

WEST VIRGINIA *BRIDGING THE GAP*
TAACCCT ROUND 3

**COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGE
AND WORKFORCE SYSTEM
COLLABORATION STUDY**



Grant Number: TC-24977-13-60-A-54

FEBRUARY 2017

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose and Background

The West Virginia *Bridging the Gap* (BTG) consortium is a system-wide effort led by BridgeValley Community and Technical College (BCTC) that involves nine community and technical colleges within West Virginia. BTG focuses on the energy, advanced manufacturing, construction, and information technology (IT) sectors through development of career pathways and enhancement of academic instruction. BTG has implemented a three-pronged, evidence-based design, which includes: 1) enhanced and accelerated sector-driven career pathways; 2) contextualized, online, blended, simulated, and remote academic instruction; and 3) expanded and individualized student support strategies focused on strategic recruitment, college success courses, peer coaching, career planning, and data-driven decision making.

The BTG consortium has worked to align programs and curricula to meet national industry standards, identify overlapping skill sets, and design effective career pathways at: 1) a state level to build and strengthen sector partnerships and identify portable skill sets, programs, and credentials; and 2) a regional level through employer-driven sector partnerships to assess regional industry-specific needs and ensure credentials, programs, and courses truly meet those needs. In addition, through stacked and latticed credentials (including Prior Learning Assessments), strengthened transferability and articulation of credits, online and technology-enabled learning, and strategic alignment, the BTG consortium has focused on long-term sustainability and success.

As part of the third-party evaluation of the BTG program, the Thomas P. Miller & Associates (TPMA) Evaluation Team has assessed the level of partnership support and building, especially with regard to the working relationship between the community and technical colleges and the local workforce development system. Both community and technical colleges and the state/local public workforce system are critical partners in providing an array of workforce and training services to job seekers, workers, and businesses. The recently enacted Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) anticipates a closer and more proactive relationship between these partners, and the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) grant program promoted a meaningful partnership between community colleges and the local workforce system.

TAACCCT partnership activities may cover a number of areas, including, but not limited to, shared business outreach strategies, coordinated job preparation and job search services, and common intake procedures. The BTG Work Plan specifically discusses the following activities:

- Regional partnership meetings
- Work-based learning through outreach to employers
- Career planning
- Recruitment and outreach
- Job placement planning and services

The purpose of this study is to gather additional, focused information, through a series of interviews and to assess to what level partnership activities have occurred under the BTG program, as well as make recommendations on opportunities for further collaboration after the grant period of performance ends.

Summary of Methodology

To gather information for the study, a series of in-person and telephone interviews were conducted with local workforce system directors. One in-person and four telephone interviews were conducted. Each community and technical college completed an emailed questionnaire that was sent back by a BTG staff member.

Five interviews were conducted with local workforce development system personnel—one interview in-person and five interviews over the telephone. One of the interviewees has worked in the system for 30 years, and others have had significant experience and understanding of the historical relationship with the college partners. As a result of this extensive experience, the workforce interviews have a historical context of the impact of the BTG program and the relationship between partners over a long period of time.

The same interview protocol was used for all the workforce system interviews and the community and technical college staff interviews. The protocol grouped questions in a manner that requested information on 1) partnership activities prior to the BTG program; 2) partnership activities and initiatives as a result of the BTG program; and 3) ways that the partnership may or may not continue after BTG is over. A copy of the interview protocol is provided as [Attachment A](#).

COLLABORATION STUDY FINDINGS

Community and Technical College Interviews

Partnership/Relationship Prior to BTG

In response to the question, “Prior to the *Bridging the Gap* project, did the college and workforce system partner and work consistently together,” four colleges indicated a strong relationship existed, two colleges had a basic relationship, and three colleges had poor working relationships. Examples of relationships prior to BTG include the following:

- Those colleges with a **strong** relationship indicated that they provided skill enhancement services in combination with career services and job readiness assistance. One concrete example was the work the local workforce development system is doing with the college to partner on grant development activities, while also providing up to \$6,000 in Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funding for students’ tuition, books, and fee costs. Other activities under a strong relationship included involvement by college leadership on the Workforce Investment Board (WIB), and one college’s involvement in local workforce development strategic planning.
- Those colleges with a **basic** relationship indicated that activities such as staying in contact about new initiatives or sharing outreach materials between the two systems occurred, but coordinated activities leading to more support for common participants did not happen consistently. One college mentioned that when workforce and college staff were in the same building, there was a strong relationship, but the cohesiveness ended when they separated into different facilities.
- Those colleges with a **poor** relationship indicated that an ongoing working relationship did not exist. Two colleges pointed to some short-term job placement activities, but no ongoing work on behalf of employers or workers is happening.

Partnership/Relationship During BTG

Based on the submitted interviews, the BTG program has improved the working relationship between the colleges and the local workforce development system. Respondents highlighted the following ways that partners worked together:

Referrals for BTG Services. Workforce development partners referred individuals for services who were potentially eligible as participants.

Coordinated Job Fairs/Placement Events. Roughly half the colleges indicated that they participated in job fairs and placement events with the workforce development system. While quantitative information regarding participant enrollment as a result of these events was lacking, college staff indicated that events were often successful.

Coordinated Job Counseling/Career Advising. Several colleges indicated that during BTG, the local workforce development staff and college advisors participated in coordinated job counseling/career advising. This included participation in counseling or advising sessions either at the local one-stop center or on the college campus.

Tuition Assistance. Two colleges indicated that the local workforce system assisted with costs of tuition under the BTG program. Because TAACCCT did not allow grant funds to be used for tuition costs, partnering to cover non-TAA participants with tuition costs provided more opportunities for participant enrollment.

Attending Meetings. To enhance communication, colleges indicated that staff from the workforce system and the colleges are attending each other's relevant meetings more consistently. These include meeting when topics such as sector strategies or participant counseling/advising strategies are discussed.

When asked the question, "Will the BTG project have impacted in any meaningful way the partnership between the college and local workforce system," college answers ranged from "No" to "Absolutely."

- For colleges that had a **strong** relationship with the local workforce development system, respondents generally indicated that BTG enhanced that relationship.
- For colleges that had a **basic** relationship, respondents highlighted an area such as continuity of services or better awareness of what the local workforce development system provides for services.
- For colleges that have a **poor** relationship, BTG did not seem to marginally impact that relationship in a way that overcomes legacy-type barriers to a more productive relationship.

Sustainable Partnership Activities Under BTG

In response to questions regarding ways that the college and local workforce development system could work together after BTG, and practices to sustain, colleges made the following comments:

- "The College hopes to maintain the marketing partnership with the [local workforce partner] and the practice of sending letters to all UI claimants. The College would also like to sustain the student referrals..."
- "We should keep an active presence at the workforce office to provide information and outreach. [College] should also work regularly with workforce counselors to ensure they have accurate information about how to apply at the [College]..."
- Partnership should "increase the number of days WIA is onsite to work with students and assisting WIA clients with transitioning into college." Practices sustained should include "referrals and membership on advisory committees and executive board."
- BTG practices recommend be sustained, "Engage key stakeholders such as employers and resources in the region."
- "All that we have been doing together will remain as part of our partnership. The state government could be a little more cooperative to allow us and others to meet as part of the Rapid Response team as other states allow it. The only answer we get is this is the way we have always done it."
- "All current practices should be sustained without additional cost to the institution. We should meet semi-annually with senior staff and workforce staff to continue improving the relationship. The local workforce development board has provided excellent leadership and

created a collaborative relationship. We are lucky to have them in our region. Relationships are key to success and open many doors. WIOA has also helped by having goals that require [us] to work together.”

- “I would recommend additional and continued trainings of workforce personnel on [college] programs. I think the workforce system really should be doing more in the way of true and legitimate statistics. Those services are not really done now. I also think the workforce counselors need to understand the colleges programs, and know that we work with students who need developmental courses.”
- “This experience did strengthen our relationship with the WIB. Even though the results were not what we expected, it did help to open doors of communication. We still have an open door with the WIB even though we do not have a representative on campus. We will keep the career webpage up and send referrals to the WIB when applicable.”

Workforce System Interviews

Partnership/Relationship Prior to BTG

Local workforce development directors provided the following information regarding activities prior to BTG. Some of these activities span the past 10-12 years, or strong partnership activities happened several years ago, but the relationship was not strong just prior to BTG.

- One local workforce development area conducted a successful Summer Youth Academy in partnership with a college. Other examples of work together between this area and partner colleges include: 1) referrals of individuals to colleges for services; 2) training provider meetings and inclusion on the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL), and 3) leadership on boards. This area has more recently worked with a college on a six-week certificate training initiative in partnership with a large employer. The local workforce development interviewee suggested that more cross training between the colleges and local workforce system would be beneficial.
- One local workforce development area indicated that training initiatives have been successful in the past that targeted training for specific employers; however, these often were time limited and not ongoing. The local workforce development interviewee stated that the local community and technical college is the first option for training—especially with customized or employer-specific training.
- One local workforce development area said their relationship has been strong for the past few years, and they have provided Individual Training Account (ITA) funds for tuition costs. When there was a changeover in college administration, the workforce staff were concerned, but found that the transition went well and the relationship was maintained.
- One local workforce development area believes they have a strong and long relationship with colleges and presented together at a recent National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB) conference. A highlight of the partnership was onsite presence at the first one-stop center and physical staff from the college being present for 2-3 days per week.
- One local workforce development area has had an unsuccessful relationship over time. The interviewee described multiple instances of contracting with the college or providing ITA funds for participant training with weak outcomes and low training enrollment and/or completion numbers. The interviewee recognized budget cuts the college has realized over a number of recent years, but voiced frustration at the lack of an ongoing, productive relationship between the workforce system and the local college.

Partnership/Relationship During BTG

Workforce development staff interviewees did not indicate that BTG had a positive impact overall on the relationship between their system and the colleges. One interviewee indicated that BTG was a major success regarding their partnership with a local college and named ways they worked well together:

- Developing a regional strategic plan
- Quarterly meetings including representatives from the workforce system in another state that formed the economic region

- Participant referrals made to the college for BTG services such as counseling and training, and participant activities were collectively tracked
- Developing a Sector Strategies initiative that focused on three sectors and how the workforce system and college could work to serve business and industry in three economic sectors

Two other workforce development interviewees highlighted some positive activities under BTG, but expressed skepticism that activities would continue once BTG ended. One interviewee highlighted partnership activities such as:

- Sector strategy meetings
- Co-branded outreach and recruitment materials
- Registration with workforce programs and assistance with job readiness, such as resume writing and interviewing to supplement college training
- Participant referrals to the college

The other interviewee indicated that a Career Counselor was on campus Mondays as part of the BTG program. There was sharing of labor market information and work on coordinated job search activities for participants.

The two other workforce development interviewees indicated that BTG was a step back in the relationship between the workforce development system and college partners. One interviewee said that they worked well with their local college historically, but under BTG things “fell apart.” The perception of this local workforce leader was the college did not hire new personnel to conduct BTG activities; rather, the college gave existing employees more to do, which overburdened those employees. The local workforce area was willing to help BTG participants with financial assistance for tuition, books, and fees, but could not make inroads with the college to formalize and streamline a process for making this service available.

The second interviewee stated that they expected a “sense of urgency” on behalf of the college to work in partnership with the local workforce development system in order to meet participant outcomes for the grant funding received, but that urgency was not forthcoming. This interviewee indicated that no credible partnership or relationship happened under BTG.

Sustainable Partnership Activities Under BTG

In response to questions regarding ways that the college and local workforce development system could work together after BTG, and practices to sustain, local workforce development grantees offered the following:

- One interviewee said that the workforce system and college should continue to work together on conducting job fairs, doing combined outreach and recruitment, such as email blitzes, and having case managers meet with college students. This interviewee also recommended doing more cross training between the various staff so workforce development staff could better understand college processes and programs, and vice versa.

- The other four interviewees all expressed concern about the ongoing relationship with their respective colleges, mainly due to the nature of the current relationship. Interviewees typically described, even positive relationships, as being based on a relationship with an individual at a college. One workforce development interviewee has experienced a very positive relationship during BTG, but the BTG director at the college has already left, and partnership activities have virtually ceased as a result. This was a consistent comment made by workforce development interviewees—the extent of working or not working together typically was a result of who was at the college and that person’s understanding and willingness to partner. The partnership was transactional versus institutional.

RECOMMENDATION

Summary

Based on the interview results, the core issue identified that inhibits better partnerships and ongoing relationships between the workforce development system and community and technical colleges in West Virginia is the lack of institutional processes, procedures, and relationships. Positive, value-added partnerships are lacking throughout West Virginia, and when a relationship is in place, it is typically “transactional,” meaning that it is part of a short-term initiative or grant-funded program, and when the personalities and/or funding ends, the partnership ends too.

The State of West Virginia should undertake a comprehensive initiative around strengthening the relationship between the state and local public workforce system and community and technical colleges. This includes identifying the relative strengths of each partner, complementary and overlapping services of each partner, and implementation of institutional processes for working together on behalf of employers and workers.

The primary recommendation coming out of this study is the following:

Implementation

To implement this recommendation, the following steps and activities could be undertaken:

1. With the leadership of the new governor and his administration, implement a statewide workforce development initiative that involves focus groups, analysis and discussion of the services provided by the statewide workforce system and comprehensively by the community and technical colleges, and develop specific actions that can be undertaken on behalf of employers and workers to strengthen the partnerships and processes for doing business together.
2. Under the statewide initiative umbrella, hold local partnership building initiatives that have the “buy in” of both workforce development system and college leadership with a commitment to develop institutional processes for working together.

Environmental Factor Influence

The timing and specific reasons for undertaking these activities are influenced by the following:

- **Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Implementation:** States and local workforce areas are in the immediate throes of implementing WIOA. As part of implementation, there are opportunities for significant community college involvement and partnership. For instance, local workforce areas must implement a competitive process for operation of one-stop centers and a competitive process for provision of career services. Both of these areas include services that community colleges provide.
- **Sector Strategies:** The federal government and many large, national employers are fully engaged in working with states and local stakeholders on implementation of sector strategies. Important progress has been made as part of the BTG program, such as development of important employer partnerships, creation of Advisory Committees and

- holding of Sector Partnership meetings, and alignment of college curriculum and equipment purchases with sector and employer growth occupations. However, ongoing implementation of these sector strategies could be more consistently applied, and coordination between the community and technical colleges and the workforce development system around sector strategies could happen more comprehensively. One activity a more comprehensive partnership could undertake is integrated business and sector outreach to foster more efficient services and eliminate redundant contacts with businesses.
- **Economic Transformation in West Virginia:** With the demise of the coal industry, the West Virginia economy has struggled, and new job growth in other industries is required. Building on career pathways development occurring through BTG and other grant-funded initiatives, the local workforce development system and community and technical colleges must work together to identify the occupations—along with the knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies needed for those occupations—to institutionalize career services and training targeted specifically at those growth occupations in various communities throughout West Virginia.
 - **Budget Realities:** Both state and federal funding for workforce programs will decline both short-term and long-term. Colleges have experienced budget cuts recently, and with continuing federal budget deficits, discretionary spending that supports state and local workforce development programs will decline as well. In contrast, if a national infrastructure bill is passed, opportunities for federal grant funding may become available, but it will be contingent on the local workforce development system and colleges being able to work together.

Conclusion

In summary, where the relationship between the local workforce development system and the community and technical colleges is strong and stable in West Virginia, it is mainly reliant on a good professional relationship between the various staff. This means the relationship and partnership initiatives are transactional versus institutional. To combat this foundational issue, a concerted and committed effort to change this dynamic must be made at both the state and local levels. It is also incumbent upon leadership and staff at the organizations to understand “why” it is important to build a permanent relationship—that is, businesses and workers in West Virginia require it to rebuild the economy and promote job and economic growth in support of the private sector, over time.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction

Purpose and Background

Both community colleges and the state/local public workforce system are critical partners in providing an array of workforce and training services to job seekers, workers, and businesses. The recently enacted Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) anticipates a closer and more proactive relationship between these partners, and the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) grant program promoted a meaningful partnership between community colleges and the local workforce system.

TAACCCT partnership activities may cover a number of areas, including, but not limited to, shared business outreach strategies, coordinated job preparation and job search services, and common intake procedures. The BTG Work Plan specifically discusses the following activities:

- Regional partnership meetings
- Work-based learning through outreach to employers
- Career planning
- Recruitment and outreach
- Job placement planning and services

The purpose of this interview is to ask a series of questions to both West Virginia Community and Technical College officials and local West Virginia workforce system officials to understand how the relationship locally has operated as part of BTG, what best practices may emerge from working together, and how the relationship between the two systems may, or may not, have contributed to accomplishment of activities. If there are improvements or ideas for future work that emerge, those will be included in the final report to Jim Skidmore, BTG Program Director.

Questions for BTG College-Workforce System Relationship Study

1. Prior to the *Bridging the Gap* project, did the college and workforce system partner and work consistently together? If so, how?
2. Do you have a “best practice” example of how you worked together prior to BTG?
3. Thinking back prior to implementation of BTG, were there ways you wished you could have worked better together? If so, how?
4. As part of the BTG grant project, what ways have you worked together?
 - a. Examples include job placement, recruitment, etc.
 - b. If you have not actively worked together, are there some ways you wanted or hoped to work together? If so, what hampered this from happening?
5. Will the BTG project have impacted in any meaningful way the partnership between the college and local workforce system?
6. Do you have specific quantifiable data that demonstrates workforce system involvement in the BTG project?
 - a. Example: Referred X number of individuals to college for intake
7. Moving forward, what BTG practices do you recommend be sustained regarding your partnership?
8. In what ways, generally, could the college and the local workforce system strengthen their collaboration?
9. Do you have any other thoughts, recommendations, or suggestions?