

The Massachusetts Department of Youth Services' Bridging the Opportunity Gap (BOG) Initiative

PROGRAM PROFILE

The Bridging the Opportunity Gap (BOG) initiative was established in 2006 through an appropriation to the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services (DYS) from the Massachusetts State Legislature and through funding from federal Title 1 transition and reentry funds. DYS and its partner, Commonwealth Corporation, the state's quasi-public workforce development agency, have collaborated on this statewide initiative to address the career readiness and employability needs of DYS clients.

The Bridging the Opportunity Gap initiative provides a variety of employment and community-related services to DYS youth, with a special focus on those returning to their home communities following residential treatment.

The goals for the Bridging the Opportunity Gap initiative includes:

- Preparing clients for entry into the workforce through career readiness and employability services;
- Providing participants with credentials, certificates, and training in specific vocational, entrepreneurial, and employability skills;
- Using regional labor market data to identify high growth job opportunities and potential high quality employment for youth;
- Providing exposure to arts and culture and mentoring programming and;
- Access to educational programming that will support the attainment of quality careers.

The Bridging the Opportunity Gap initiative programs are administered by grantee organizations that have a proven track record in effectively administering career readiness and employability services for youth. Grantee organizations, which include community and faith based organizations, workforce investment boards and career centers, and vocational technical high schools across the state, work in partnership to expand program services and resources that result in multiple employability, community service and education pathways for DYS clients.

The BOG initiative has two funding components – a BOG Summer Program, which runs from July – September and a BOG Year-Round program that runs from October – June. The BOG program (summer and year-round) provides funding and offers training and services for one of five different program options including:

Option 1: BOG Work-based Learning Program: A program that provides youth with career readiness and youth development training (a 10 hour orientation and a minimum of 10 follow up sessions) that result in a set of employability skills and competencies, a career portfolio, and participation in 48 hours of subsidized employment. Desired outcomes for this option include a completed youth portfolio and referring each youth in an unsubsidized employment experience.

Option 2: BOG Vocational Training: A program that provides youth with career readiness and youth development training (a 10 hour orientation and a minimum of 10 follow up sessions) that result in a set of employability skills and competencies, a career portfolio, and 96 hours of vocational training. Desired outcomes for this program include completion of an industry recognized credential, a completed youth portfolio and a referral to an unsubsidized job placement or continued vocational training.

Option 3: HiSET and Tutoring Services: A program that enables youth to receive tutoring, pre- HiSET and HiSET services at a DYS District Office by a provider with staff and capacity to implement a HiSET program consistent with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's HiSET approach and DYS's policies and procedures for HiSET services.

Option 4: Arts and Culture Activities: A program that provides youth with youth development training (a 10 hour orientation and a minimum of 10 follow up sessions) that result in a set of employability and youth leadership skills and competencies and at least 48 hours of arts and culture programming, such as the development of murals, art products or engagement with experiences focused on the “Creative Industries”. Desired outcomes include the completion of an individual or group art project.

Option 5: Mentoring Initiatives: A mentoring program that reflects the Commonwealth Corporation AIM model and is aligned with Massachusetts Mentoring Partnership’s elements of effective mentoring. Desired outcomes are 6-8 youth per site who each receive a minimum of 30 hours of mentoring services.

The Bridging the Opportunity Gap initiative supports the successful transition and reentry of DYS clients by focusing on training and services that are tailored to their unique strengths and needs. Programming addresses a variety of learning styles, is interactive and engaging to youth, and delivered in a “hands-on” manner. The Bridging the Opportunity Gap initiative is based on a positive youth development model that is asset-based, culturally responsive, and delivered by personnel with experience in operating youth employability programs.

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