

BRIDGING THE GAP

Imagine you were unable to finish high school because you had to help support your family. Now, 15 years later, stuck in a low-paying retail job, you know you need to get a degree in order to get a better job. But you don't have your high school degree, and you don't have the reading, math, or English skills for college-level coursework. So you enroll in a GED or adult education program. But it isn't linked to your career aspirations. You may have ideas about your dream job, but you don't know how to work towards it.

Across the country, millions of women find themselves in a similar situation. All too often, they get stuck—never advancing to college and never earning the skills for a better career.

Women Employed is championing a solution that will help women build the basic academic skills they need to succeed in college-level courses and training while giving them the opportunity to explore careers in high-demand fields. These innovative courses are called bridge programs.

Bridge programs provide:

Academic Instruction In the Context of an Industry

Students improve their basic math, reading, and language skills by studying materials from and working on projects related to their chosen industry. For example, adults in a healthcare bridge might improve their reading skills by reading about a current health trend, like antibiotic resistance, and writing about the impact of that issue.

Help with Career Exploration

Students have the opportunity to explore specific types of jobs in their chosen field, and learn more about the world of work in that industry.

Support to Ease the Transition to College

Students receive targeted support services—including advising and tutoring—to help them successfully navigate their way from adult education or remedial coursework into college or training programs.

This concept works. Students in bridge programs transition successfully into college or college-level training programs at significantly higher rates than students enrolled in traditional adult education. And these students go on to careers in high-demand fields, filling an important need for businesses while putting their families on better economic footing.

Women Employed is leading the effort to implement bridge programs in Illinois and nationwide, giving thousands of Illinois workers the skills and credentials they need to move from low-paid, low-opportunity jobs into high-demand careers that offer financial stability.

Through a partnership with City Colleges of Chicago (CCC), we have created lesson plans for bridge programs in healthcare; transportation, distribution, and logistics (TDL); culinary/hospitality; and we're working on additional curricula in other high-demand fields. We have also trained CCC instructors to successfully teach these programs. So far, over 1400 students have been served by bridge programs at CCC, and 81 percent of them have successfully completed their courses. We're scaling up to serve thousands more.

Along with a coalition of more than 600 individuals from colleges and community organizations, we advocate for the policies, funding, and support necessary to ensure the launch of more bridge programs. WE and CCC have also made our curricula available free of charge to any college or community organization that wants to launch their own bridge programs.

"This is a great course. My students' writing has drastically improved, and they're now well-prepared to handle a college-level workload."

—Healthcare Bridge Instructor at City Colleges of Chicago

CHUTES AND LADDERS OF GETTING THROUGH COLLEGE

