

# EMPLOYER CONNECTION PLAN

LISC > FINANCIAL OPPORTUNITY CENTERS (FOCS)

## Introduction

**The Employer Connection Plan** is designed to help LISC and FOCs form strategic relationships and partnerships with employers.

Employers have the ability to give guidance to training needs and offer validation to programs. A strong employer partnership may also lead to internship and job opportunities for FOC beneficiaries.

The Connection Plan can be used to guide FOCs when making an employer connection, and additional approaches, not included here, may also be used. Use this guide as a starting point and supplement your strategy as needed to tailor fit each organization's unique employer relationship needs.

## Valid Assumptions

We make the following assumptions in this plan:

- Employers have limited time availability
- Employers have hiring needs that are often heightened due to high turnover rates for entry-level roles
- Employers have high expenses related to hiring and training employees
- Employers often lack a pool of highly-qualified candidates to fill open positions

## Value Proposition

Bridge Programs provide value for Employers in the following ways:

- Provides employers with a pool of candidates that have been trained to key competencies important to the jobs and skillsets in their industry
- Participants in a Bridge Program have invested time and effort into learning skills to launch into a specific career pathway. This shows employers the Bridge Program participants have "skin in the game" and are committed to the jobs, which should correlate to a lower turnover ratio if hired
- Employers may be able to save money on post-hire training, as foundational competencies have learned through Bridge Program

## Phases of Strategic Employer Relationship Development

According to Women Employed, there are eight important phases in developing a strategic employer relationship. Here are the phases in detail with context input from Accenture Corporate Citizenship in relation to LISC and FOC when applicable:

### PHASE 1

Learn the language of the business and develop an understanding of the issues employers face, their workforce needs, and their performance challenges. Suggested actions steps include:

- Review websites of industry associations, industry leaders, and labor unions that are active in the target sector/industry. For example:
  - **IT:** CompTIA, Microsoft, Oracle
  - **Health Information:** AAPC, AHIMA, AMIA
- Join a professional networking organization related to Human Resources and/or Recruiting. For example:
  - Society of Human Resource Management
  - National Human Resources Association
- Meet with local workforce boards. For example:
  - [Career One Stop](#)

### PHASE 2

Create a strategy for reaching out to employers. Potential action steps:

1. Determine which employers in your area are the best prospects for outreach
  - **Targeted IT Markets:** Chicago, Cincinnati, Houston FOCs can reference the Market Scan (*under section: Market Scan Package*) created by Accenture Corporate Citizenship where top employers have been identified
  - **Nationwide IT and Health Information:** FOCs can reference the Market Scan (*under section: Market Scan Package*) created by Accenture Corporate Citizenship where top employers across the nation have been identified
  - **Online job boards** are encouraged to be used (Indeed.com, LinkedIn, Glassdoor)
    - Search by city and job title
    - Prevalent employers can be targeted for partnership

**Note:** *It may be difficult to establish a new relationship with a large or global company. Small to medium companies may be a good start. These companies are more likely to have less individuals to go through for approval, to have entry-level positions that do not require post-secondary degrees and are more likely to become directly invested in their local communities.*

2. Document what the Bridge Program will offer to employers (Value Proposition)
  - This will be the reason the employers will want to form a strategic partnership (Some items have been called out above)
  - Create a seller's fact sheet that helps call out the benefits to the employer
3. Outline what specific role you are hoping the employer to provide

### PHASE 3

Develop a networking plan to reach employers in the industries of importance to the region. Action steps may include:

- Leverage existing relationships with support/partner network and stakeholders
- Meet with local Workforce Investment Board, the local chamber of commerce, your community's economic development corporation, and/or your local United Way Thrive program to coordinate workforce development efforts. Determine the company or few companies that would make a good starting point

### PHASE 4

Begin engagement for connection with the employer (ideally someone from HR and/or the lead from the department with the position(s) targeted, top executives may not have time immediately).

- Determine who should be present in the meeting
- Collect information and outcomes regarding previous interactions (if any) with the company
- Women Employed Worksheet "Employer Meetings Discussion Guide" has been included in the Appendix of this guide to assist for meetings in this phase

### PHASE 5

Begin to work with others in the employer organization. This may include:

- Meetings with HR, training, and/or organization development managers to learn how the bridge would fit into their training needs
- Meetings with supervisors and frontline staff to validate and learn more about the skills needed to perform work responsibilities
- Identify a Point of Contact person for future communication
- Establish a framework for future meetings and communication
- Women Employed Worksheet "Employer Meetings Discussion Guide" has been included in the Appendix of this guide to assist for meetings in this phase

### PHASE 6

Include employers in the Bridge Program design, curriculum development, and program validation

- Employers can provide tremendous value in validation meetings ensuring material is industry and role relevant and of value to their business
- Employers can provide copies of company manuals, forms, and procedures that could be incorporated into the curriculum (due to confidentiality, employers may be hesitant to provide copies. If so, focus on building the skillset and allow the employer to train on company procedures, etc.)
- Committees could be formed with participating members from the employer regarding:
  - Curriculum Advisory Board
  - Validation Advisory Board
  - Technology/Industry Advisory Board

## PHASE 7

Obtain program review and validation from employer during the program development.

## PHASE 8

During Bridge Program implementation stage an ongoing employer relationship and communication is vital to the ongoing success of the program and future programs that could stem from the employer relationship. Employer demands may change as time progresses, which could result in a number of possible avenues: updates to the program, implementing a new supplemental program, etc.

- Develop a schedule for continued employer involvement pertaining to the Bridge Program
- Record all employer feedback and make easily accessible for future review and reference

## Employer Roles

Employers may play the following roles to engage with participants during the Bridge Program.

- **Field Trips:** Participants can see firsthand what the job may look like and a potential company to work for
- **Job Shadowing:** Develops skill-sets for participants in a real-world context
- **Internships:** Provides a trial/learning period where the employer can see if the participant would be a good fit for the company, while the participant also is able to see what it feels like to work for a specific employer
- **Guest Speaking:** The employer can guest speak during the Bridge Program. This allows the employer to market their company to the participants and provides the opportunity for the participants to learn and ask key questions directly from someone in the industry
- **Mentorship:** Employers can provide graduating participants with a network of mentors from their company that can support and encourage them upon completion of the Bridge Program

## The Importance of Gratitude

Never forget to show gratitude to the Employer. Employers will often times be willing to help/partner if they feel valued, see successful outcomes for the business, and see a benefit to the disadvantaged workforce. Keep identifying, keep partnering, and keep building bridges!

## Market Scan Package

Accenture has created a Market Scan Package to assist you in identifying and communicating with employers. This resource includes GDP and employment statistics for several major U.S. industries, with detailed analysis of the Information Technology and Health industries, including names of top employers. It also contains useful information about entry-level roles and career pathways in these industries.

The Market Scan Package is available on the Employment Coaching page of the LISC Bridges to Career Opportunities website, located at the link below:

<http://www.bridgestocareeropportunities.com/employment-coach.html>

## Source

Women Employed, *Bridges to Careers for Low-Skilled Adults – A Program Development Guide*. Women Employed with Chicago Jobs Council and UIC Great Cities Institute. 2005. PDF  
<http://womenemployed.org/sites/default/files/resources/BridgeGuide.FullReport.2005.pdf>

## APPENDIX: WOMEN EMPLOYED EMPLOYER MEETINGS DISCUSSION GUIDE

Below is a set of topics to discuss during start-up meetings with potential employer partners. The topics discussed will vary based on knowledge of the company, type of bridge program under development, and previous relationships with the company.

### Background

- A. Information about the lead institution
- B. Summary of previous relationships with the employer
- C. Overview of how/why you chose to meet with this employer now

*Tip: Consider sending this information before the actual meeting along with a detailed agenda. Be ready to give an overview of the information to reinforce it and focus the conversation.*

### Bridge Program Basics

- A. Brief overview of bridge program basics (a handout may be helpful)
- B. Brief overview of the bridge program you are developing:
  1. Target occupations
  2. Target audience (*The target audience is important to the provider. Employers tend to care most about who they see at their door when they are hiring—make this a program that will help employers meet their bottom line, not a social service program.*)
  3. Timeframe/schedule
  4. Expected outcomes
- C. Benefits to the employer (*To the degree possible, anticipate what the benefits will be. These can be clarified as you learn more about the employer.*)
  1. The bridge program will help develop a qualified workforce.
  2. The program curriculum will reflect the employer's needs.
  3. The bridge program can assist in promoting the company to a new population of potential workers.
  4. The program would be available to the employer's entry-level workers.
  5. The program could help the employer lower costs of recruitment and reduce turnover.

### Employer Information

- A. Baseline information about the company
  1. Number of employees, types of positions, number of company locations, etc.
  2. The company's goals for the next one to three years
  3. Challenges the company faces in meeting its goals
- B. Human resources information and challenges

1. Does the company have the skilled workforce it needs to meet its goals? What gaps exist? Are there plans to address those gaps?
2. What are the problems with finding and training entry-level workers?
3. Has the company identified career pathways for entry-level workers? (*If not, this might be a useful exercise to engage in with the employer.*)
4. Is the company open to working with an external provider such as your institution?
5. Is the company willing to provide release time or on-the-clock time for participation of incumbent workers and new hires?
6. Does the company have a labor union and what roles might it play?

### Options for Employer Roles

- A. Specific information on the role the employer (and, if appropriate, the labor union) might play in bridge program development and implementation
  1. Program development
    - Clarification on hiring issues
    - Descriptions of required skills and educational levels, advancement opportunities, and salary levels for entry-level positions
    - Input into curriculum development
  2. Program delivery
    - Presentations to bridge program participants
    - Service on advisory committee
    - Providing tours of facilities, job shadowing, or mentoring
    - Providing internship or work experience opportunities
    - Priority interviewing for program graduates
- B. Exploration of areas that are of most interest to the employer
  - Strengths of employer organization
  - Motivation for involvement, e.g., gain new employees, educate current workforce, improve public relations
- C. Feedback and input on curricular directions and program design
  - Eligibility of incumbent employees for the program
  - Other potential employer partners (*be aware that the employer may be sensitive about having partners who are direct competitors*)
  - Potential funding through the Workforce Investment Act

### Summary and Next Steps

- A. Summarize the program under consideration and the employer's response to it
- B. Together, determine what needs to be done, by whom, by when
- C. Agree on a next meeting time and who needs to be at the next meeting.