act may be available and Pell grants may be an option for credit programs. Private employers, sectoral associations, and foundations are also possibilities. Other potential funding possibilities can be found in "Building Bridges: Funding options for the core components of Bridge Programs." (Smith and Unruth, May 2004).

- *Address barriers to program participation and employment:* Many individuals have barriers that have resulted in limited success in the workplace and in school. To give the program its best chance of success, program operators should be prepared to address issues such as childcare, transportation, and healthcare, or refer students elsewhere for assistance. The seriousness of

participants' skills deficits and other issues was raised as an important consideration by staff at all three of the programs described above.

*· Form partnerships with organizations that will work well together.* Sometimes partnerships that look great on paper are disasters in practice. Too many partnerships are formed without enough attention on how activities will be coordinated so that participants or services do not fall through cracks. Bridge programs are a challenge because they require the cooperation of employers, academic institutions, and sometimes community based organizations -- entities that have very different missions, priorities and orientations. Coordination can also be a challenge within organizations, particularly educational institutions where sections that offer credits, degrees and certificates must align with the non-credit side that provides ABE, GED, and ESL instruction. Without an effective partnership a bridge program has little chance of success.

*· Find the most appropriate organization to provide the education and training.* While there are a number of organizations that could provide educational training in a bridge program, community colleges are well situated to provide this service. Community colleges mission includes serving as a bridge to four-year colleges while also responding to workforce needs of local employers through college credit and noncredit offerings.

A more extensive discussion of the issues to consider when designing a bridge program can be found within "Bridges to Careers for Low-Skilled Adults: A Program Development Guide" (Women Employed with Chicago Jobs Council, and UIC Great Cities Institute) available on the Internet at [www.womenemployed.org](http://www.womenemployed.org) and at [www.cjc.net](http://www.cjc.net).

## **Prospects for the Future**

Bridge program are an exciting concept because they improve the employment prospects of workers and job seekers and meet the high-skill needs of employers. Many Marylanders do not have the skills or education to go to and succeed in college or to obtain and retain a high-wage job. Current services only scratch the surface of satisfying the need of residents and the demand of employers. Learning from the experience of the programs already implemented and addressing early on the key issues suggested above will go a long way to ensuring the effectiveness of future bridge programs.

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