



**City of Seattle**  
Office of City Auditor

**MEMORANDUM**

Date: June 16, 2015

To: Honorable Ed Murray, Mayor  
City Councilmembers

From: David G. Jones, City Auditor

RE: Evaluation of the Career Bridge Program

The attached report, *Evaluation of Career Bridge, Final Report*, was requested by the Seattle City Council's Budget Committee in the fall of 2013. A comment letter from the Seattle Human Services Department and the Office of Economic Development, and a separate one from the Urban League<sup>1</sup>, follow the report.

The Career Bridge program is designed to assist low-income men of color facing multiple barriers to employment through mentoring support, education, and job readiness training, along with "wrap-around" social services (e.g., housing, childcare, transportation). The program was created to respond to a spate of gun violence in Seattle in early 2012. Staff from the City's Human Services Department and Office of Economic Development met with members of the communities most affected by the gun violence to plan a program that could potentially address some root causes of the violence. These planning sessions helped lead to the creation of the Career Bridge program.

The City provided \$210,000 for Career Bridge in 2013 and \$400,000 in 2014. Before consenting to increased program funding, the City Council requested further analysis of the program. The Council provided funding for our office to hire a consultant to perform this analysis. We selected the consulting firm MEF Associates, and asked them to produce two reports: a plan for evaluating the Career Bridge program (published in September 2013), and the evaluation itself (which follows this memo). The City Council could use this evaluation to inform its future decisions about the program.

MEF Associates concluded that the Career Bridge program has led to strong employment outcomes and has the potential to benefit the individuals enrolled and the communities they come home to. They said Career Bridge's strengths included maintaining strong support from community activists as well as using staff that share the background and experiences of program participants. MEF noted that Career Bridge represents a creative approach for combining public funds with community-based activism to increase the opportunities for low-income men of color facing barriers to employment, including formerly

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<sup>1</sup> In April 2014, the Human Services Department finalized a contract with the Urban League to operate the Career Bridge program.

incarcerated individuals. The MEF report identifies challenges faced by the program and recommends solutions, which could increase the program's value to participants. Some of these solutions have already been implemented. The report also notes two program elements (i.e., residency requirements and program focus) that would benefit from clarification.

Please contact either Mary Denzel (684-8158) or me (233-1095) if you have any questions about the report.



# Evaluation of Career Bridge

Final Report

*Prepared for:*

**The City of Seattle – Office of City Auditor**

*Prepared by:*

**MEF Associates**

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**June 16, 2015**

*Contract Number: OCA 2013-03*





MEF Associates conducted this evaluation of Career Bridge under a contract with the Office of City Auditor, City of Seattle (Contract Number: OCA 2013-03). The findings and conclusions in this report do not necessarily represent the official positions or policies of the Office of City Auditor.

For more information about MEF Associates and our work, see our website: <http://mefassociates.com/>





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## **Acknowledgements**

This evaluation was conducted under direction of the Seattle Office of City Auditor. We are grateful for the guidance and support of Mary Denzel, Deputy City Auditor. Earlier work on this project was also informed by members of the City Council Central Staff.

Our work would not have been possible without the contributions of the numerous community members and staff involved in Career Bridge. This includes staff from the Human Services Department, the Office of Economic Development, and the Urban League. Equally important was the willingness of community members involved in Career Bridge and Career Bridge staff to spend the time to provide us with open, honest discussions about the initiative. Without their input, this work would not have been possible.

We are also indebted to the Career Bridge participants who shared their own experiences with us. Their perspectives were vital. We are similarly appreciative of the members of the Black Prisoners' Caucus who pushed us to think about the roots of Career Bridge and how it interacts with the broader re-entry experience.

We appreciate the work of staff from the Seattle Jobs Initiative and TRAC Associates in providing participant data.

Kathleen Moore provided valuable assistance with the data analysis.

## Overview

In response to a spate of gun violence in Seattle in early 2012, the Mayor's office, the Seattle Office of Economic Development, and the Human Services Department began thinking through alternative strategies to support the needs of low-income men of color with barriers to employment in the city.

The resultant initiative, Career Bridge, represents an innovative effort by the City of Seattle (City), community members, and a non-profit partner to better support the needs of low-income men of color who are facing multiple barriers to employment. This report describes the findings of our evaluation of Career Bridge, focusing on the implementation experience and the employment and participation outcomes from the first three cohorts enrolled into Career Bridge in 2014.

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Career Bridge participants enroll in a two-week job readiness training, followed by case management and job search assistance. In addition, Career Bridge offers individualized supportive services such as counseling and group-based opportunities for peer support and mentorship.

The initial Career Bridge design emerged out of a series of conversations between City staff and community leaders that emphasized the acute needs of this population. City staff and key community members sought to develop an intervention designed specifically to challenge the existing paradigm for how to support formerly incarcerated individuals and those with high barriers to stability around employment services. This included an emphasis on grassroots involvement of community members in the design and implementation of the intervention and a process that empowered participants and community members.

As a result of this process, a model with a dual set of goals emerged. While much of Career Bridge focused on the employment outcomes of the target population, the City and community members collaborated to design a model that sought to address the institutional and systematic barriers in the city facing racial and ethnic minorities and those with criminal convictions.

### Strengths of the Intervention

Many of the strengths associated with the current Career Bridge model stem from the initiative's ability to blend the community-driven approach of the initial iteration with a structured and more formalized service delivery model. We found a substantial, ongoing commitment among key community members to the mission of Career Bridge. Its participants are exhibiting success in securing and maintaining employment, and at least a subset are actively engaged in the community-building and peer support components of Career Bridge.

- **Strong employment outcomes.** The high percentage (81 percent) of Career Bridge participants from the first three cohorts who reported finding employment following enrollment is positive. Given that Career Bridge explicitly targets individuals with substantial barriers to employment, the high employment rate among participants along with the relatively short period of time between enrollment and employment is a substantial accomplishment.
- **Career Bridge staff share the characteristics and experiences of participants.** The composition of current initiative staff is a strength of the initiative. Almost all of the

Career Bridge staff are people of color, the majority are men, and several had made the successful transition from incarceration to these professional positions. Participants, staff, and community members alike emphasized that it was the combination of substantive knowledge and skills along with the shared experiences and characteristics that make these staff effective. It gives them greater credibility with participants and helps foster a safe and open environment. As Career Bridge continues to expand, enroll more participants, and require more program navigators, it will be critical to continue emphasizing the value of these experiences and characteristics in the hiring of Career Bridge staff.

- **Participants face multiple barriers to self-sufficiency and Career Bridge is increasingly well-equipped to address these needs.** Career Bridge participants face housing instability, low educational attainment, debt, and limited recent work history. Over 90 percent report having been convicted of a crime at some point in their life. The current Career Bridge model is increasingly well-equipped to respond to the multiple barriers facing the target population. This includes: supports to address barriers such as transportation, housing, mental health issues, and chemical dependency; formalized relationships with low-income and transitional housing providers; and offering one-on-one counseling services. Presentations on domestic violence and asset building during the job readiness training also expose participants to resources to address related issues.
- **Ongoing support from community members.** Career Bridge was born out of the effort to marry City funding with the efforts of committed community activists. The goal was an intervention that was responsive to community voices and also could leverage the funding and expertise of City staff and enable access to other City-funded employment services. There remains a committed group of community members who regularly participate in Career Bridge events and provide mentorship to participants. These same community members also represent a strong voice that continues to push Career Bridge to provide a more holistic set of services that is not narrowly focused on direct, employment-related supports. Similarly, there remains a strong emphasis on participant-led programming and empowerment.
- **Increased service capacity and formalized navigation and case management.** A critical weakness of the initial Career Bridge model was the heavy reliance on community sponsors for recruitment and to provide de facto case management services. This approach both limited enrollment capacity and the ability to fully meet the needs of participants. With the addition of designated navigation and case management services, Career Bridge participants have better access to direct support as well as referrals to necessary support services. While Career Bridge will need to add additional staff if enrollment continues to increase, the current model substantially expanded capacity to provide intensive services to all enrolled participants.

### **Intervention Challenges**

Despite the strengths of the current Career Bridge model, we found some ongoing challenges with the initiative. The challenges we discuss below mainly highlight areas where the initiative can improve on existing strengths.

- **Need for more individualized employment services.** One of the most consistent and pronounced criticisms we heard regarding the current Career Bridge model was the lack

of support for higher wage employment in sectors that aligned with participants' interests and experiences. The current model's emphasis on rapid reemployment and a job development strategy emphasizing survival jobs comes at the expense of longer-term career development, and many respondents suggested participants would benefit from more individualized employment services aligned with their specific skills and expertise.

- **Need for increased referrals to the broader education and training system.** Despite the initial intent of Career Bridge to serve as a pathway into the broader array of education and training programs in the city, our fieldwork suggests that Career Bridge remains relatively isolated with few formalized connections to these programs. While this may largely be a function of the heavy emphasis being placed on rapid reemployment, at least a subset of the participants would likely benefit from connections with more advanced training options. Both the time commitment of a job and the limited referral network to these types of programs make enrolling in education logistically challenging.
- **Need to increase staffing as enrollment increases.** We heard from multiple community members and staff that, as Career Bridge continues to enroll more cohorts of men, current case management and job development capacity will soon be insufficient. In part this is driven by the lack of a formal exit policy and the commitment of staff to maintain ongoing relationships with as many past participants as possible. However, absent staffing increases, this is likely unsustainable.
- **Variable levels of engagement.** While program data showed most participants had regular contact with core Career Bridge staff, our findings indicate much lower rates of engagement with other Career Bridge services. A substantial portion of Career Bridge participants do not participate in many of the more community-oriented activities. As a result, following the job readiness training, these participants experience a form of Career Bridge that looks similar to a more typical case management-based employment program.
- **No clear plan for meeting stated community-level and system-level goals.** City staff and Career Bridge community sponsors consistently emphasized that the goals of the initiative extend beyond individual-level outcomes. There is an obvious desire for Career Bridge to be a broader agent of change within the African-American community, specifically in terms of supporting the needs of low-income men with substantial barriers to employment. While Career Bridge has clear, measurable outcomes on the individual level, there is no equivalent for the community-level goals, and it is unclear how these goals will be accomplished or what metrics can be used to determine success.

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Career Bridge benefits from a committed and talented group of staff and volunteers who have worked hard to increase the opportunities for low-income men of color facing barriers to employment. The model continues to represent a creative approach to combining public funds with community-based activism. Moreover, its partnership with established efforts to support the transition out of prison offers increased continuity in the social supports available to formerly incarcerated individuals. This has the potential to pay dividends both for the individuals in the re-entry process as well as the communities they come home to.

## I. Introduction

In response to a spate of gun violence in Seattle in early 2012, the Mayor's office, the Seattle Office of Economic Development (OED), and the Human Services Department (HSD) began thinking through alternative strategies to support the needs of low-income men of color with barriers to employment in the city.

The resultant initiative, Career Bridge, was an effort to improve access to employment, education, and training for low-income men of color. This report describes the findings of our evaluation of Career Bridge, focusing on the implementation experience and the employment and participation outcomes from the first three cohorts enrolled into Career Bridge in 2014.

Career Bridge is focused on developing pathways to economic opportunity while strengthening community and families. Developed jointly by HSD and OED with substantial input from volunteer community members, Career Bridge is currently overseen by HSD, which in turn contracts with the Urban League to provide the majority of direct services.

Career Bridge participants enroll in a two-week job readiness training, followed by case management and employment assistance. In addition, Career Bridge offers individualized supportive services such as counseling and group-based opportunities for peer support and mentorship.

The initial Career Bridge design emerged out of a series of conversations between City of Seattle (City) staff and community leaders that emphasized the acute needs of this population and the potential implications for reduced violence. City staff and key community members sought to develop an intervention designed specifically to challenge the existing paradigm for how to support formerly incarcerated individuals and those facing barriers to stability around employment services. This included an emphasis on grassroots involvement of community members in the design and implementation of the intervention and a process that empowered participants and community members.

As a result of this process, a model with a dual set of goals emerged. While much of Career Bridge focused on the employment outcomes of the target population, the City and community members collaborated to design a model that sought to address the institutional and systemic barriers in the city facing racial and ethnic minorities and those with criminal convictions. These broader, community-level goals included an emphasis on increasing the capacity of community-based institutions to provide direct services for this population as well as bolstering their ability to advocate for policy change impacting this population.

In April 2013, the Seattle Office of City Auditor contracted with MEF Associates to conduct an evaluation of Career Bridge. In July 2013, MEF Associates released a Preliminary Report, which described the intervention, analyzed participant characteristics and employment outcomes, outlined the challenges associated with the Career Bridge model, analyzed program costs, and discussed the implications of our findings for expansion of Career Bridge.<sup>1</sup>

In the months following release of this report, the City initiated several changes to Career Bridge, including beginning the process of contracting with a Community-Based Development Organization (CBDO) to operate Career Bridge. Given the timing of this decision – HSD's

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<sup>1</sup> Glosser, A. and Obara, E. *Evaluation of Career Bridge: Preliminary Report*. MEF Associates: prepared for the City of Seattle – Office of City Auditor. July 2013.

contract with the Urban League was finalized in April 2014 – the Office of City Auditor requested that MEF’s Final Report focus on the Career Bridge implementation experience under the new design and employment outcomes from the first three cohorts enrolled into Career Bridge by the Urban League.<sup>2</sup> This report describes our findings. It includes the following sections:

- **Section II** describes our methodology.
- **Section III** describes our understanding of the intervention. This includes describing the design of the intervention, the target population, key goals, and the current service delivery structure.
- **Section IV** is an analysis of participant characteristics.
- **Section V** discusses participant engagement and service delivery receipt.
- **Section VI** presents an analysis of employment outcomes for the first three cohorts of individuals enrolled into Career Bridge by the Urban League.
- **Section VII** offers concluding thoughts, including discussion of key strengths and weaknesses of the current model.

Career Bridge has changed substantially since we began our evaluation work. While the design of the model and the service delivery structure have become more formalized in recent months, in many ways Career Bridge is still in its infancy. Many program managers and key staff have been in their positions for less than a year, there has been substantial turnover among the City staff responsible for the design and monitoring of Career Bridge operations, and there are ongoing changes to the recruitment approach and target population. Our hope is that, despite these ongoing changes, our evaluation of the core components of the intervention can support further program improvement.

## **II. Methodology**

The findings in this report are based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative data. Following the strategy we outlined in our Evaluation Plan,<sup>3</sup> we used a mixed methods approach to document participant characteristics, participant engagement, employment outcomes, and implementation.

### **A. Qualitative Data Collection**

We used an array of qualitative techniques to capture perspectives on the design and implementation of Career Bridge. Additionally, we used administrative data to capture detailed information on the characteristics and experiences of three cohorts of recent participants.

**Interviews with key stakeholders.** We conducted 60- to 90-minute phone interviews with a variety of key community members and staff. While the topics we covered were tailored to each interviewee, we sought to hear all respondents’ perspectives on the goals of Career Bridge, the roles of various community members and staff, the main components of the program, changes from the former model, needed improvements, and prospects for expansion of the current model.

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<sup>2</sup> Cohorts 8, 9, and 10. There were seven cohorts before the Urban League began operating Career Bridge.

<sup>3</sup> Glosser, A. and Obara, E. *Evaluation of Career Bridge: Evaluation Plan*. MEF Associates: prepared for the City of Seattle – Office of City Auditor. September 2013.

- Our conversations with staff members from *Seattle Jobs Initiative (SJI)* and *TRAC Associates*<sup>4</sup> focused on characterizing SJI and TRAC's roles in Career Bridge following the program redesign in 2014, the two-week job readiness training, the weekly men's group, job placement, and individual counseling services.
- We spoke with a *financial counselor* who leads a class during the first week of the training and provides ongoing financial advice to participants.
- Our interviews with *HSD and Urban League* staff members working on Career Bridge focused on the design of the new model under Urban League management, the roles of the Urban League in providing services, and the theory of change<sup>5</sup> guiding program operations.
- We spoke with three *community sponsors and supporters* about how they became involved in Career Bridge, how their roles have changed, the referral, recruitment and enrollment process for new participants, and how participants are provided with supportive services and case management.
- We interviewed two *employers* who have hired Career Bridge participants, asking them about their hiring decisions and experiences working with these men and Career Bridge staff.

***Attendance at Career Bridge events.*** We attended two Tuesday night meetings typically held weekly at the Life Enrichment Bookstore, which are attended by varying numbers of Urban League staff, sponsors, participants, and other community members. These meetings included the graduation celebration for Cohort Thirteen. We also observed the first day of Cohort Thirteen's job readiness training. In addition, we attended one of the weekly meetings of the Black Prisoners' Caucus at the Monroe Correctional Complex.

***Participant interviews.*** To capture participant perspectives regarding their experiences with Career Bridge, we conducted a series of three interviews with each of three volunteer participants over the course of seven months. We interviewed a fourth participant once in June but were unable to schedule further interviews with him. We sought volunteers for these interviews when they were enrolled in the job readiness training, shortly following their entry into Career Bridge. The interviews were semi-structured using a short protocol, but participants led the flow of the informal conversation, and we asked probing questions. The interviews typically lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and addressed participants' initial recruitment into Career Bridge, program goals, participant barriers, the two-week training, job placement services, supportive services and case management provided by community sponsors and staff, and possible program improvements.

***Review of Career Bridge documents.*** We reviewed an array of Career Bridge program documents to support our work. These documents included the community sponsor manual, participant enrollment and initial intake assessment forms, the Career Bridge schedule of events, the PowerPoint presentation and assignments used in the job readiness training, and forms developed by staff to identify and address participant needs.

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<sup>4</sup> TRAC is a for-profit organization that provides an array of contracted employment services in the greater Seattle area.

<sup>5</sup> A theory of change is a complete picture of the early- and intermediate-term changes that are needed to reach a long-term goal expressed by a given community.

## B. Quantitative Data Collection

Our quantitative analyses focused on the experiences of three cohorts of Career Bridge participants (31 total) – the first three run by the Urban League, which occurred in April, May, and July 2014. We selected these cohorts for two reasons: (1) to focus our analysis on the most recent version of Career Bridge and (2) to maximize the length of time we could observe outcomes for enrolled participants. As with our July 2013 Preliminary Report, we believed that it was important to focus on the outcomes of those participants who had been enrolled in Career Bridge the longest. However, we had to balance this with the recognition that there were substantial changes in the model that accompanied the City’s contracting with the Urban League to manage Career Bridge. Our focus on these three cohorts represents an attempt to balance these two imperatives, with the goal of providing as accurate a picture as possible of the experiences of Career Bridge participants.

In accordance with our Evaluation Plan, we analyzed Career Bridge program data to support our understanding of participant characteristics, participation in Career Bridge, and participant outcomes. We worked closely with HSD staff, the Urban League, and TRAC Associates to develop intake forms and tracking tools to support this effort. We received individual-level, de-identified data on all participants enrolled in the three cohorts.

- ***Participant characteristics.*** The Career Bridge enrollment form includes baseline information covering a range of topics, including demographic characteristics, past employment history, program expectations, housing status, criminal background, and financial obligations. Participants completed this form roughly at the start of the job readiness training, which marks the formal beginning of a cohort.
- ***Career Bridge participation.*** Career Bridge staff tracked multiple forms of participant engagement. These included attendance at Career Bridge meetings, men’s group attendance, individual counseling, and participant contacts with the program navigator and job developer. The Urban League also provided monthly reports of financial support provided to participants from July through December 2014.
- ***Participant outcomes.*** We obtained employment-related outcomes through reports generated using data reported by participants to the Career Bridge job developer, tracking participants’ employment activities following the two-week training. These are self-reported data.
- ***Job development.*** TRAC provided us with data on the monthly job development work conducted for Career Bridge. These data are collected from the job developer’s notes.

All data presented in the report is based on participant self-reports or documentation provided by Career Bridge staff. The participant data include only participants who enrolled and completed the job readiness training. We worked closely with HSD, the Urban League, and TRAC to ensure the data provided were as accurate as possible. This included logic checks and a close review of early data submissions.

## III. Description of Intervention

Career Bridge was designed to support low-income men of color in Seattle seeking to increase stability and move toward self-sufficiency. It combines formalized case management with a community-driven model of peer support and mentorship. The model is intended to draw on the support of the broader community as a means to support participant success, particularly in the

area of employment. Moreover, it seeks to present an alternative to the more typical employment programs in the city.

We begin this section by briefly summarizing the initial program design. We then describe the components of the current model in more detail.

**Initial Program Design.** As mentioned above, the Office of Economic Development and Human Services Department began developing Career Bridge in response to the spate of gun violence and deaths in Seattle in early 2012. OED and HSD initially conceived of Career Bridge as an intervention designed to prevent violence by facilitating disadvantaged individuals' access to pathways to economic opportunity.

The 2013 to 2014 City Council Adopted Budget included funding for Career Bridge with the understanding that it would provide skill-building assistance and connections to resources to move disadvantaged individuals facing multiple barriers toward longer-term employment, degrees, and credentials. OED and HSD proposed a partnership to provide integrated employment and human services tailored to meet the unique needs of the participants. OED and HSD staff also intended for Career Bridge to serve as a way to help participants find employment while preparing them to be successful in SJI's Career Pathways program – an initiative to assist low-skilled working-age adults complete a professional degree or credential that leads to a better paying and more secure job with benefits and opportunities for career advancements.<sup>6</sup>

In developing the Career Bridge intervention, HSD and OED met with community members from community resource networks, faith-based institutions, and informal and formal support organizations as well as with men of color looking for economic and educational opportunities to achieve self-sufficiency. Based on these conversations, community leaders and City staff defined several core components:

- Integration of wrap-around support services such as housing, childcare, and transportation into employment and training services;
- Community sponsors who support program completion and on-going success by providing mentorship, case management, and a network of highly accessible support resources;
- A job developer who cultivates relationships with employers in target sectors and assists participants in job search; and
- A weeklong 20-hour job readiness training module provided by SJI that would be tailored to individuals with criminal records.

**Revised Program Design.** In fall 2013, after about 18 months of program operation, City staff and Career Bridge community members began planning changes to the Career Bridge model. As we noted in our July 2013 Preliminary Report, Career Bridge saw the transition of operational responsibility from the City to a new CBDO as an opportunity to implement these changes.<sup>7</sup> HSD's Request for Qualifications for the new managing CBDO included components outlining these changes in addition to continuing the services already provided. The selected CBDO was expected to measure and report on a variety of outcomes that Career Bridge was previously not

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.seattlejobsinitiative.com/jobseekers/career-pathways-program/>

<sup>7</sup> Glosser, A. and Obara, E. *Evaluation of Career Bridge: Preliminary Report*. MEF Associates: prepared for the City of Seattle – Office of City Auditor. July 2013.

tracking consistently. In addition, the CBDO was tasked with responsibilities such as development of community capacity, streamlining access to services, and formalization of the community sponsor role and the personal/relational support provided to participants.<sup>8</sup>

In fall 2013, the Seattle City Council authorized \$400,000 for HSD to contract with a CBDO to manage the intervention and provide case management and navigation services.<sup>9</sup> The City awarded this contract to the Urban League in spring 2014. Subsequently, the Urban League took on responsibility for delivering many of the services and supports that had previously been provided by community sponsors and City staff. While the underlying goals of Career Bridge remain similar to those we discussed in the Preliminary Report, there are some changes we note. Additionally, by contracting out Career Bridge services, the City formalized aspects of the intervention that were previously delivered in a more ad hoc fashion.

The following sections (A through C) describe the key components of the current Career Bridge model, including the target population, key goals, and service delivery structure.

## **A. Target Population**

The city's involvement in Career Bridge began as a response to concerns about community safety and stability.<sup>10</sup> HSD and OED made a decision early in the program's implementation (i.e., in 2012) to use Career Bridge to support the needs of African American men through a community-driven model of support. As we found in our July 2013 Preliminary Report, Career Bridge began primarily serving African American men with substantial barriers to employment, the majority of whom had a prior incarceration or criminal conviction.

While the commitment to a community-based system of support for men of color remains at the heart of Career Bridge, the shift of management of Career Bridge operations to the Urban League resulted in a more formalized definition of Career Bridge eligibility.

HSD's contract with the Urban League characterizes Career Bridge as a model seeking to support "low-income people of color who face multiple barriers to jobs and education/training."<sup>11</sup> More specifically, the contract includes the following specific eligibility criteria:<sup>12</sup>

- At least 18 years of age.
- Low income, which, while not defined, does require that at least 51 percent of participants have incomes no greater than 80 percent of area median income.
- Resident of Seattle or homeless.
- Facing multiple barriers to employment, examples of which include: limited work experience, lack of education, low basic skills, housing instability, criminal history, unmet basic needs, outstanding legal financial obligations, and mental health and/or chemical dependency challenges.

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<sup>8</sup> Human Services Department, City of Seattle. 2013 Career Bridge Community Based Development Organization Request for Qualifications, pages 7-11.

<sup>9</sup> The Urban League contract includes an additional \$43,125 in funding and in-kind services from private partners.

<sup>10</sup> Human Services Department, City of Seattle. 2014 Career Bridge project services agreement, page 6.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, page 5.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, page 10.

However, despite formalized eligibility requirements, our conversations with community sponsors and staff involved in Career Bridge revealed a more nuanced and diverse set of perspectives regarding the appropriate target population and the participant needs Career Bridge is best-equipped to meet.

In discussing the Career Bridge target population, the staff and community members with whom we spoke emphasized that Career Bridge could meet the needs of a diverse group of participants. While most acknowledged that it was well-equipped to meet the specific needs of those who were formerly incarcerated, multiple interviewees stated that there are multiple factors that might suggest a good fit for Career Bridge. In particular, they stressed that limited work history and education substantially hindered the job prospects of individuals, especially when combined with barriers such as mental illness or chemical dependency. Similarly, staff noted that Career Bridge should target individuals who have less stability in their lives. In addition to struggles with mental health issues or chemical dependency, they emphasized that those with unstable housing situations, food insecurity, and transportation barriers are a good fit.

Interviewees also stressed that they were looking to enroll individuals in Career Bridge who expressed an interest in giving back to their community. In large part they said this because they do not see Career Bridge as simply an employment program but also as a form of community building; they expressed interest in targeting individuals who saw their participation in Career Bridge as a way both to get the support they need and to assist and support others in the community. This approach, which emphasizes a desire for self-empowerment and fostering leadership, stems in part from Career Bridge's roots with the Black Prisoners' Caucus (BPC) at the Monroe Correctional Complex.<sup>13</sup>

#### Career Bridge ties to the Black Prisoners' Caucus

The Black Prisoners' Caucus (BPC) was founded in 1972 by men incarcerated at the Washington State Reformatory at Monroe Correctional Complex. The purpose of the BPC is to provide a medium for members to work collectively to improve themselves and their family relationships, their communities, and their facility. BPC operates education programs and cultural activities and addresses systemic issues that lead to incarceration. In addition, it works to improve the re-entry process and considers Career Bridge as a part of its re-entry plan.\* Some of the original community members and City staff who designed Career Bridge sought to incorporate BPC practices into the process. Their desire for self-empowerment and fostering leadership influenced the original Career Bridge model and guided their focus on former prisoners, although the initiative as a whole was oriented toward extremely disadvantaged individuals.

\*Taken from undated handout, "Black Prisoners' Caucus Re-entry Assistance and Career Bridge Process," received on December 12, 2014.

## B. Key Goals

We heard diverse perspectives regarding the key goals of Career Bridge from different community members and staff. In this section we discuss the goals established as part of the City's contract with the Urban League that represent the formal goals of the model, as well as what we heard from community members and staff. These include individual-level goals relating to education and employment as well as broader, community- and systems-level goals related to change beyond the circumstances of individual participants.

While our review of program materials and conversations with staff, community members, and participants all emphasized the desire for Career Bridge to help support self-sufficiency, we did

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<sup>13</sup> Based on interviews with long-term community sponsors and conversations with current members of the BPC.

not observe consensus regarding the specific definition of key goals and how different goals should be prioritized within the model.

## 1. Employment Goals

The Urban League’s contract states that “Career Bridge seeks to connect low-income people of color who face multiple barriers to jobs and education/training through grassroots community support that position participants on a pathway toward living wage careers.” It continues, stating that the “ultimate goal of Career Bridge is to achieve lasting change for individuals facing multiple barriers to self-sufficiency, through an aligned strategy between workforce training, social services and community to improve outcomes for these individuals.”<sup>14</sup> The contract then defines three categories of targeted outcomes for Career Bridge: individual outcomes, community outcomes, and system outcomes.

While the education and training related goals outlined in the Career Bridge contract and emphasized by interviewees largely align with what we heard during field work for our July 2013 Preliminary Report, several notable differences emerged. In particular, our more recent round of interviews revealed less emphasis on connecting Career Bridge participants to the broader education and training infrastructure in the City. The logic model we presented in the Preliminary Report reflected a strong desire on the part of the City, and OED in particular, for Career Bridge to serve as an onramp to the established training infrastructure in the City, especially career pathways programs run by the Seattle Jobs Initiative. By comparison few respondents in our more recent interviews emphasized training and education as core goals of Career Bridge. Moreover, they did not articulate the ways in which they saw Career Bridge feeding into the broader education and training infrastructure in Seattle in any systematic way. Instead, respondents placed a heavier emphasis on helping participants secure employment quickly.

Both Career Bridge staff and participants made it clear that employment was the primary goal of the model. They emphasized that the community-oriented approach along with case management and job development were critical in helping participants become employed. Among the participants with whom we spoke, it was clear that assistance with employment was the primary reason they sought to enroll in Career Bridge. On the Career

### Priority Outcomes defined in the Urban League’s Career Bridge Contract

#### Individual Outcomes

- Increased readiness for employment and/or training and education programs
- Increased connection to supportive communities, including families/children
- Increased advancement into career and/or training pathways
- Increased access to support services and a decrease in barriers
- Improved confidence and readiness to balance life responsibilities and challenges

#### Community Outcomes

- Improved community infrastructure to partner across systems to implement Career Bridge
- Increased implementation to scale and improved delivery of community sponsorship model

#### System Outcomes

- Improved availability and access to support services
- Improved organizational infrastructure and coordination within and across systems
- Comprehensive and cohesive education and training systems that address the needs of diverse populations at varying levels of the skills continuum

<sup>14</sup> Human Services Department, City of Seattle. 2014 Career Bridge project services agreement, page 5.

Bridge intake form, participants are asked what they expect to learn or gain from participating. More than 94 percent (N = 29) indicated that they expected to get a job placement from Career Bridge. Another 81 percent (N = 25) expected they would get a skills assessment, and less than a third said they expected to get support services.

All of the individuals with whom we spoke acknowledged the importance of Career Bridge supporting the workforce needs of participants. They emphasized that, especially for those making the transition from incarceration, stable employment at a living wage is critical.

## **2. Community Empowerment**

A subset of the community members suggested that the primary focus on employment comes at the expense of a broader imperative to use Career Bridge as a means to foster community empowerment and economic development in the African American community.

These community members emphasized that employment alone is insufficient to address the circumstances facing men of color who have recently been released from prison. These men's re-entry has broad impact on their families and communities, and community sponsors expressed the desire that Career Bridge would provide more holistic support. Research suggests returning prisoners are often concentrated in a small number of neighborhoods within cities, exacerbating the impact of their return. Individuals who are recently released from prison often have untreated health conditions, face unstable housing situations, and may be grappling with chemical dependency. Moreover, incarceration strains family relationships, which can be critical for supporting stability upon release.<sup>15</sup> Several community sponsors and staff emphasized that the goals of Career Bridge include improved participant self-esteem, increased participant involvement with their children, and community-building.

Participants, community sponsors, and staff noted that they saw Career Bridge as a means to create a community of support for men who may not have a positive peer group or role models. Two participants noted that Career Bridge was a way in which they could have positive social relationships after being released from prison. Prior to their incarceration a considerable proportion of their social networks involved individuals who were gang-involved or otherwise engaged in criminal activity, and they enrolled in Career Bridge with the hope to have a more positive peer network. One staff member noted that creating an environment in which recently released participants can interact with positive role models can help give them an alternative to reengaging with gangs or with former friends who remain criminally-involved.

## **3. Community and Systems-Level Goals**

By articulating outcomes beyond the individual level, the City's contract with the Urban League makes explicit the intent to have Career Bridge affect change beyond the circumstances of individual participants. The community- and systems-level outcomes indicate a clear interest on the part of the City in enhancing the coordination across community organizations and City agencies to support the needs of low-income populations facing barriers to employment. The Urban League must report to HSD on their progress in meeting annual performance

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<sup>15</sup> Baer, D., Bhati, A., Brooks, L., Castro, J., La Vigne, N., Mallik-Kane, K., Naser, R., Osborne, J., Roman, C., Roman, J., Rossman, S., Solomon, A., Visher, C., and Winterfield, L. (2006). Understanding the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry: Research Findings from the Urban Institute's Prisoner Reentry Portfolio. Justice Policy Center Washington, DC. [http://www.urban.org/uploadedpdf/411289\\_reentry\\_portfolio.pdf](http://www.urban.org/uploadedpdf/411289_reentry_portfolio.pdf)

commitments. While Career Bridge has clear, measurable outcomes on the individual level, there is no equivalent for the community-level goals, and it is unclear how these goals will be accomplished or what metrics can be used to determine success.

Several community sponsors indicated that as Career Bridge services become increasingly formalized and more akin to a typical service delivery model, it reduces the potential to empower participants. They suggested that a model that focuses primarily on participant barriers and providing services to address those barriers reinforces a power dynamic in which the participants have limited agency. Moreover, this dynamic makes it more difficult to place expectations on participants that they have a responsibility to the community and their fellow participants – that Career Bridge is not just a way to receive services but instead a broader movement toward self-sufficiency and community empowerment. Despite these concerns, these community sponsors did agree that Career Bridge can play an important role in meeting the employment needs of the target population.

The emphasis on systems- and community-level outcomes aligns with comments from multiple long-term community sponsors regarding the desire for Career Bridge to extend beyond a program that exclusively exists to meet the needs of individuals. These respondents were part of the group of community members who were involved from the design and inception of Career Bridge, and they continued to emphasize that employment and anti-poverty programs based exclusively on serving individuals fail to address more systematic, race-based inequalities. They believe that formalized, overly programmatic approaches are ill-equipped to have broader impacts on community-level empowerment and economic development. Moreover, they cited a level of paternalism that accompanies typical employment programs, which limits the ability of participants to develop increased self-efficacy. Although the current model of Career Bridge does not emphasize the goals in ways these community members hoped for, they expressed that Career Bridge works well and adds value to the array of existing services in the city as an employment program that addresses immediate barriers.

However, to counteract the broader societal forces which they believe perpetuate inequality, these community sponsors and supporters feel that Career Bridge needs to foster civic engagement, including educating community members about the mechanics of public institutions and how they are financed.

Initially, Career Bridge placed a very strong emphasis on using a consensus-driven approach to decision-making and the allocation of resources. While the structure of the model has become more formal and hierarchical with the funding of a CBDO to operate it, staff, participants, and community sponsors generally felt that there was still an effort to make decision-making transparent and to use the experience of receiving City funding as a vehicle for civic education among both participants and community members. Furthermore, there is still strong community involvement in Career Bridge. In addition to recruiting participants, program staff also work on engaging community members with Career Bridge. In particular, the Career Bridge interns conduct community outreach to organizations and individuals who may be interested in becoming involved.

### **C. Service Delivery Structure**

In this section we describe the Career Bridge service delivery structure. Career Bridge is a community-based support and mentorship model where participants are recruited and mentored by community members and Career Bridge staff. Participants attend a 50-hour, two-week long

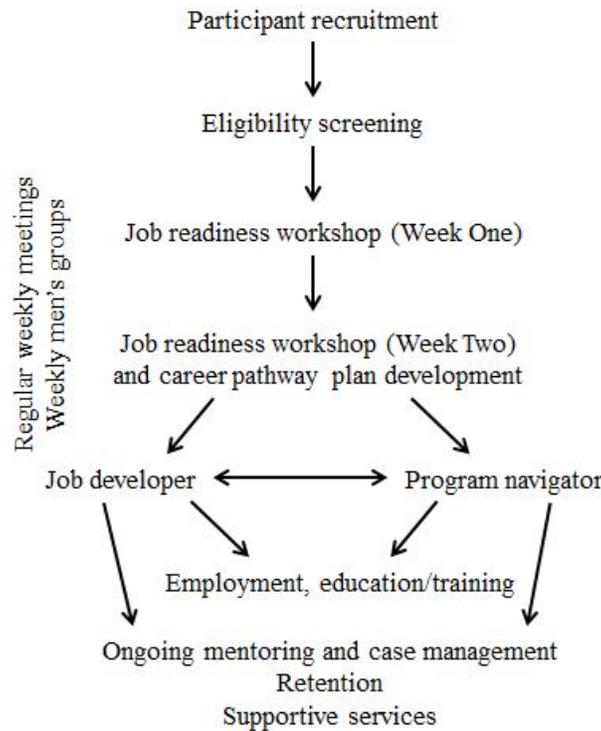
job readiness training workshop. In addition, they have access to a program navigator, job developer, counselor, and an array of group-based community meetings.

HSD oversees Career Bridge, and it is directly managed and operated by the Urban League.<sup>16</sup> In addition to oversight by the Urban League Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer, the Urban League provides a Career Bridge program manager, a navigator, and two interns who assist with participant recruitment, outreach to community organizations, and administrative tasks.

The Urban League contracts with TRAC Associates to provide job development services. An independent contractor facilitates the men’s group meetings and provides individual counseling, and SJI staff participate in the job readiness training through an existing contract with OED.

**Figure 1** provides a general conceptual model of the service delivery structure. Although the two-week long job readiness training, weekly men’s groups, and weekly community meetings<sup>17</sup> anchor the organization of the other program components, the sequence and intensity of services provided post-training vary. The services Career Bridge provides depend on individual participant need and level of engagement.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Service Delivery Structure



### 1. Participant Recruitment and Intake

Participants are recruited into Career Bridge through multiple methods. The Urban League program manager and navigator have primary responsibility, with assistance from Career Bridge

<sup>16</sup> The City issued a Request for Qualifications in fall 2013 to procure a CBDO to implement Career Bridge. The Urban League applied and was awarded the contract, which was fully executed in spring 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Weekly community meetings are typically attended by Career Bridge staff, participants, and community members.

interns. Urban League staff recruit potential participants at recreation centers, through churches, informal social relationships, work release, juvenile court, and street outreach. In addition, they conduct outreach to community organizations that may send potential participants.

As with the initial iteration of Career Bridge, referrals from sponsors and community members still represent an important referral source. However, Career Bridge no longer requires that a potential participant have a designated sponsor as a condition of entry. Additionally, participants also learn of Career Bridge through word-of-mouth from past participants.

By relying on informal referral networks or referrals from trusted community organizations, Career Bridge aims to serve a population often not found in more typical employment programs. Despite the shift in recruitment, described in more detail in the text box, the Career Bridge recruitment model remains attentive to the distrust that many in the target population have of more traditional employment programs. Either through past experience with other programs or as a result of prior incarceration and the resultant distrust of authority, individuals in the target population may not trust more traditional employment programs; and Career Bridge presents itself as a community-oriented alternative.<sup>18</sup>

#### Shift in Recruitment Models

The initial Career Bridge design placed greater emphasis on the role of community sponsors in the recruitment process. Participants were required to have a community sponsor to enroll in Career Bridge. This approach was born out of the belief of many stakeholders that, distinct from typical employment programs, success in Career Bridge would be contingent on participants having a robust support network within the community. As we discussed in our July 2013 Preliminary Report, a recruitment strategy that is based primarily on identifying those with pre-existing relationships to program stakeholders or other participants has the potential to exclude other, more isolated segments of the population who may also benefit from participation. Moreover, the limited number of sponsors constrained enrollment, even when program slots were going unfilled.

The shift to recruiting from a wider variety of places alters the initial attachment participants may have to Career Bridge because they are not necessarily personally connected to their recruiter. The potential benefit of the prior sponsorship model is that participants have the added incentive and support associated with a sponsor to remain engaged in Career Bridge. It can enhance accountability and increase the likelihood of enrolling committed participants.

Conversations with members of the Black Prisoners' Caucus reinforced some of the community sponsors' concerns regarding this shift. They felt that strong community support at the point of enrollment was especially important for those recently released from prison. Many individuals who have experienced incarceration are not receptive to institutional referral mechanisms, and the grassroots, community-based recruitment model is a key feature of Career Bridge that enables it to engage this population. Moreover, they advocated for a recruitment strategy that targets incarcerated men prior to their release as a way to further ease the post-release transition and to strengthen their commitment to Career Bridge.

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<sup>18</sup> In contrast, other area programs such as Life-Skills-to-Work, run through South Seattle Community College, have a much stronger link with the state Department of Corrections. Although it focuses on similar lessons as the Career Bridge job readiness training over ten weeks, Life-Skills-to-Work requires that students are referred by a county or state corrections official, are involved in a drug, alcohol, or anger-management treatment program, and regularly check in with their community corrections officer. This course is intended to be an on-ramp to vocational training or an associate's degree, provided at no cost through the community college. Another example of a re-entry program with more structured entry requirements is the Washington State Post-Prison Education Program, intended to assist the transition to college and the workforce. Although applicants can self-refer, they must demonstrate that they have the life skills necessary to succeed at school and work and those who are not ready are screened out. In addition, the application makes it explicitly clear that those who do not adhere to program policies regarding academics, lifestyle, and drug and alcohol use will be exited from the program.

**Table 1** shows the primary person, agency, or source that directed participants to Career Bridge, based on participant responses on Career Bridge enrollment forms. Approximately one-third of participants indicated that they had been referred by a friend, another 19 percent indicated that a family member referred them, and 16 percent indicated that they were referred to Career Bridge by a community organization.

Table 1: Primary person, agency, or source who directed participant to Career Bridge

Referral source	Percent	N
Church	3	1
City of Seattle	3	1
Community College	3	1
Community Organization	16	5
Employer	3	1
Family	19	6
Friends	32	10
Offender Re-Entry Program	10	3
Urban League	10	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>31</b>

\* Percentages do not total 100 due to rounding

The Career Bridge program navigator is responsible for screening all potential participants. He meets individually with potential participants for approximately 90 to 120 minutes to discuss their fit for the program. He pays specific attention to whether they could benefit from participation – in particular whether they have clear barriers to employment and financial stability that Career Bridge could help address. Common indicators he might ask about are a revoked driver’s license, housing instability, or child support debt that is disincentivizing formal work. Despite this screening process, the navigator indicated that it has been rare that he has turned away potential participants. In the few times this has been necessary, applicants did not have substantial barriers to employment but were instead seeking funding to participate in a specific training program.

The participants who we interviewed provided several reasons for enrolling in Career Bridge. One participant mentioned an immediate need for job placement, access to certifications and trainings, housing stability, and social support. In addition to these needs, other participants mentioned needing assistance with obtaining driver’s licenses, navigating courts and legal issues, and learning how to fund education. Participants consistently mentioned job placement and advancement as being a primary reason for enrollment into Career Bridge.

Career Bridge staff and community sponsors indicated that the availability of employment services represented a strong incentive for initial enrollment. While staff indicated that, once enrolled, participants vocalized a more diverse set of goals, the perception that Career Bridge would provide employment assistance is clearly a strong recruitment tool.

Under the previous model, participants needed to decide whether or not to formally participate about two weeks before the start of the training. Under the current model, potential participants are recruited up through the first day of the training. Formally participating in Career Bridge entails attending the two-week long job readiness training and having access to the job

developer. As long as participants do not miss more than two days of the two-week training, they are considered officially enrolled.

Those who decide against formally participating in a specific cohort may remain engaged in the weekly meetings and decide to participate in a later cohort. A recruit may choose this course if they feel they have barriers, such as a substance addiction, that need to be addressed first in order to fully participate. The Career Bridge mental health counselor noted that not having completed chemical dependency classes does not technically preclude a man with substance abuse issues from enrolling, though they may not be ready to participate fully.

## 2. Job Readiness Training

The two-week long, roughly 50-hour job readiness training is the central formal component of Career Bridge. The training involves two weeks of daily, partial-day sessions at the New Holly Learning Center, a satellite campus of South Seattle Community College in Beacon Hill. The curriculum and schedule for the week is roughly the same for every cohort.

The first week was designed by the Urban League and is led by the program navigator. It focuses on engaging the participants, identifying individual barriers, and building rapport between the participants and the program navigator. In addition, the program navigator brings in volunteer guest speakers based on the needs of the cohort; typical speakers have been members of the Seattle Police Department, a financial counselor, a county prosecutor specializing in child support, and a domestic violence counselor. The guest speakers provide information to the group and typically run a question and answer session facilitated by the program navigator. The presentations are focused on the needs of the individuals. For example, the financial literacy

### Participant Perspectives of the Job Readiness Training

The participants we interviewed all spoke highly of the job readiness training. They noted that it was an effective combination of skills development as well as a venue for peer support.

One participant with substantial work history characterized it more as a necessary refresher in life skills and useful encouragement and inspiration to make life changes, while others expressed that they also learned many new helpful things about topics such as about credit and child support. Another emphasized that the instructors were “powerful instruments of encouragement” and that the training provided much needed affirmation. He noted that he had heard similar messages before, but when “you’re detached from the work environment or regular systems of self-conception, you lose those.” He saw the training as a way to be reminded of the norms of the working world.

Two participants emphasized that they appreciated hearing from past participants during the training; they found that hearing the success stories was motivating and made the course content more credible. All the interviewees cited the credibility of the training instructors; the instructors’ willingness to speak frankly about their own career paths and struggles added a layer of authenticity.

class that the financial counselor provides focuses on topics most likely to be of direct relevance to Career Bridge participants; he discusses managing legal financial obligations and debt and contesting identity theft that may have occurred while the participant was in prison. Some of these volunteer speakers, such as the financial counselor and domestic violence counselor, offer free one-on-one services to participants post-training.

The second week of the training is largely the same as the weeklong Career Bridge training provided in 2012 and 2013. SJI adapted the content from a job readiness workshop that SJI provides to other clients. The regular SJI workshop

covers topics such as workplace culture and expectations, writing resumes and cover letters, job search skills, and customer service skills. For Career Bridge, staff tailored these topics to the target population and developed several new segments, including content on understanding labor

market options and understanding one's digital footprint. By the end of the second week, participants have an updated resume, a general cover letter, and professional email addresses and voicemail messages. The week ends with a graduation.

The second week of training is led by two instructors, one who has worked for SJI for over 15 years and another who is an independent contractor who also facilitates the men's group and provides mental health and substance abuse counseling for participants. The two instructors have been working together for 12 years and team-teach this class. The instructors noted that with the addition of the first week of the workshop, they have more time to focus on the content of their training and on addressing participant barriers as the program navigator assists participants in completing administrative paperwork and identifying barriers during the first week. In addition, the instructors noted that many participants in earlier cohorts suggested that more time in the computer lab would be beneficial and this was added into the first week.

All instructors regularly integrate contextualized examples and encourage a high degree of participation and sharing of personal experiences over the two weeks. For example, the SJI instructors emphasize the importance of "The Four A's" – Attendance, Attitude, Ability/skill, and Accountability – in retaining and advancing in employment, but also how these skills apply to personal life. The SJI instructors share relatable real-life experiences they have gone through that demonstrate the importance of these skills.

### **3. Navigation and Case Management**

The Urban League staff are responsible for providing navigation and case management to all participants. Case management responsibilities are now divided between the program manager and program navigator.

The *program manager* provides case management and navigation services to all participants who enrolled before the City contracted with the Urban League.<sup>19</sup> As a case manager for these cohorts, the program manager attempts to address barriers to employment of participants who are not working, checks in with participants who are working and are too busy to engage much with Career Bridge, and works to reconnect with individuals who have not been actively participating in Career Bridge. Part of her job is to make participants aware that Career Bridge is still available to them as a resource. The interns also help to reengage past participants and regularly call participants, including those with whom Career Bridge has had limited recent contact.

The *program navigator* is responsible for case management for all participants who have enrolled since HSD awarded the Urban League the Career Bridge contract – from Cohort Eight on. The Urban League's contract with the City describes the navigator role as helping participants navigate systems and access public benefits and support services provided through government entities, community partners, and the Career Bridge participant support fund. The Career Bridge contract earmarks \$50,000 annually for the participant support fund. This is used for direct financial assistance for participant support services, such as rental assistance, job-related clothing and supplies, transportation, and counseling.<sup>20</sup> The navigator is also expected to

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<sup>19</sup> This constitutes the 68 men in Cohorts One through Seven. Of these participants, 28 men have terminated their participation in Career Bridge and three have been inactive.

<sup>20</sup> Human Services Department, City of Seattle. 2014 Career Bridge project services agreement, page 20.

provide flexible and individualized participant support to address barriers to completing job training and/or education programs and securing career path employment.

Participants, community members, and staff consistently noted that the program navigator's background and shared experiences as a man of color who was previously incarcerated allows the participants to relate to him and see him as a role model. We heard from several participants, community members, and staff that this shared background is a part of why the program navigator is particularly effective at case management.

A consistent theme in our conversations with Career Bridge participants, staff, sponsors, and members of the Black Prisoners'

Caucus was the importance of having staff who share the experiences and characteristics of the participants. They emphasized that having men of color providing Career Bridge services is critical. Similarly, the fact that the program navigator had previously been incarcerated gave him added credibility. Having taught a re-entry class while incarcerated left him especially well-equipped to understand the needs of participants and the steps they could take to move toward self-sufficiency.

#### Program navigator staffing

Members of the BPC were especially adamant in their belief that the professionalization of the program navigator job function should not result in it being staffed by individuals who did not share the experiences and characteristics of Career Bridge participants. They acknowledged that a specific skill set around case management was imperative to support the employment goals of participants and to help them navigate complex social service delivery systems. However, they felt that an understanding of the experience of being incarcerated and the re-entry process was equally important. They noted that Career Bridge may actually serve a professional development role, with current participants developing the necessary skills to take on formal case management duties should Career Bridge expand. The current intern program represents one example of this effort.

Interviews with several community sponsors and staff indicated that having the Urban League take on case management from the community sponsors was a positive change, as some sponsors were unprepared for, or ill-equipped to provide, the level of case management that the participants' barriers necessitated. These interviewees largely asserted that the professionalization of the navigation and case management role by the Urban League has improved these conditions.

The program navigator builds relationships with new participants by leading the first two days of the job readiness training and facilitating the remainder of the first week. After the two-week training, participants schedule an hour-long meeting with the program navigator to make a plan to address their barriers. Although the participants create long-term personal and career goal plans during the two-week training, the post-training meeting focuses on short-term needs. The navigator reported that the two biggest barriers that need to be addressed are getting an income and stable housing. Career Bridge partnered with Seattle Recovery Support Center to secure transitional housing specifically for Career Bridge participants, and Career Bridge recently secured housing for some participants through the faith-based organizations that are part of the Career Bridge community.

Simultaneous to assisting participants with securing employment and housing, the navigator works with participants to address other key barriers such as revoked driver's licenses, child support obligations, drug and alcohol abuse, mental health issues, and open court cases. Some of these barriers he assists with directly, while others require referrals to partners. The program navigator handles driver's license issues directly and will call the collection agencies and courts

with the participant. For mental health issues and substance abuse counseling, the navigator will send the participant to the dedicated Career Bridge mental health counselor.

After he works with participants to begin addressing their immediate barriers, the program navigator also assists participants in executing the longer-term goal plans they developed during the training or modifying them to meet changing circumstances. He interacts frequently with the participants. For those men with many pressing barriers, he talks to them as often as daily. He indicated that he contacts most participants on a weekly basis. However, interviews with staff indicated that the program navigator is reaching capacity, especially as he plays many roles aside from case management (e.g., recruitment, handling administrative responsibilities, and facilitating the job readiness training).

#### **4. Employment Services and Job Development**

The Urban League has a subcontract with TRAC Associates to provide job development and employment services to Career Bridge participants. The TRAC job developer, who works full time on Career Bridge, has a long history of providing employment services to formerly incarcerated individuals and other hard-to-place populations in the Seattle area and has built up a large potential employer pool. A second job developer from TRAC also works on Career Bridge part-time. They share the caseload, employer pool, and administrative work, though the full-time job developer works with the majority of participants.

In our July 2013 Preliminary Report we noted that the job developer had an especially heavy workload as she had been providing participants with broader case management services in addition to support specifically around employment. With the addition of the Urban League staff, the primary job developer reported that she was able to focus her efforts more squarely on employment and job development, deferring to the program navigator when participants needed additional case management and support.

The primary job developer meets with the cohort informally during the job readiness training to start learning about the participants' barriers and short- and long-term goals in order to begin her job development early. She noted that it has been essential to connect with the participants during this time; the early interaction helps them to see her as a resource, and she believes that this early contact increases their willingness to remain in contact with her once they have completed the training.

##### **Participant interest-job match**

Our conversations with participants and stakeholders revealed some concerns regarding the perceived focus of the job developer on immediate employment at the expense of longer-term, stable positions more closely aligned with participants' skills and interests.

While respondents voiced appreciation for the employment services, several felt that a more personalized set of employment services would be more effective. Generally, they noted that the misalignment between the opportunities identified by the job developer and the types of jobs that the participants want indicates a need to expand job development to more occupations and industries.

One participant suggested that Career Bridge needed more job developers to handle the number of cases and develop jobs that are tailored to the individual participants' work experience, interests, and barriers. Another participant noted that while the employment services have been helpful, the job leads are often for warehouse jobs, which he does not want. It is what he has experience in from the jobs he worked in prison, but they are not his real interest.

One employer with whom we spoke noted that not all employers respond to the job developer's approach, as some hiring managers are approached by staffing firms on a regular basis. This employer expressed that a pitch that emphasizes the social, community aspect of participating in Career Bridge would be more compelling.

For the three weeks following the training, the job developer tries to meet individually with each participant weekly to focus on their job search. The job developer noted that she places a strong emphasis on helping participants quickly secure employment following the job readiness training. She uses the resumes and the employment goal plans developed during the training, as well as the meetings with participants, to determine the type of jobs for which they may be well suited. The job developer will continue to contact participants weekly, mostly by phone, if they are not employed.

In her interactions with employers, the job developer described presenting herself and Career Bridge as a free staffing service to employers. She indicated that employers, especially those with immediate hiring needs, are often responsive to this approach. She is clear from the beginning that many Career Bridge participants have a criminal background, and she uses her participant files to make the best match. For new employers, she will try to send the more job-ready participants so the employer will be more likely to accept another participant. She reported that she relies heavily on word-of-mouth as well as her established network of connections as a means to identify potential employment opportunities for participants.

**Table 2** provides an overview of the types of job leads identified by the job developer. It shows unduplicated counts of job leads by industry. As the table shows, the job developer has worked to identify employment opportunities in a range of industries. However, the positions are most highly concentrated in industries where jobs entail manual labor, which do not align with the job interests of all participants; the highest proportion of positions identified by the job developer were in construction (30 percent), warehouses (19 percent), driving (15 percent), and manufacturing (13 percent).

Table 2: Job leads developed by job developer

Industry	Job Leads Developed	
	Total	Total (%)
Janitorial	16	10
Driver	25	15
Warehouse	32	19
Food Service	13	8
Construction	49	30
IT	3	2
Telemarketer	3	2
Retail	1	1
Manufacturing	22	13
Social Services	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>100</b>

\* Percentages do not total 100 due to rounding

When the job developer identifies an employer that is hiring, she typically will notify Career Bridge participants through a group email. In addition, if she thinks that the position is an especially good fit for a given participant, she will notify that participant directly.

In addition to assistance with job searches, the job developer can also serve as a resource for participants and employers post-placement. In conversations with community members and participants it was apparent that the program navigator, the Career Bridge interns, and the job

developer all serve as potential resources for issues related to job retention. For those positions identified by the job developer, she often remains an employer's point of contact should issues emerge. The program navigator and Career Bridge intern, who also conduct targeted job development, will also interact with employers if workplace issues emerge. As the navigator and interns are often in more regular contact with participants following placement, they often serve as the primary point of contact. The job developer and Urban League staff are in contact weekly, and they regularly exchange information regarding participants' job status.

## 5. Community Support and Group-Based Interaction

Following the job readiness training and initial meetings with the job developer and program navigator, Career Bridge allows for different levels of participant engagement. For some participants, this means sporadic contact with the navigator or the job developer, but little continued interaction with other participants or community members. However, the design of the model places a heavy emphasis on providing opportunities for ongoing engagement with Career Bridge staff and the broader community. Moreover, these opportunities for continued engagement are not exclusively focused on direct service delivery to participants. Instead, the design encourages a group-based model of participation that allows participants to take on leadership roles and have an active voice in the direction of Career Bridge.

Aside from individual contacts with the job developer and navigator, two weekly Career Bridge meetings represent the most consistent, well-defined opportunities for participants to remain engaged with Career Bridge. For highly engaged participants, the community sponsor is also a consistent opportunity for engagement.

**Community Partners Meetings.** Community partners meetings, held every Tuesday evening, are led by the Urban League and often facilitated by the interns. They take place at the Life Enrichment Bookstore, owned and operated by a community sponsor. Community members; potential, current, and past participants; family members; and staff attend these meetings. They are an opportunity for the Career Bridge community to make program decisions, exchange information about resources, jobs, and training opportunities, and check in with each other; and they are an opportunity for potential participants to become familiar with Career Bridge and learn more about enrolling. One participant we interviewed told us he goes to the community partners meetings regularly. He explained that “the Tuesday meetings are a community event, there’s food, you meet good contacts, meet prominent people in the African American community” and “the meetings are nice, they ask you about what’s going on, what they can do to help. I didn’t have people who were interested in me while I was inside.”

**Weekly Men’s Group.** The other weekly meeting is the Monday men’s group, which generally meets at the Urban League. These operate as group counseling sessions and are an opportunity for Career Bridge participants to interact with their peers in a safe environment. Participants from all cohorts can attend these meetings, which often include some male sponsors and community members. The men’s group is centered around the participants, and the sponsors are there to offer support and advice. While the Career Bridge mental health counselor facilitates these meetings, he indicated that the men largely direct the conversation and bring in the issues they wish to discuss. The counselor noted that the most common issues had to do with anger management, childhood trauma, family and relationship problems, and legal issues. The group works to connect the men to resources, discuss where the problems may be coming from, and create plans to address the issues. According to the counselor, there are usually about 10 people

who attend (mostly participants), though there have been some groups with as many as 15 to 20 people.

Career Bridge also organizes events and celebrations throughout the year. Each cohort ends in a graduation celebration that community members and some past participants attend. As part of their work on Career Bridge, Urban League staff also organize community building and engagement opportunities such as rallies, voter registration drives, panel discussions at local universities, appearances at city hall, and barbeques with local community organizations.

**Community Sponsors and Mentoring.** In addition, community sponsors still provide ongoing engagement, although their role has changed since the earlier model. Instead of focusing on providing direct resources and case management, they focus more on providing mentorship. According to the Community Sponsor two-page manual created by the Urban League, “community sponsor is interchangeable with mentor.” Their main role in sponsorship is to “provide ongoing assistance, mentoring, and guidance to support the member’s readiness for success,” and to support leadership development and giving back to the community.<sup>21</sup> Sponsors also have a responsibility to conduct outreach, recruitment, and referral to Career Bridge and to assess readiness of potential participants.

Overall, many of the goals are still the same as the initial model and focus on providing social support and a positive environment, as well as addressing barriers to employment and economic independence. Previously, the community sponsors were responsible for maintaining a high level of engagement with the participants they sponsored; if program staff were unable to reach a participant, the first place they used to turn to was the community sponsor. However, we heard this was no longer the case, as only a handful of community sponsors have maintained that level of engagement. Community sponsors noted that, with the addition of the Urban League, the program navigator and Career Bridge interns now have primary responsibility for maintaining ongoing connections with participants.

## **6. Career Bridge Internships**

In addition to formalizing several of the staff positions, the Urban League added paid internships to the program model. There are two intern positions at any one time and they are open exclusively to Career Bridge participants. Each internship lasts three months, at 20 hours per week, at \$15.00 per hour. Each intern works under the supervision of one staff person, such as the program navigator or a job readiness training instructor. The interns conduct administrative work, outreach to community organizations, event planning, and participant recruitment. One intern’s position was extended by three months due to his leadership interest and the longer-term nature of the work he was conducting. This intern also conducted targeted job development, reaching out to employers and hiring managers from the African American community.

## **7. Additional Participant Supports**

Through their participation in Career Bridge, participants are able to access additional services to address barriers to employment and to assist in their transition to self-sufficiency. Along with referrals from the program navigator to external providers, participants can engage with several providers who have direct relationships to Career Bridge.

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<sup>21</sup> Community Sponsors for Career Bridge. Career Bridge internal document provided by Urban League staff.

The individual who presents the training segment on financial education and the individual who presents the segment on domestic violence at the job readiness training are both available to meet one-on-one with Career Bridge participants. These individuals became involved with Career Bridge through pre-existing relationships with other members and offer their services at no cost.

In addition, the individual who facilitates the men's group and co-facilitates the second week of the job readiness training is a licensed mental health and chemical dependency counselor, and he is available to meet with participants, as outlined in his contract with the Urban League.

The program navigator is the primary referral source for these services, though participants may also become aware of these services at community meetings, from community sponsors, or from other Career Bridge participants.

Participants also have access to individual financial support. According to the contract, these funds are meant to "address critical needs such as housing, transportation, work clothes, and identification fees that are required for employment and/or training and cannot be otherwise met."<sup>22</sup> Staff stressed that this funding is not intended to be an ongoing source of support, but instead is designed to meet more urgent needs or to provide support to participants while they are engaged in job search.

Under the current model, participants make a request to the program navigator or the program manager, who fills out a funding request form if they deem the request appropriate.<sup>23</sup> The program navigator and the program manager determine whether distribution of the funds is warranted based on participant need. While there is no maximum limit on funding per participant, Career Bridge staff indicated that they attempt to keep expenditures under \$1,000 for each participant.

Despite the discretion afforded to the program navigator and the program manager regarding distribution of funds, there are specific criteria they apply to certain types of requests. For example, an individual who makes a rental assistance request must be working full time, must complete a budget listing all of his expenses, and must have a job that will allow him to earn enough in future months to pay the rent for which he requested assistance. Individuals requesting funding for the bus or for a phone must be actively seeking employment, as verified by the job developer.

After they approve the request, the program navigator or program manager submits the funding request form, along with a budget form, accounting form, and supporting documents to verify the request (e.g., lease agreement, estimate of work clothing costs) to the Chief Operating Officer and the President of the Urban League for authorization.

#### **IV. Participant Characteristics**

In this section we present baseline data on self-reported participant characteristics, captured at the point of enrollment. We focus on the 31 Career Bridge participants in Cohorts Eight, Nine, and Ten, which began in April, May, and July 2014, respectively. The Career Bridge participants share many characteristics in demographics, criminal background, and employment history.

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<sup>22</sup> Human Services Department, City of Seattle. 2014 Career Bridge project services agreement, page 11.

<sup>23</sup> In contrast to the current approach, the model we described in the Preliminary Report required community consensus and was time intensive; in addition, funds were capped at \$200 per participant.

Many face barriers such as housing instability, low educational attainment, debt, limited recent work history, and a criminal background.

**Program status.** As **Table 3** shows, there were 31 participants enrolled<sup>24</sup> in Career Bridge across three cohorts (i.e., Cohorts 8 through 10). Of the 31 participants, one from Cohort Eight and two from Cohort Nine terminated their participation with Career Bridge during or after the training component.

Table 3: Program Status

Program Status	Cohort 8 April 2014 % (N)	Cohort 9 May 2014 % (N)	Cohort 10 July 2014 % (N)	Total % (N)
Currently enrolled	23 (7)	42 (13)	26 (8)	90 (28)
Terminated	3 (1)	6 (2)	0 (0)	10 (3)
<b>Total</b>	<b>26 (8)</b>	<b>48 (15)</b>	<b>26 (8)</b>	<b>100 (31)</b>

\* Total % (N) values do not sum to 90 and 10 due to rounding

**Demographic characteristics.** All 31 participants are male and 84 percent (N = 26) of participants identified as black/African American. Seven percent (N = 2) identified as two or more races, and seven percent (N = 2) identified as Asian/Pacific Islander. As **Table 4** shows, most participants (77 percent) did not report having children living with them for whom they were responsible. Forty-five percent of participants were parents of children under 18 years of age with whom they were not living, and most participants with children had just one child.

Table 4: Children

	No % (N)	Yes % (N)	Total % (N)
Have children you are responsible for who live with you	77 (24)	23 (7)	100 (31)
Have children under 18 who do not live with you	55 (17)	45 (14)	100 (31)

**Barriers – criminal history.** Almost all participants reported a criminal history, but many had

**Variation in criminal background**

Although the data show that many participants share the barrier of a criminal background and the experience of incarceration, our interviews with participants showed variation in their experiences that are not captured in the quantitative data. One participant had no criminal background, two participants had had long sentences with limited prior incarceration experience, and one participant reported multiple spells of incarceration, multiple warrants, as well as numerous incarcerated family members.

never been incarcerated and some had only been convicted of misdemeanors. **Table 5** shows participants' self-reported criminal background at the point of enrollment. Ninety-four percent of the participants reported having been convicted of a crime. Of the participants who had been convicted of a crime, 34 percent reported having been convicted of a misdemeanor and a felony, 28

percent reported only misdemeanors, and 21 percent reported only felonies.<sup>25</sup> Many of the participants had been incarcerated but not all of them; 72 percent of the participants who had

<sup>24</sup> The data only reflect participants who complete the two-week job readiness training. There may be other participants who enrolled in Career Bridge but did not complete the training.

<sup>25</sup> Seventeen percent of participants who had been convicted of a crime either did not answer the questions about misdemeanors, felonies, or both.

been convicted of a crime reported having been incarcerated at some point prior to enrollment.<sup>26</sup> With the exception of two participants, the participants who had reported previously being incarcerated also reported their most recent release date. The median number of years between participants' most recent release date and enrollment into Career Bridge was about one year.<sup>27</sup> The shortest length of time between release and enrollment was five days, while the longest length of time between release and enrollment was about 18 years. At the time of enrollment, 24 percent of participants who had been convicted of a crime reported being under some form of community supervision.

Table 5: Criminal Background

	Yes % (N)	No % (N)	No Answer % (N)
Convicted of a crime	94 (29)	7 (2)	0 (0)
Among those convicted of a crime:			
Only convicted of misdemeanor	28 (8)	55 (16)	17 (5)
Only convicted of felony	21 (6)	62 (18)	17 (5)
Convicted of misdemeanor and felony	34 (10)	48 (14)	17 (5)
Previously incarcerated	72 (21)	24 (7)	3 (1)
Currently under community supervision	24 (7)	72 (21)	3 (1)

\* Percentages do not total 100 due to rounding

**Barriers – housing.** We heard in many of our interviews with staff, community members, and participants that housing was a major barrier for many participants. **Table 6** below shows participants' housing situation at the point of enrollment; a majority reported being homeless or in a temporary or transitional living arrangement. None of the participants with whom we spoke rented a house or apartment; three were staying with family and one was in work release.

Table 6: Housing Situation at Enrollment

Type of Housing	Participants (%) N
Homeless	10 (3)
Living with Someone Temporarily	36 (11)
Transitional Housing	19 (6)
Rent House or Apartment	32 (10)
Did Not Answer	3 (1)
<b>Total</b>	<b>100 (31)</b>

**Barriers – financial obligations.** At the time of enrollment, participants reported whether they had debts for license suspension, child support, and legal financial obligations (LFO). **Table 7** shows that 42 percent of participants reported none of these, while the remaining 58 percent reported at least one or some combination of these obligations.

<sup>26</sup> One participant did not answer this question, but did answer that he had only ever been convicted of a misdemeanor.

<sup>27</sup> Two participants were in work release when they began Career Bridge. Thus, their release dates were after their enrollment dates and they were excluded when calculating the median amount of time between release and enrollment.

Table 7: Financial Obligations

Obligations	Participants
	% (N)
None	42 (13)
Only License Suspension	10 (3)
Only Child Support	13 (4)
Only LFO	13 (4)
License Suspension and Child Support	0 (0)
Child Support and LFO	10 (3)
License Suspension and LFO	10 (3)
License Suspension, Child Support, and LFO	3 (1)
<b>Total</b>	<b>100 (31)</b>

\* Percentages do not total 100 due to rounding

**Education.** The highest level of schooling participants reported having attained ranged widely from “Some High School” to “Bachelors or Higher.” **Table 8** shows that for 58 percent of participants, a high school diploma or GED was their highest school completed. Twenty-three percent of participants had some high school education but no diploma or GED, and 13 percent reported having an Associate’s degree or a technical certification. Among the four participants whom we interviewed, one had a high school diploma and three had their GED.

Table 8: Highest Level of Education

Highest Level of Education Achieved	Participants
	% (N)
Less Than High School Graduate	23 (7)
High School Diploma or GED	58 (18)
Associates or Technical Certificate	13 (4)
Bachelors or Higher	7 (2)
<b>Total</b>	<b>100 (31)</b>

\* Percentages do not total 100 due to rounding

**Work history.** Most participants had some work history, though few were working in the days prior to enrollment. Among those who had worked before, the wages and duration of their last job differed by characteristics such as incarceration history, education, and housing stability. As **Table 9** shows, most participants had worked for pay at least once before enrolling in Career Bridge, and 77 percent of participants had worked a full time job at some point prior to enrollment. At the time they began the program, 84 percent of participants had not worked in the previous week, and, of those who were working, only one person was in a full time position.

Table 9: Employment History

	Ever Worked for Pay	Ever Worked Full Time	Worked Last Week
	% (N)	% (N)	% (N)
Yes	81 (25)	77 (24)	13 (4)
No	19 (6)	23 (7)	84 (26)
No Answer	NA	NA	3 (1)
<b>Total</b>	<b>100 (31)</b>	<b>100 (31)</b>	<b>100 (31)</b>

Participants provided information on their last job prior to enrolling Career Bridge;<sup>28</sup> these jobs were often full time, paid slightly over minimum wage, were retained under a year, and differed by participant barriers.

Overall, the median hourly wage of participants' last job was \$11.75, with a median of 40 hours per week, and a median duration of 198 days. Half of them had ended their last job due to a layoff, 46 percent due to quitting, and four percent due to being fired.

**Table 10** highlights some differences that emerge when comparing the characteristics of participants' last job by participant barriers. The median wage among participants who have been incarcerated was lower than the wages of those who have never been incarcerated (\$11.00 and \$13.77, respectively). Unexpectedly, those who had been incarcerated had a longer median job duration compared to those who had never been incarcerated (252 days/121 days). Also surprising is that the median wage among those with less education was higher compared to the wages of those with more education (\$15.75 and \$11.45, respectively). However, those with more education had a longer job duration in their last job (244 days/121 days).<sup>29</sup> Lastly, those with stable housing had been employed in their last job for much longer than those who had unstable housing (335 days and 124 days, respectively).

Table 10: Earnings and Job Duration in Prior Jobs

		Median Wage	Median Job Duration (days)
High School Diploma/GED or Higher Education	Y	\$11.45	244
	N	\$15.75	121
Previously Incarcerated	Y	\$11.00	252
	N	\$13.77	121
Stable Housing	Y	\$11.45	335
	N	\$12.00	124

**Public assistance receipt.** Participants also reported on their receipt of public assistance at the time of enrollment. Thirty-six percent (N = 11) of the participants were receiving benefits from the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program and seven percent (N = 2) reported receiving cash benefits through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. No participants reported receiving General Assistance - Unemployable, Social Security Disability Insurance, or Supplemental Security Income at the time of enrollment. Only one participant reported collecting Unemployment Insurance at the time of enrollment. Some participants provided reasons for not collecting Unemployment Insurance despite being unemployed; the majority, 58 percent (N = 18), answered that they had not applied.

The data show that, despite often having past work experience, participants in Career Bridge face numerous barriers to self-sufficiency, most notably housing instability, criminal background, and unemployment or underemployment. These barriers align with the characteristics that staff and community sponsors target when recruiting potential participants.

<sup>28</sup> The following numbers do not include employment in prison. All wages have been converted to 2014 dollars based on job end date.

<sup>29</sup> Those with more education are defined as having a high school diploma, GED, or higher education, compared to those with less than a high school diploma or GED.

## V. Participation in Career Bridge

This section presents data on participation in Career Bridge activities and services. Again, we focus on the 31 participants enrolled in the first three cohorts of Career Bridge run by the Urban League. Our analysis indicates that while most participants have had consistent contact with program staff, many participants do not attend Career Bridge events such as the weekly meetings. In addition, engagement varied by participant characteristics; most notably, a larger proportion of participants who had previously been incarcerated were more engaged than those who had never been incarcerated, which may indicate a greater demand for social support among those who have experienced incarceration. Lastly, use of the participant support fund reflects what we heard from staff and community members about housing and transportation being key barriers for many participants.

Our interviews with staff and Career Bridge community members indicated that the ongoing engagement work is a crucial component of Career Bridge. Tuesday community partners meetings, Monday men’s groups, individual counseling, contacts with the job developer, and, most consistently, contacts with the navigator constitute the main opportunities for participants to engage with Career Bridge on an ongoing basis.

**Table 11** shows the percent of participants who engaged in Career Bridge activities each month. There are high rates of engagement in the activities in which a participant responds to contacts initiated by the job developer or the program navigator. This can be in-person contact or, more often, phone contact. However, the percent of participants who attend program activities is much lower and more variable from month to month. Attendance at the men’s group drops off as time passes from a participant’s enrollment.

Table 11: Percent of participants who engaged in Career Bridge activities

Month	Job Developer Contacts		Community Partners Meeting		Navigator Contacts		1-on-1 Counseling	
	N	% (N)	% (N)	% (N)	% (N)	% (N)	% (N)	
July	31	90 (28)	19 (6)	23 (7)	97 (30)	6 (2)		
August	31	90 (28)	16 (5)	3 (1)	97 (30)	3 (1)		
September	31	84 (26)	13 (4)	7 (2)	94 (29)	3 (1)		
October	31	77 (24)	7 (2)	16 (5)	97 (30)	3 (1)		
November	25	73 (22)	4 (1)	0 (0)	100 (25)	8 (2)		

Note: Some participants were exited – total number of participants in November was 25.

While the percentage of participants attending one-on-one counseling is low, it is fairly consistent across months. At the time we interviewed the counselor in November 2014, he reported meeting with approximately 15 different participants for individual counseling.<sup>30</sup> Some men have just needed a one-time session to vent, and he tries to address issues in four to five sessions, though others have needed counseling over a longer term. He noted that with this population (men of color with multiple barriers to employment and stability), it is especially important to address the negative stereotypes and perceptions around needing mental health counseling.

**Table 12** shows the mean number of times participants engaged in core Career Bridge activities per month among those who had at least one instance of contact in that month. With the

<sup>30</sup> This includes participants from earlier and later cohorts.

exception of contacts with the navigator, the average number of times participants who engaged with Career Bridge attended an activity is once or twice a month. The high number of navigator contacts per month aligns with what we heard from staff and participants – the navigator makes sure to make at least one contact a week with each participant, and he is often the first person participants call when they need assistance.

Table 12: Mean number of contacts per participant

Month	Job Developer Contacts	Men's Group	Community Partners Meeting	Navigator Contacts	1-on-1 Counseling
July	2.5	2.2	1.4	6.3	2.0
August	1.0	2.0	1.0	4.9	2.0
September	2.2	2.2	1.5	5.4	1.0
October	2.2	1.0	1.2	4.8	1.0
November	1.0	1.0	NA	5.2	1.0

Many participants did not attend any Career Bridge activities following the job readiness training. Over the five months of observation, 77 percent (N = 24) of participants never attended a men's group, and 87 percent (N = 27) of participants never participated in counseling. More of the men went to the community partners meetings, but, here too, 65 percent (N = 20) of the men never went to a meeting over the five months. Some of the men who did participate did so over multiple months. Some participants were highly engaged even after they were placed in a job and regularly took leadership roles at the weekly meetings, while others did not consistently attend the group Career Bridge events or at all.

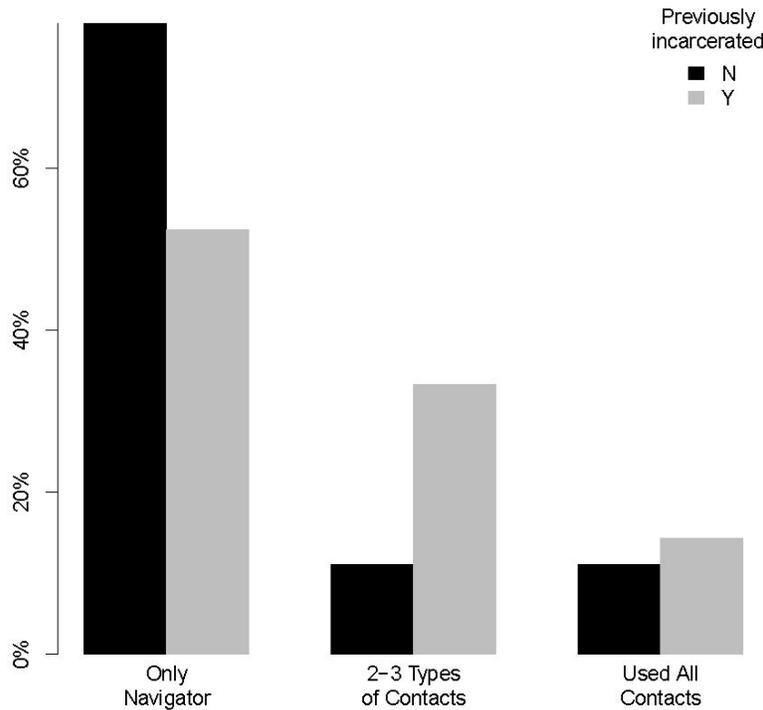
**Attendance at Career Bridge activities**

The interviews we conducted with participants reflect what the quantitative data show about the levels of engagement in Career Bridge. Three of the four participants to whom we spoke had not attended any community partners meetings, men's groups, or counseling. The reasons they gave were that it was difficult to get to the meetings, that their work schedule impeded attendance, or that they were not interested in attending. The fourth participant regularly attended the community partners meetings, participated in volunteer activities organized by Career Bridge, and also mentioned that he was interested in attending the men's group, although he had not yet attended any when we last spoke to him in December 2014. He indicated that participation in Career Bridge activities was a priority for him, both because it exposed him to positive influences as well as because he felt he had a sense of responsibility to be an active member of the Career Bridge Community.

Participation in Career Bridge activities varied by participants' background characteristics. As **Table 11** shows, the program navigator had contacts with almost every participant every month, while participation in the men's group, community partners meeting, and one-on-one counseling was much lower. **Figure 2** shows the percentage of participants who engaged only in navigator contacts, or in two to three types of contact, or in all types of contact, comparing participants who had previously been incarcerated to those who had not.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> The types of contacts used in these graphs include navigator contact, community partners meetings, men's group, and one-on-one counseling. The figures use only contact data collected by the Urban League. It does not include job developer contacts, which were collected by TRAC.

Figure 2: Percent of Participants Engaging in Career Bridge Activities by Previously Incarcerated



A greater proportion of participants who had experienced incarceration prior to enrollment engaged with Career Bridge in more ways compared to those who had never been incarcerated. Most of the men who had never been incarcerated only engaged with Career Bridge through the navigator contacts (78 percent, N = 7), while only about half (52 percent, N = 11) of the men who had experienced incarceration engaged only with the navigator. Eleven percent (N = 1) of men who had never been incarcerated used two to three types of contact, compared to 33 percent (N = 7) of men who had experienced incarceration. In addition, participation also varied by housing stability at the time of enrollment, although the differences are smaller than those seen by incarceration experience. A higher percentage of participants who did not have stable housing only engaged with Career Bridge through the navigator contacts (67 percent, N = 14) compared to those with stable housing (50 percent, N = 5).

Participants also have access to the participant support fund. Between July and November 2014, 61 percent (N = 19) of the participants received individual financial support from Career Bridge. Among participants who received any funding, the median total amount of financial support received between July and November 2014, was \$339.40. The most common use of the funding was for bus passes and bus tickets, with 39 percent (N = 12) of the participants receiving funding for this purpose. In addition, 29 percent (N = 9) of the participants received funding for rent assistance. This aligns with what we heard in our conversations with staff who noted that housing was a major barrier for participants. Some participants received as little as \$8.00 in assistance, while others received as much as \$1,225.00.

Although we have heard from community sponsors that one of the goals of Career Bridge is to foster participant ownership and leadership of Career Bridge, analysis of the participant

engagement data shows that there is limited participant engagement of this nature. The main connection participants have with Career Bridge after the job readiness training is contact with the program navigator, and to a lesser extent, the job developer. Contact with the program navigator is very frequent and highly consistent across months, which aligns with what we heard from community members and participants. However, some of the staff we spoke with noted that this level of engagement may not be feasible for one program navigator to handle as the number of participants increases. As shown in **Figure 2**, the higher levels of engagement among those who have been incarcerated compared to those who have not may indicate a greater demand for social support and a peer community compared to other participants.

## VI. Employment Outcomes

As we note in the previous sections, we confine our analysis of employment outcomes to the experiences of participants in Cohorts Eight, Nine, and Ten. While we have employment data for the more recent cohorts as well, we felt that the longer exposure to the program offers a more representative description of the employment experiences of Career Bridge participants.<sup>32</sup>

The employment outcomes of the three cohorts reflects an emphasis on rapid reemployment followed by ongoing job searches seeking longer-term placements in more stable, higher wage positions. While participants have had some success in securing and retaining employment, advancement in employment or into education and training appears to be limited. In addition, differences in wages and hours emerge, as was the case with the participant engagement results, when comparing participants who have been incarcerated to those who have not.

**Table 13** shows the frequency of employment among participants. Of the 31 participants in these cohorts, 81 percent (N = 25) reported starting a job during the five-month observation period. Thirty-two percent (N = 10) of participants were still working in their first job at the end of the observation period, and 29 percent (N = 9) participants were still working in their second job at the end of the observation period.

Table 13: Frequency of Employment

	No Job % (N)	First Job % (N)	Second Job % (N)	Third Job % (N)
Number of placements started	19 (6)	81 (25)	32 (10)	3 (1)
Number of placements ended	NA	48 (15)	3 (1)	3 (1)
Number currently working	0 (0)	32 (10)	29 (9)	0 (1)

The data also provide information on how and why a placement ended. The majority of jobs ended because the participant quit (65 percent, N = 11), while few jobs ended due to the participant being fired or laid off. Some of the positions that ended were followed by a subsequent job. As **Table 14** shows, of the 17 jobs that have ended, 65 percent (N = 11) were

<sup>32</sup> These data capture placements made by the job developer or other Career Bridge staff, and may or may not include positions that participants obtained on their own. The job developer estimated that roughly 20 percent of the men find a job on their own and likely only half of these men were reporting their employment to her. As such, these data may underestimate employment outcomes. Urban League staff share information they hear about participants finding employment on their own with the job developer on a weekly basis.

followed by another job within the observation period. The two most common reasons given for a job ending were (1) finding another job and (2) not enough work hours. All but one of the ten participants who gave these two reasons were employed again within the observation period. These data indicate that, while participant employment was not always consistent, those who were able to secure initial employment were able to find new jobs if the first position did not work out. Half of the participants who did not find a new job ended their initial job because of issues like punctuality and attendance or finding the job too difficult, while none of the participants who were able to find a new job listed these reasons.

Table 14: Job End Details

	Laid off	Fired	Quit	Unknown	Total
	% (N)	% (N)	% (N)	% (N)	% (N)
Exit to unemployment	0 (0)	12 (2)	18 (3)	6 (1)	35 (6)
Reemployed	6 (1)	0 (0)	47 (8)	12 (2)	65 (11)
Total	6 (1)	12 (2)	65 (11)	18 (3)	100 (17)

Note: Denominator is total number of jobs ended (N = 17)

**Table 15** provides details on the participants' job placements. Among those participants who became employed, it took an average of 41 days and a median of 23 days from the start of the job readiness training for them to become employed.<sup>33</sup> While Career Bridge in its previous iterations was a very different program compared to the current model and thus comparisons should be interpreted cautiously, the difference between our findings here and in the Preliminary Report in the time between enrollment and first job placement is stark. Our July 2013 Preliminary Report used data collected at the end of May 2013, and showed a median of 113 days between enrollment and first job placement.

The duration a participant stayed in one position ranged widely from as long as 209 days to as short as 5 days. At the time that the data were compiled at the end of November 2014, 61 percent (N = 19) of the 31 participants were still employed and had been working their jobs for a median of 97 days. However, there is variation in retention when looking more closely at these 19 men; ten of these participants had remained employed in their first job for a median duration of 152 days. The other nine participants who were employed at the end of data collection were employed in their second job for a median duration of 60 days. This difference could be attributed to participants starting their second job later during the observation period.

Job duration, when excluding current placements, is much lower than overall job duration. Participants spent a median of 49 days in the jobs they no longer worked.<sup>34</sup> In addition, jobs that ended due to the participant quitting lasted for less time (median of 50 days) than jobs where the participant was laid off (median 75 days) or fired (median 75 days). This could mean that some participants were willing to take temporary jobs at first but quickly transitioned to better jobs as they became available. Differences in job duration by whether or not a participant had previously been incarcerated and whether or not they had worked full time before Career Bridge were small.

The median wage of \$11.00 is above the 2014 minimum wage in Seattle (\$9.32). Participants worked a median of 36 hours a week. There is no difference in median wage or median weekly

<sup>33</sup> The minimum value is 0 days and the maximum value is 143 days.

<sup>34</sup> Only one participant ended a second job, and he had been employed there for 79 days.

hours between participants’ first and second jobs. This suggests that factors other than wage and hours may be incentivizing participants to quit and begin new jobs, such as location, work schedule, job tasks, and benefits.

Table 15: Placement Details

	First Job	Second Job	Third Job	All Jobs
Median job duration current placements (days)	152	60	NA	97
Median job duration prior placements (days)	49	79	5	49
Median hourly wage	\$11.00	\$11.00	\$10.00	\$11.00
Median hours/week	36	36	32	36

To explore the overall employment success of the three cohorts in terms of job duration, wage, and working hours per week we divided participants into three categories: (1) those who have had at least one job post-enrollment and meet the following criteria: work over 20 hours per week, make over \$10.00 per hour, and stay in their job longer than 60 days, (2) those who have found employment post-enrollment, but which do not fit these criteria, and (3) those who have not obtained a job post-enrollment. We recognize that this categorization may be an imperfect indicator of success, and it should only be understood as a snapshot of the three cohorts’ employment outcomes on November 30, 2014. Using this definition, 23 percent (N = 7) of participants had obtained a job meeting the criteria listed in the first category, 58 percent (N = 18) had obtained a job with wages, hours, or duration below the criteria, and 19 percent (N = 6) had not obtained a job post-enrollment.

There are some differences in job details based on participant characteristics. The largest differences can be seen when comparing those who have previously been incarcerated to those who have not. While it may be unsurprising that those who have never been incarcerated had a higher median wage (\$14.50 compared to \$10.66), they also worked fewer hours per week (25 compared to 40). Only minor differences emerged when comparing participants with stable versus unstable housing and participants with less than a high school diploma/GED versus those with higher educational attainment.

Although the service delivery flow can include enrollment in an educational or training program, both the time commitment of a job and the limited referral network to these types of programs make enrolling in education logistically challenging. The pathways to education and vocational training have been informal thus far. SJI and TRAC have connections with some local community colleges, and Career Bridge has a connection with the South Seattle Community College Life Skills instructor. The job developer reported placing 10 participants in Pioneer Human Services’ (PHS) paid five-week training, and she tends to refer participants to this training whose criminal backgrounds severely limit their employment prospects. Successful participants are offered a spot in PHS’s paid nine-week Aerospace Joint Apprenticeship; we do not have information on whether any participants enrolled in this follow-up program.

The data suggest that Career Bridge’s employment services focus on rapid reemployment. While some participants are working and retaining jobs that make over minimum wage and offer over 20 hours a week, many do not retain these positions or are employed in jobs that do not meet these standards. However, while there are no differences in the wages and hours of participants’ first and second jobs, the majority of jobs are not ending due to layoffs or firings and are followed by a new job.

## VII. Conclusion

Career Bridge represents an innovative effort by the City of Seattle, community members, and a non-profit partner to better support the needs of low-income men of color who are facing multiple barriers to employment. While the intervention has undergone substantial changes since its inception, this core goal has continued to drive the implementation of the intervention. In this report, we have chronicled the design and implementation of the current model and have described the characteristics, service receipt, and outcomes of three cohorts of participants.

We found a substantial, ongoing commitment among key community members to the mission of Career Bridge. Its participants are exhibiting success in securing and maintaining employment, and at least a subset are actively engaged in the community-building and peer support components of Career Bridge. Based on our fieldwork and data analysis, below we discuss particular strengths of the intervention along with several ongoing challenges facing Career Bridge. While these are largely focused on the model as it currently exists, when appropriate, we also discuss potential implications for the longer-term sustainability of the model.

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Many of the strengths associated with the current Career Bridge model stem from the initiative's ability to blend the community-driven approach of the initial iteration with a structured and more formalized service delivery model. For example, while the navigation and case management roles are now professionalized, many of the staff in these roles share the characteristics and experiences of the men with whom they are working. While several community sponsors expressed concern with the more formalized nature of the current model compared to the initial design, our conversations revealed an ongoing commitment of all staff and community members to a community-based approach that empowers participants to take an active role in the process.

**Strong employment outcomes.** The high percentage (81 percent) of Career Bridge participants from the first three cohorts who reported finding employment following enrollment is positive.<sup>35</sup> Given that Career Bridge explicitly targets individuals with substantial barriers to employment, the high employment rate among participants along with the relatively short period of time between enrollment and employment is a substantial accomplishment. It is especially encouraging to see the dramatic decrease in the amount of time from enrollment to employment of the cohorts we observed under the new program design (Cohorts 8 to 10) compared to the first Career Bridge cohorts in 2012 and early 2013.

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<sup>35</sup> According to an experimental evaluation of New York City's Center for Employment Opportunities program (a transitional subsidized employment program targeting recently released individuals), 69 percent of control group members who did not receive the program subsidy and only a short job readiness training were employed one to three years after the training and 52.1 percent were employed two to three years after the training. Of those who had received services, 53.3 percent were employed one to two years after the program period ended. While the comparison is not exact, in terms of target population, service delivery model, and potential selection bias stemming from Career Bridge's non-experimental setting, the employment rates from Career Bridge do compare favorably. Redcross, Cindy, Megan Millenky, Timothy Rudd, and Valerie Levshin (2012). *More Than a Job: Final Results from the Evaluation of the Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) Transitional Job Program*. OPRE Report 2011-18. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

**Career Bridge staff share the characteristics and experiences of participants.** A concern voiced by Career Bridge community members during our initial interviews was that formalizing and professionalizing Career Bridge services would make the initiative less responsive to the needs of the participants and the communities in which they live. They expressed that there is an abiding need for Career Bridge to maintain a community orientation in order to engage disadvantaged men and their families who often have had negative experiences with institutions. The composition of current initiative staff who share many of the experiences and characteristics of Career Bridge participants has minimized these concerns. Almost all of the Career Bridge staff are people of color, and the majority are men. Moreover, several had made the successful transition from incarceration to these professional positions. Participants, staff, and community members alike emphasized that it was the combination of substantive knowledge and skills along with the shared experiences and characteristics that make these staff effective. It gives them greater credibility with participants and helps foster a safe and open environment in which participants feel supported and respected by initiative staff. As Career Bridge continues to expand, enroll more participants, and require more program navigators, it will be critical to continue emphasizing the value of these experiences and characteristics in the hiring of Career Bridge staff.

**Expanded job readiness training.** During conversations with staff, community members, and participants for the July 2013 Preliminary Report, we heard concerns that the job readiness training was too short. Respondents suggested that the training did not spend enough time supporting specific job search skills, and that it did not address all of the barriers facing participants. During our most recent round of interviews and conversations with participants, we heard near unanimous praise for the expansion of this training with an additional week, facilitated by the Career Bridge program navigator. Respondents indicated that it allowed more time for participants to get to know one another, to hear guest speakers addressing issues of particular interest to Career Bridge participants, and to set the stage for an intensive job search process following the training. Moreover, the fact that the program navigator was responsible for facilitating the first week strengthened the bond between him and the participants, making him a more effective support for participants over the long term. Overall, respondents expressed that the revamped training meets the needs of participants around the job search process while also providing ample time for mentorship and peer support.

**Ongoing relationship with the Black Prisoners' Caucus.** Although not explicitly a re-entry program, Career Bridge community sponsors and participants consistently emphasized that a core focus of the initiative is to support the needs of individuals who have recently been released from prison. Career Bridge actively recruits individuals on work release or who have criminal backgrounds.

Although informal, the relationship with the Black Prisoners' Caucus appears to be an important source of referrals and also guidance on the best approach for meeting the needs of former prisoners. Career Bridge staff have participated in and led trainings at the Monroe Correctional Complex, and many key Career Bridge community sponsors have longstanding relationships with the Black Prisoners' Caucus. Moreover, the emphasis on participant-led programming and empowerment championed by the Black Prisoners' Caucus exerts a continued influence on Career Bridge's approach to service delivery.

This connection with a prisoner-led organization can help establish continuity in the re-entry process and better equip recently released individuals to connect with community supports such

as Career Bridge. Additionally, the active voice of currently incarcerated and recently released individuals can help ensure that Career Bridge services are best-attuned to the needs of this population.

**Added support to address participant barriers.** City staff and Career Bridge community members worked hard to design a model that responds to the array of barriers facing the target population. Aside from assistance with employment and job searches, they set out to refine the model to better address barriers such as transportation, housing, mental health issues, and chemical dependency. This included a more streamlined process for allocating dollars from the Career Bridge participant support fund, formalizing relationships with low-income and transitional housing providers, and paying for one-on-one counseling services. Moreover, presentations on domestic violence and asset building during the job readiness training also exposed participants to resources to address related issues.

**Ongoing support from community members.** Career Bridge was born out of the effort to marry City funding with committed community activists. The goal was an intervention that was responsive to community voices but that could leverage the funding and expertise of City staff and enable access to other city-funded employment services. With the transition to contracted case management services, the role of community partners in Career Bridge has changed. While some express regret that the focus of the initiative is more narrowly on employment, we observed that there remains a committed group of community members who regularly participate in Career Bridge events and provide mentorship to participants. These same community members also represent a strong voice that continues to push Career Bridge to provide a more holistic set of services that is not narrowly focused on direct, employment-related supports. Moreover, the involvement of volunteer community members has been vital in sustaining and strengthening the relationship between Career Bridge and the Black Prisoners' Caucus.

**Targeted outreach to community organizations and churches.** One of Career Bridge's community-level goals is to improve community partnerships across systems to implement Career Bridge. Since its inception, Career Bridge has worked to build relationships with organizations in the community and this has continued under the new model. Additionally, the creation of the intern positions has increased the capacity to carry out this work, as the internship job description includes conducting targeted outreach to community organizations. A number of organizations and churches partnered with Career Bridge in 2014 and referred participants, as well as provided a variety of services and support, such as housing and emergency funds.

**Increased service capacity.** A critical weakness of the initial Career Bridge model was the reliance on community sponsors for recruitment and de facto case management services. This approach both limited enrollment capacity (even as Career Bridge failed to meet its enrollment targets) and the ability to fully meet the needs of participants. With the addition of designated navigation and case management services, Career Bridge participants have better access to direct support as well as referrals to necessary support services. Additionally, whereas the job developer had also previously taken on case management responsibilities, she is now in the position to focus her efforts more on identifying employment opportunities and supporting participants' job search efforts. While Career Bridge will need to add additional staff if enrollment continues to increase, the current model substantially expanded capacity to provide intensive services to all enrolled participants.

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Despite the strengths of the current Career Bridge model, our work did find some ongoing challenges with the initiative. In our July 2013 Preliminary Report many of the challenges we identified described substantial near-term limitations to providing even basic services as intended. By comparison, the challenges we discuss below mainly highlight areas where the initiative can improve on existing strengths.

**Need for more individualized employment services.** One of the most consistent and pronounced criticisms we heard regarding the current Career Bridge model was the lack of support for higher-wage employment in sectors that aligned with participants' interests and experiences. Most individuals with whom we spoke acknowledged that, given the barriers facing many of the participants, immediate employment in higher-wage jobs would be a challenge. However, they expressed concern that the current model's emphasis on rapid reemployment and a job development strategy emphasizing survival jobs came at the expense of longer-term career development. Moreover, many respondents suggested participants would benefit from more individualized employment services aligned with their specific skills and expertise. Though the current model has alleviated some of the strain of job development capacity by reducing the de facto case management role of the job developer, it may be that the size of the caseload remains a hindrance to a more personalized service delivery model.

**Need for increased referrals to broader education and training systems.** Despite the initial intent of Career Bridge to serve as a pathway into the broader array of education and training programs in the city, our fieldwork suggests that it remains relatively isolated with few formalized connections to these programs. Aside from referrals to Pioneer Human Services and the co-location of the job readiness training at the New Holly Learning Center, it was not apparent that referral to community colleges or other training programs is common in Career Bridge. While this may largely be a function of the heavy emphasis being placed on rapid reemployment, at least a subset of the participants would likely benefit from connections with more advanced training options. While the job readiness training goes over the importance of credentials in obtaining higher-wage work, participants are not exposed to detailed guidance on how to navigate education systems or how to balance work and school.

**Limited delineation between navigator and job developer role.** Under the current model, there is not a clear delineation between the navigator and the job developer in terms of the provision of employment services. Community members and participants both indicated that they often look to the program navigator for support during the job search process as well as if they encounter issues once employed. Moreover, we heard several examples of the program navigator and Career Bridge interns doing job development work. While our conversations revealed a collaborative working relationship between all of the staff involved in Career Bridge, it may be that redundancies around employment services and navigation are not maximizing the use of Career Bridge resources, particularly as we heard in our interviews that those who are primarily responsible for providing employment services and navigation already have caseloads that are burdensome. The need for more staff in both employment services and navigation is clear based on our conversations with participants, staff, and community members, as well as the navigator himself.

**Variable levels of engagement.** While program data showed most participants had regular contact with core Career Bridge staff, our findings indicate much lower rates of engagement with other Career Bridge services. A substantial portion of Career Bridge participants do not participate in many of the more community-oriented activities. As a result, following the job

readiness training, these participants experience a form of Career Bridge that looks similar to a more typical case management-based employment program. As we discuss below, some of the variation in engagement may be driven by geographical constraints. However, it may also reflect the diverse needs of participants. While some are looking for strong positive peer connections and the ability to give back to their communities, others are more singularly focused on accessing Career Bridge services to support their employment goals.

On the one hand, this variation suggests that there may be a benefit in a more flexible program model that can accommodate these varying levels of needs. However, given the limited staffing and relatively low overall enrollment numbers, this variation may compromise the core Career Bridge service delivery model. It may be worthwhile to consider narrowing the eligibility criteria to focus more specifically on those participants with the highest needs. Alternatively, if the City and Career Bridge community members remain committed to serving individuals with differing levels of needs, it may be beneficial if the model more clearly articulates the available service pathways. Serving all these individuals may also create opportunities during the two-week training for those with fewer barriers to provide peer support for those facing more barriers.

**Unclear eligibility characteristics around residency requirements.** Career Bridge is serving a population with severe housing instability. Many participants are in transitional housing, homeless, or moving between the houses of different friends and families. The official eligibility criteria require that enrollees either be residents of Seattle or homeless. However, especially given the increasing housing costs within Seattle city limits, this means that participants are often living outside of Seattle, typically in other parts of South King County. In part because eligibility criteria are applied only at the point of enrollment, Career Bridge participants are dispersed over a wide geographic area. This has potential implications in terms of Career Bridge goals around community support and ongoing participant engagement. For participants living in Federal Way, Kent, or other South King County communities, it is logistically far more difficult to remain actively engaged; for example, those without cars must take lengthy bus rides to attend meetings. The time commitment and costs associated with attending community events likely contributes to the lower levels of engagement in community-oriented activities mentioned above.

**Need to increase staffing as enrollment increases.** We heard from multiple community members and staff that, as Career Bridge continues to enroll more cohorts of men, current case management and job development capacity will soon be insufficient. In part this is driven by the lack of a formal exit policy and the commitment of staff to maintain ongoing relationships with as many past participants as possible. However, absent staffing increases, this is likely unsustainable.

One potentially promising solution to this challenge is the internship program. Along with providing participants short-term income and work experience, the internship program has the potential to play a vital role in professional development for Career Bridge. Given the value we saw in having Career Bridge staff who share the characteristics and experiences of the men with whom they work, using the internship program to train future potential Career Bridge staff may be one way to address potential issues with staff capacity. This is obviously dependent on the availability of funds to support any staffing increases.

**No clear plan for meeting stated community-level and system-level goals.** City staff and Career Bridge community sponsors consistently emphasized that the goals of the initiative extend beyond individual-level outcomes. There is an obvious desire for Career Bridge to be a

broader agent of change within the African-American community, specifically in terms of supporting the needs of low-income men with substantial barriers to employment. These goals focus on increasing community capacity to meet these needs, increased empowerment of these men, and more clearly articulated pathways to existing support services and education and training programs. However, unlike the individual-level services, there is less clarity in how the Career Bridge model will support these broader, community-level goals. Articulation of measureable goals, interventions, and metrics to track progress in achieving these goals would provide clarity as to how Career Bridge intends to create changes on the community- and system-level.

**Need to rebuild sponsor pool under new model.** Following the shift to the more formalized model, many of the former Career Bridge sponsors took on less active roles in the intervention. To some degree this was by design; Career Bridge was placing unrealistic expectations on a relatively small group of committed volunteers. However, as the model becomes more formalized, it will be critical to have clear plans in place for how to maintain community connections and to take advantage of committed community members willing to act as sponsors for participants. Recent attempts to clarify and define this role are promising developments.

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Career Bridge benefits from a committed and talented group of staff and volunteers who have worked hard to increase the opportunities for low-income men of color facing barriers to employment. The model continues to represent a creative approach to combining public funds with community-based activism. Moreover, its partnership with established efforts to support the transition out of prison offers increased continuity in the social supports available to formerly incarcerated individuals. This has the potential to pay dividends both for the individuals in the re-entry process as well as the communities they come home to.

Our hope is that this report can support ongoing improvement of the Career Bridge model. Given the City's commitment to improving services for this population, especially those recently released from prison, ongoing attentiveness to the strengths and weaknesses of the model is imperative.



## City of Seattle

Date: April 16, 2015

To: Mary Denzel, Deputy City Auditor

From: Steve Johnson, Director, OED  
Catherine Lester, Acting Director, HSD

Subject: Review of Draft Evaluation of Career Bridge Final Report, Dated March 11, 2015

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Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the final draft of the Evaluation of Career Bridge prepared by MEF Associates and dated March 11, 2015.

This external evaluation of Career Bridge is undertaken pursuant to a 2012 Council request (Green Sheet 120-2-A-1), to assess the strengths, weaknesses and outcomes of this new strategy to address the needs of individuals with significant barriers to education and employment. MEF Associates released a Preliminary Report in July 2013, which described the program implementation and challenges for future implementation. The current evaluation focuses on Career Bridge's most recent implementation model, following formalization of a partnership with a non-profit community organization to administer Career Bridge services.

MEF Associates has conducted an in-depth and comprehensive evaluation of Career Bridge, combining qualitative and quantitative source data. We generally agree with its findings and offer just a few points of clarification. We also feel that this evaluation is timely, given the long-overdue national dialogue to reduce disparities and improve outcomes for men of color. Career Bridge's intended goal to "achieve lasting change for individuals facing multiple barriers to self-sufficiency, through an aligned strategy between workforce training, social services and community" offers an approach to address social mobility, institutional roles and community change.

### **Comments to Evaluation**

In its conclusion, MEF Associates points to the need for more individualized employment services and increased connections to education and training. We certainly agree that rapid employment is just the first step in a career path and that individual success goes beyond initial labor market attachment. As MEF Associates notes, Career Bridge participants face a number of employment challenges, including the lack of an education or training beyond high school. Given these circumstances, immediate income is often the most pressing issue and necessary to create the economic stability to persist in a training program. Linking participants with education and training remains an explicit goal. In recent months, the Career Bridge job readiness course has become an accredited program, with each participant dually enrolled at the South Seattle Colleges and earning 6 credits upon completion. Current participants who seek full time employment have more opportunities now than participants did in the 2014 cohorts. Businesses such as

Molly Moon and Starbucks have partnered with Career Bridge to provide mock interviews and employment opportunities for recent cohort graduates.

Career Bridge recognizes the on-going challenge of referring participants for employment because of limited capacity to provide a broad range of support services many men require. Minimal employment skills related to vocational and technical occupations are also a significant challenge that make it difficult to find employers willing to train workers they consider unqualified.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment. Please feel free to contact either of us if you have any follow-up questions.



Date: April 14, 2015  
To: Mary Denzel, Deputy City Auditor  
From: Pamela Banks, CEO, Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle  
Subject: Evaluation of Career Bridge Final Report, Dated March 11, 2015

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Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Evaluation of Career Bridge Final Report.

We appreciate the thorough evaluation of Career Bridge conducted by MEF Associates. They captured the goal of Career Bridge “to achieve lasting change for individuals facing multiple barriers to self-sufficiency, through an aligned strategy between workforce training, social services and community.” As a result, their quantitative and qualitative assessments are well-focused.

We are also pleased to announce that we have addressed many of the challenges identified in the evaluation report prior to its release. These updates have been implemented via the 2015 Career Bridge programming. Since the scope of the evaluation includes only the first three cohorts of Career Bridge participants in 2014, we have outlined the most significant programmatic updates in the attached document “2015 Career Bridge Accomplishments.”

In addition, we have provided additional clarifying details in response to the following areas of the evaluation report:

**III. Description of Intervention, C. Service Delivery Structure, 1. Participant Recruitment and Intake, Shift in Recruitment Models**

Career Bridge aims to serve a population often not found in more typical employment programs. Career Bridge continues to partner with the Black Prisoners Caucus (BPC) to provide training to men prior to release. The Career Bridge Program Manager has established relationships with the Washington State Department of Corrections’ work release sites and community members who have longstanding relationships with BPC, participants, and others. Family and friends remain the primary referral source for participants.

**III. Description of Intervention, C. Service Delivery Structure, 2. Job Readiness Training**

In 2014, we were excited to expand the job-readiness training from twenty to nearly fifty hours in order to cover additional topics identified from participant feedback. This enhanced curriculum was designed by the Urban League and is led by the program navigator. It focuses on engaging the participants, identifying individual barriers, and building rapport between the participants and the program navigator.

**VI. Employment Outcomes and VII. Conclusion, Need for Increased Referrals to Broader Education and Training System**

At the endpoint of the evaluation, Career Bridge’s connection with the South Seattle College involved administering the CASAS test to all participants to provide an orientation to post-secondary training options during the job-readiness training. The focus on post-secondary training has been to provide participants with information needed for future goal setting. For many participants, the need for employment and stability are the initial priority and required to



comply with Washington State Department of Corrections' requirements, and the need for an income. This testing via South Seattle College has also provided participants with guidance on how to navigate education systems.

#### **VII. Conclusion, Need for more individualized employment services**

Prior to receiving the evaluation report, we recognized the need for more individualized employment services. In response to that need, Career Bridge participants now have access to an additional job developer at South Seattle College's "Go to Work Team."

#### **VII. Conclusion, Unclear eligibility characteristics around residency requirements**

The Career Bridge official eligibility criteria require that enrollees either be residents of Seattle or homeless. Considering the increasing housing costs within Seattle city limits, participants are often living outside of Seattle, in other parts of South King County. Efforts to place Career Bridge participants in City-funded and Seattle-based low income housing have been difficult due to participant's criminal histories. Career Bridge has developed relationships with faith-based and other community groups to identify housing despite these challenges.

We look forward to continuing to build and sustain Career Bridge while taking the findings included in the evaluation report into close consideration. This information, in addition to the program updates we have implemented in 2015, will assist us in our efforts to provide opportunities for individuals to achieve lasting change on their journey to self-sufficiency. Career Bridge, as a result, will become stronger, providing a pathway to economic opportunity while strengthening families and the community.

Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions.



## ATTACHMENT

### 2015 Career Bridge Accomplishments

- Expanded training from two-week 50 hours to four-weeks, 80 hours
- 6 college credits enrolled in South Seattle College (SSC) with Student I.D.
- \$75.00 stipend for each completed week of training
- 3 day computer lab taught by SSC instructor
- Access to additional job developer at SSC “Go To Work Team”
- Leveraged funding and resources from SSC
- Partnership with Starbuck’s and Molly Moon (hiring managers have committed to participate in mock interviews and hire CB graduates)
- Opened 2<sup>nd</sup> clothes closet in partnership with Damascus Church
- Partnership with Seattle Tilthe and community kitchen (healthy eating) added to curriculum
- Job Search Portfolio includes (Cover Letter, Resume, Master Application, and Personal Career Plan
- United Way King Grant \$35K
- Received \$15K through anonymous donor- Seattle Foundation
- Job Developer Grant \$75K (pending)

Staffing: All three CB dedicated employees are now full-time ULMS employees with benefits:

- Program Manager and a certified SSC instructor
- New Program Navigator hired
- New Program Assistant is a CB graduate