



Bridges to Career Opportunities

Communication Guide

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Introduction

This Communication Guide is developed for any organization that operates a Bridges to Career Opportunities program or anyone who supports or is affiliated with BCO.

An innovative program that combines several evidence-informed elements, Bridges to Career Opportunities helps low-income workers prepare for and succeed in careers that offer living wages. To establish a local BCO program and build on its success, it is important to communicate about BCO with clients, funders, reporters, elected officials, community residents and other key stakeholders.

This guide will help your team clearly explain what BCO is, how it works and why it is effective. It includes an overview of what makes BCO special, content you can use in press releases, grant applications, and other communications, and guidelines for use of logos and other materials.

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Bridges to Career Opportunities is a national program operated by local organizations working with LISC in communities across the country. Because communications from all of us are widely visible to partners, policymakers and colleagues far beyond our own city, there should be a measure of consistency when describing BCO. Like other organizations, LISC has developed a style in how we present our institution and programs to the public. Telling the same story about BCO helps ensure the program is well-regarded and well-understood.

This guide is also a resource to help you tell an effective, compelling story of how BCO makes a difference. Many agencies and community-based organizations have a limited budget for communications and many competing demands for their time and attention. Our hope is that the suggestions and guidance provided here make it easier to get the word out about BCO in ways that build support for your work.

If you have any questions or suggestions about communicating around Bridges to Career Opportunities, please contact your local LISC program officer. Thank you for your work to bring BCO to those who benefit from its programming, and thanks for your help in telling the story of its impact.

Key Characteristics of Bridges to Career Opportunities

Before discussing how to describe Bridges to Career Opportunities in a press release, or which logos to use on your website, let's start by listing piece by piece what BCO includes and why the combination of factors makes a powerful, unique program.

LISC's supported bridge training program model, Bridges to Career Opportunities, is designed to help overcome the gaps in academic readiness that prevent many low-wage and unemployed adults from being hired and succeeding in careers that offer livable wages.

Occupational skill training—building specific skills needed to gain employment in a specific industry or field—has become a national priority, but many workers are unable to participate. They are not strong enough in basic reading, mathematics and other academic skills to qualify and they have financial challenges that undermine their ability to commit to longer-term training and career development. BCO has combined elements that have been proven to make it more likely that participants will be successful in the program and their career:

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Integrated coaching and support: To help participants manage financial and logistical challenges that can interfere with job training, BCO uses a proven model that integrates services that support a client: career coaching, financial coaching services, and access to income supports. Participants get help finding employment, learn how to plan effectively for a financially secure future and are connected to available resources, from food-stamps to a bus pass.

Career pathway: Bridges to Career Opportunities has a strategic focus on sectors or industries that are slated for growth in the city or region, based on labor market projections and employer outreach. The program provides “stackable credentials” recognized in the sector, which give participants the option for continuing career advancement through a guided, connected pathway of education and training programs.

Foundational academic skills: Bridge programs teach the foundational skills—such as math, literacy or English as a Second Language—that are needed to qualify for and be successful in work-training programs, but that many low-wage and unemployed workers lack or need help improving.

Contextualized lessons: BCO lessons are built around industry-specific content that clearly links to the types of situations students will encounter in their intended occupation. A health care program, for example, might teach math concepts through medication dosages or with a blood-pressure monitor. This both gives the adult students a clear reason to work on basic skills and teaches technical, industry-specific concepts from the start.

Ongoing coaching: Trust, strong client relationships and coaching are the bedrock of Bridges to Career Opportunities services. A coach is a facilitator and a partner, providing support and motivation. BCO support includes job-hunting skills such as resume-writing, interviewing and dressing professionally, and workplace skills like communication, conflict resolution and time management.

Run by established local organizations: All BCO programs are run at Financial Opportunity Centers (FOC), a network of more than 75 centers in more than 30 cities across the country. Operated by trusted community-based agencies, FOCs are experienced in job-placement, financial coaching and providing income support.

Supported by LISC: Both the Bridges to Career Opportunities program and the FOC network are programs of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation's national Financial Stability program. Financial Stability staff work with local LISC offices to offer the local agencies that run BCO with grant funding, technical assistance and peer-learning opportunities.

Funded and approved by SIF: In 2013, LISC began piloting the Bridges to Career Opportunities model in six cities. The program has expanded deeper into the national FOC network starting in 2015, supported by the federal Social Innovation Fund (SIF), which unites public and private resources to evaluate and grow innovative community-based solutions with evidence of results.

Proven success: A 2015 study by LISC of hundreds of clients at FOCs in Chicago found that participants in the Bridges to Career Opportunities program were placed in jobs more quickly, earned more per hour, and were more likely to retain a job within the first six months than those who were not in BCO.

BCO Boilerplate Copy

Your organization may need to explain the Bridges to Career Opportunities program for any number of reasons. This section has suggestions how to write about the basics on BCO in different levels of detail, to be used depending on the context and format.

Typically you would describe the specific BCO program at your agency or organization—when it started, who it serves, what careers you support, notable partnerships, etc. mixed in with the text below that explains how BCO works and its overarching story.

This section has suggestions for content that gives the basics on BCO in different levels of detail.

For any first reference of a program or organization, spell out the full name and note the acronym for audiences less familiar with it. The acronym may then be used for subsequent references:

- Bridges to Career Opportunities (BCO)
- Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)
- Social Innovation Fund (SIF)

In Passing

Possible uses: Short explanation in an brochure, article, letter, etc.

Bridges to Career Opportunities (BCO) is a supported bridge training program—a first step for low-wage, low-skill adults to be ready for occupational training that leads to “middle skill” jobs. BCO provides basic education contextualized in practical applications for high-demand industries at local employers. The program integrates career coaching, financial coaching, and supportive services to help ensure participants successfully transition to a new career.

A program of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, BCO is offered by local organizations across the country and has proven to be effective in helping participants find and keep a job. The program is a grantee of the federal Social Innovation Fund (SIF).

Overview

Possible uses: Explanation of the program in a newsletter or online article, press release on the program

Bridges to Career Opportunities (BCO) helps low-wage, low-skill adults overcome common barriers to occupational training—which teaches specific capacities to prepare workers for employment in an industry or field that offers livable wages. As a supported bridge program, BCO offers a hand to those who have difficulty qualifying for training due to limited abilities in math or literacy, as well as financial challenges that undermine their ability to commit to career development. BCO has been shown to help participants find work more quickly, earn more and stay with an employer longer.

BCO provides effective adult basic education contextualized for locally strong industries like healthcare and advanced manufacturing. Participants can see the practical applications of basic academic skills while simultaneously learning technical, industry-specific concepts from the start. As important, BCO programs are provided at Financial Opportunity Centers, which integrate career coaching, financial coaching and access to income supports to help participants in training and their career.

Both Bridges to Career Opportunities and Financial Opportunity Centers are programs of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), a national nonprofit intermediary organization that provides funding and technical assistance to the local organizations across the country. More than 75 FOCs are run by local organizations in more than 30 cities. BCO is a grantee of the federal Social Innovation Fund (SIF), which unites public and private resources to evaluate and grow innovative community-based solutions with evidence of results.

In Depth

Possible uses: Section of a funding proposal, factsheet, website page on the program

Bridges to Career Opportunities (BCO) is a supported bridge training program that helps overcome the gaps in academic readiness that can prevent low-wage, low-skill adults from being hired and succeeding in careers that offer livable wages. Many workers are unable to participate in occupational skill training, which teaches workers specific capacities so they are prepared for employment in an industry or field, because they are not able to meet standards for literacy and math skills and have financial challenges that undermine their ability to commit to longer-term training and career development. BCO is designed to address both these issues.

BCO provides effective adult basic education contextualized for strong local industries like healthcare and advanced manufacturing. Participants learn

foundational skills such as math, literacy or English as a Second Language in the context of their intended occupation. Adult learners can see the practical applications of basic academic skills while simultaneously learning technical, industry-specific concepts from the start. BCO prioritizes attainment of industry-recognized “stackable” credentials, so that participants have marketable, employer-validated skills and can continue on a career path.

As important, Bridges to Career Opportunities helps participants manage the financial and logistical challenges that can interfere with job training. BCO programs are provided at Financial Opportunity Centers, which integrate career coaching, financial coaching, and access to income supports. Participants are helped with employment opportunities, learn how to plan effectively for a financially secure future and are connected to available public and private benefits.

Both Bridges to Career Opportunities and Financial Opportunity Centers are programs of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), which provides funding and technical assistance to the local organizations across the country that operate the programs. A national nonprofit intermediary organization dedicated to helping local community development organizations transform distressed neighborhoods into healthy and sustainable communities of choice and opportunity, LISC supports a network of more than 75 FOCs in more than 30 cities.

A 2015 study by LISC of hundreds of clients at FOCs in Chicago found that participants in the Bridges to Career Opportunities program were placed in jobs 32 days more quickly than clients who were not enrolled in BCO. Participants earned initial wages \$1.22/hour higher than the others and were more likely to retain a job over the first six months of employment.

BCO is a grantee of the federal Social Innovation Fund (SIF), which unites public and private resources to evaluate and grow innovative community-based solutions with evidence of results. The SIF and its private-sector partners have invested more than half a billion dollars in compelling community solutions awarding grants to more than 35 community-based organizations and over 180 nonprofits working in 37 states and the District of Columbia.

Talking Points

Staff for Bridges to Career Opportunities and those who work closely with the program should be prepared to quickly and simply describe BCO and what it does. An “elevator speech” is a prepared summary that can be delivered in 30 seconds – the time it would take to spark interest during a chance meeting in an elevator.

With a good elevator speech, anyone can hit the most important aspects of the program in a clear, accurate and interesting way.

With a good elevator speech, anyone can hit the most important aspects of the program in a clear, accurate and interesting way. Here’s a suggested structure to follow:

We offer Bridges to Career Opportunities, a program that helps workers who want to move to a better-paying career in local industries that are hiring, but who are having a hard time making the transition. BCO helps them improve their basic math and literacy skills so they qualify for more demanding training. BCO makes those lessons more interesting and more useful because they’re in the context of their chosen career.

BCO is a proven program that’s offered through centers like ours that integrate career coaching, financial coaching and supportive services for participants. With this mix they have the advice and support to be able to succeed in the training and in their new career. It’s part of a national network, supported by LISC and funded by the federal Social Innovation Fund.

Of course, don’t feel like you should memorize the paragraphs above word for word. It’s merely an example of how to hit the key points in a way that’s natural and clear. Regardless of the exact words you choose, though, we suggest that you touch on the basic building blocks of Bridges to Career Opportunities in the Key Characteristics section:

Integrated coaching and support help participants manage financial and logistical challenges.

Career pathways moves participants into jobs in local industries that pay well and are growing.

A bridge program teaches the foundational academic skills needed to qualify for more rigorous work-training programs.

Contextualized lessons are built around industry-specific content so students focus on basic skills.

BCO is operated through Financial Opportunity Centers, which are run by established local organizations.

BCO has been studied and found to help participants find a job, earn more, and stay on the job longer

BCO and FOCs are programs of LISC, and so they have national support and guidelines to help them succeed.

The federal Social Innovation Fund (SIF) funds and approves the BCO program nationally.

Use of Logos

Communications works on two levels: A reader or viewer notices the clarity, style and quality of the content itself, but also the context of the design and visual appeal. When you create a website, e-newsletter, flyer, brochure or any other communication vehicle, the presentation of the copy and the images says something about your program and your organization.

A logo is the most widely seen expression of a brand and is often the first contact people have with your group. Both LISC and the Social Innovation Fund have guidelines for how their logos are used in print and digitally. You should be aware of these guidelines for any outreach for Bridges to Career Opportunities. We recommend that your organization has similar brand consistency guidelines for your logo, as well.

A logo is the most widely seen expression of a brand.

Social Innovation Fund guidelines

Camera-ready Social Innovation Fund and other branded materials can be downloaded here:

<http://www.nationalservice.gov/newsroom/marketing/logos/sif>

Technical guidelines for use are here:

<http://www.nationalservice.gov/newsroom/marketing-and-media-resources/logos/guidelines-use>

The recipient of SIF support may not alter the SIF logo.

Social Innovation Fund grantees are required to verify that all digital properties, media materials, and other relevant items reflect their association with the Social Innovation Fund.

- Prominently display the standard Social Innovation Fund logo on websites, most notably on the home page or on Social Innovation Fund project pages.
- Use standardized language to describe the program in press releases and other public documents to identify the organization's Social Innovation Fund affiliation (that standardized language has been incorporated in the materials provided in the "Boilerplate Copy" section).
- Display signs or posters that feature the grantee and the Social Innovation Fund logo at events and conferences.

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF) name and logo are insignia owned by Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). All recipient and sub-recipient websites must clearly state that they are a SIF grantee and must prominently display the SIF logo. Recipients and sub-recipients must use the Social Innovation Fund name and logo on all public-facing materials, signs, banners, press releases, social media, and publications related to their SIF program in accordance with CNCS requirements.

The recipient may not alter the SIF logo and must obtain written permission from CNCS before using the Social Innovation Fund name or logo on materials that will be sold, or permitting donors to use the Social Innovation Fund name or logo in promotional materials. The recipient may not use or display the Social Innovation Fund name or logo in connection with any activity prohibited in these Terms and Conditions or the laws and regulations incorporated.

LISC guidelines

The LISC logo should be displayed on digital properties, media materials, and other relevant items that are associated with the Bridges to Career Opportunities program. The logo should be at least an inch high and when displayed alone, be placed in the upper-left corner of a publication or web page.

When the LISC logo is displayed with another logo for a partner organization, the two logos can share a common size (either height or width depending on the orientation of partner's logo) but the LISC logo must maintain the minimum height. Documents created by partner can have the LISC logo on the upper right corner of the page.

The LISC logo may not be altered. It can be displayed in the LISC blue or in black, but no other colors. The blue is Pantone 2767, four-color C100/M85/Y35/K30, and RGB R0/G0/B102.

BCO on Social Media

Posting on social media about your Bridges to Career Opportunities program can remind funders, employment partners and other supporters that the BCO program is running and successful. It also is a way to promote BCO and your Financial Opportunity Center to potential clients and to spark the interest of reporters, local elected officials, and others who can be useful to advance the work.

To amplify your BCO social media voice, connect your posts to LISC and the Social Innovation Fund, both of which have wide nationwide networks of organizations and individuals who care about and work on helping low- and moderate-income individuals move to a well-paying career and improve their lives. Including a hashtag or @ for LISC and/or SIF can let these groups repost or promote your work.

Social media reminds funders, employment partners and other supporters that the BCO program is running and successful.

Your local LISC office also likely has a social media presence in your city: Get in touch with your program officer to find out how to link to their accounts as well.

Twitter

@LISC_FinOpp

@SIFund

#SIFund

#LISCbco

Facebook

Local Initiatives Support Corp.

Corporation for National and Community Service

Instagram

lisc_hq

Social Media Tips

BCO can easily be part to an ongoing strategy your organization has for Twitter, Facebook or other social media channels. If your organization hasn't really used social media, the BCO program offers an easy avenue to communicate about the work in a way that promotes the program and speaks to individuals and groups interested in this work and your agency.

When posting, remember that social media is typically less formal than other communications, allowing your organization to have a conversation with readers that is interactive and more personal than a newsletter or press release. You can

write in a tone and style that shows you're enthusiastic about the program, proud of your participants, excited by milestones—whatever feels genuine and real.

In addition to writing about your organization's work, be generous with partners and allies: Mention their group when appropriate in a post and send out thank-you notes with a link back to their account when there's an opportunity. It's also nice to stop and post or re-post about their accomplishments even when those aren't directly connected to BCO or your agency.

In the same vein, when you hear about information, data and other programs that are related to but not explicitly about BCO or your organization, consider posting or reposting about those too. You'll generate goodwill in your field and become known as a organization that has the inside track on what is new and important.

Social media is a big realm that keeps getting bigger. New platforms, new apps, new ways to connect and communicate. That changing landscape keeps adding new ways for you to get the word out about your work—but it also can be a bit overwhelming. Start with (or keep to) whatever combination of the basics works best for your group—Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, etc.—and when you have an opportunity, check out resources to learn more. Here are some resources for new ideas:

<http://www.socialmediatoday.com>

<http://www.nonprofitmarketingguide.com/resources/nonprofit-resources-social-media>

<http://www.classy.org/blog/category/nonprofit-marketing/social-media-for-nonprofits>

Opportunities to Post about Bridges to Career Opportunities

BCO provides a number of natural, relatively simple moments to post to social media in a way that highlights how the program works and its strengths and impact. Below are some suggestions. You can have a regular online presence by taking a moment to post when there is an opportunity for most or all of these—and others as well, of course—or pick a few that fit in with your social media outreach for other programs.

Opening a New Class: If you are recruiting participants, announce that spots are now open and where to learn more.

New Cohort of Participants: When a class is ready to start, let your followers know that a group of X members is about to begin their BCO course.

First Day of Class: Take a picture or post that class is in session, and what the first lesson is about.

Interesting Lesson: Post some details about a day's lesson—be sure to note how the ideas are connected to the industry-specific concepts.

Coaching Session: If a participant is willing, post a photo of him or her sitting down to talk with their FOC coach. The post doesn't need to mention any personal specifics about what was discussed. It's just a snapshot of the program working.

Graduating Class: When a cohort has finished its class, let folks know the group is ready to take the next step. If some participants are looking for work, include that employers can give you a call!

Participant Hired: Give a mention when a participant has a new job because of BCO (with his or her and the employers approval beforehand).

Participant Promoted: If a BCO graduate has moved up at work, give a congratulations, even if their time in the program was a while ago. BCO is built to help individuals continue on a career path—this is a great opportunity to show that ongoing support works.

Reaching Out to the Press

Reporters and local news outlets are looking for “feel good” stories about programs that have an impact. They want to write about something new, different, and interesting and about real people who can be quoted or will talk on camera. They like to have a news hook—a reason that story is running today and not just at any time. It helps a busy reporter when he or she is presented with all the moving parts for the story, including good sources.

When considering press outreach about Bridges to Career Opportunities, take these factors into account. The good news is that BCO can catch a reporter or assign editor’s interest by checking off most or even all those boxes.

The Social Innovation Fund suggests focusing on the stories of those who are served or impacted by the programs and interventions being implemented. Reporters will be more interested in personal stories and anecdotes than just an abstract list of what a program offers. See if any of your participants are willing and interested in talking with a reporter about the program. Someone who has found a job in the industry is a particularly nice example, but the person could be a recent graduate or even someone just starting the program, if he or she has a great story to tell.

Reporters are more interested in personal stories and anecdotes than just an abstract list of what a program offers.

With social media, you can reach out often about the progress of a course—the medium is informal and brief. For press outreach, pick one or two times to send a press release or call a reporter: A chance to sit in on a lesson and talk with students afterwards, for example, or a graduation ceremony. A cohort just starting or finishing is always a good news hook, but if you pick a new group starting, be sure to have one or more groups that have already finished the course, so you can tell the reporter about their experiences and victories to date with BCO.

Talking to Reporters

Relax! It’s almost assured that a reporter who wants to do a story is interested in making your organization, your clients, and your program look good. If they responded to a press release or a call you made, he or she wants hear why BCO is a program run by a well-respected local agency to help strengthen the local economy and support folks who want to improve their careers. You’re the expert on the program, and so he or she needs you to help explain how it works and give a few good quotes and examples.

You’ll want to have the basic facts at your disposal: How many clients a year are served, what do the participants learn, example of how lessons are connected to the

industry, how coaches help with financial and employment issues. Most of this you'll likely know off the top of your head, but take a look at the latest stats before the interview and consider asking for some anecdotes or examples from co-workers if that's helpful. When talking with the reporter, avoid jargon and getting lost in deep detail.

This is also a great chance to put those talking points presented earlier to work. Know which important aspects of BCO you want to emphasize, and look for opportunities to introduce them.

For example, if a reporter asks how many hours a week a participant is in class, you could point out that their total investment includes both the training and seeing a coach regularly, because BCO combines contextualized learning with integrated support. You can then point out that a lot of experience from Financial Opportunity Centers around the country has shown that providing these elements together helps make the program more effective.

Tips on Photos

Images have always been as or more important than words to develop a clear and meaningful identity for an organization. That's even more true today as people use the web and social media to gather information. Photos of participants in the program—in class, with a coach, at work—make the story of your Bridges to Career Opportunities program more vivid and real. Good photos also present your organization and BCO as professional and sharp.

Photos of participants in the program make the story of BCO more vivid and real.

If possible, hire a photographer, which can be very affordable, especially if you get a number of shots of different participants, instructors and other staff in one afternoon. However, with digital photography and smart phones, you can get good photos in house as well. Some basic tips:

Take a lot of shots: Digital pictures are essentially free to take, so keep clicking. When you've got a nice set up, take three or six shots to get that one really good one when nobody is blinking and you captured a great, momentary smile.

Vary the composition: If possible, don't just take ten pictures from the exact same spot. Stand over by the other desk. Try a few from a lower angle. Take some horizontal and some vertically. You'd be surprised what you'll see differently when comparing shots later.

Watch the light: Have the light shining on people, not behind them. If it's in an office or classroom, the lighting might not be great, but that doesn't have to be a dealbreaker. Look at the first shot and see if you can see the subjects' faces clearly—if not, see if you can change the lighting or even ask them to move.

Mix posed pictures and live action: A portrait of everyone smiling into the camera is great to have. If possible, also see if you can get some journalistic style images as well to mix it up: coach and clients talking over a desk or in a hallway, a trainer at the front of class, participants taking notes or listening.

Get in close: Amateur snapshots tend to be of a whole room, each person a tiny part of the picture. Try zooming in closer, making one or two people the majority of the frame. Context of a classroom is definitely good—get some of those—but if you can also get in tight and capture participants sharing notes or a thoughtful expression during a lesson, you may have something special.

Asking for Permission and Photo Release

Participants or partners should never be surprised that you're taking their photo, and certainly not that their image is on your website or has been featured on Facebook. Explain that you'd like to take their picture to promote the program and to let people see how BCO works.

LISC staff, or photographers or videographers hired by LISC, are required to obtain a release from individuals not employed by or affiliated with LISC who are prominently featured in a photograph or video used in any publication: invitations, cards, newsletters, reports, promotional videos, websites. Someone is prominently featured if he or she is clearly recognizable and a focus of the picture or video (not someone's face in a crowd), and/or if his or her name is printed or spoken of in a related story or in a caption under the photograph or in connection with a video image.

You can download a copy of LISC's Photographs and Video Image Release Form for adults and the one for minors to use for your program—as a “licensed partner” any FOC is covered by the form. Or you can use the release as a template for your own release form.

Depending on how you present images on your website, Facebook account, newsletter, etc., you can include a caption or let the image stand alone without explanation. If you do caption the photo, you can leave names out (e.g. “Participants in our Bridges to Career Opportunities light manufacturing training, learning about measurement and estimation.”). Or you can identify specific clients by name—neither method is necessarily correct or wrong.