

Mapping the Solution: Equitable Career Advancement for Entry-Level Healthcare Employees

Advancing in the healthcare workforce requires more than just an initial training and entry-level job placement.

The Passport for Career Advancement, developed at Brandeis University, is being implemented as part of the Health Professions Opportunity Grants (HPOG) Program, a federal program providing education and training to low income individuals for occupations in healthcare, a field with higher wages and occupations that are expected to either experience labor shortages or be in high demand. Evaluations of the **HPOG Program** show that many participants complete training and attain jobs in healthcare, but career advancement is still out of reach for the majority. While some participants aim for mid- and high-level healthcare jobs, many get stuck in entry-level positions with few internal advancement opportunities.

The Passport for Career Advancement curriculum builds prospective and entry-level healthcare employees' knowledge about health careers, the potential pathways to different opportunities, and how to access key resources that enable them to advance and secure their long-term employment goals. Brandeis research shows that career advancement is not linear; it takes twists and turns. This curriculum supports activities that guide participants through the winding path.

The curriculum focuses on comprehensively designing the participant experience through the lens of retention and advancement (as opposed to traditional "job placement"), from first contact, to the first coaching meeting, through the arc of the entire education, training, and first employment experience.

Equitable career advancement for entry-level healthcare employees is a process of career counseling, education and training, job placement, and ongoing engagement with an infrastructure that is prepared to enable and enhance opportunities for career advancement, particularly for low-wage women of color

The Brandeis team defined several problems with the traditional approach to career advancement that the curriculum aims to address.

The Passport for Career Advancement curriculum is comprised of five workshops:

- Navigating the Road Through Your Career
- Starting a New Job
- Making Your Employer Work For You
- The Better Jobs Workshop
- Setting and Meeting Goals

Unlike a traditional curriculum, *The Passport for Career Advancement* includes videos, interactive roadmaps with colorful illustrations and stickers, a board game, and even an online component with tools to help employees advance.



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Problem #1: Before Occupational Skills Training

Entry-level healthcare employees often start in jobs that don't align with or contribute to their long-term career goals. Job choice may be motivated more by a short-term need for employment, rather than the "big picture." Oftentimes, this is because entry-level employees have not had the chance to identify or consider their priorities and long-term goals.



The Solution: Educate program participants on the idea that a first job in healthcare is just that: a first step.

- Active and Engaged Coaching and Mentoring:
 - At first contact with the program, provide opportunities for participants to learn about the jobs, workplaces, and career pathways available in their area and how they can navigate life's roadblocks to stay on the path to career advancement.
 - Encourage participants to identify a long-term vision and build out goals that help them achieve it.
 - Participants have their first coaching meeting once they decide to pursue a health career, followed by the new job workshop and a post-education/training coaching session. Coaching calls continue after employment to encourage participation in subsequent workshops.
- Navigating the Road through Your Career:
 - Helps participants identify what they prioritize in a job and why these things are important to them.
 - Introduces participants to different kinds of healthcare jobs, their duties, scheduling considerations, the workplaces that hire these positions, and the general compensation range in their area, including benefits.
 - Offers examples of different health career trajectories and possible hardships by sharing the stories of real participants. Participants trace these stories through an illustrated career map that highlights micro-advancements.
 - Empowers participants to create their own career maps to identify their training pathway and possible challenges they may face along the way.

Problem #2: During and After Training and Education

People in healthcare jobs often don't know where to turn when they are facing challenges in work or life, or where to go for resources or support. When this is the case, many employees end up leaving their jobs in order to tackle these challenges rather than accessing support.



Our Solution: Educate workers about both formal and informal networks they can access to help them stay on the path to career advancement.

- Making Your Employer Work for You:
 - Introduces participants to some of the formal workplace networks that can support them, such as Human Resources (HR).
 - Shows participants that HR is more than the hiring and firing department; HR teams handle employee benefits, mediate workplace issues, and can assist with internal advancement in some workplaces.
 - Illustrates the difference between behaviors that workers see as unfair and those which are illegal.
- Navigating the Road through Your Career:
 - Highlights informal networks people can go to for help navigating their career paths, including family, friends, and the broader community.



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Problem #3: After First Employment

Career Advancement Tools and Strategies: Many traditional workforce programs provide occupational skills training on how participants can get their first jobs in healthcare, but not how to advance in their careers.



Our Solution: Provide advancement-focused training to help workers learn how they can advance and identify tools they can use to get to where they want to go.

- The Better Jobs Workshop:
 - Helps new and experienced healthcare workers identify how their current job aligns with their priorities, how they might be able to advance internally, how to search and apply for jobs while working, and how to incorporate experience into a resume and cover letter.
 - Breaks down advancement into actionable steps of timing, preparation, and communication.
- Setting and Meeting Goals:
 - Gives participants the tools to break down their long-term goals into actionable steps, stay accountable, and celebrate their success.
 - Includes four research-grounded strategies for setting and meeting goals, including developing an accountability plan, breaking goals into actionable intermediate and short-term steps, setting aside time to re-evaluate goals and progress, and having a reward system along the way.
 - Provides opportunities for identifying potential barriers and mapping strategies for addressing them.
 - Links to other tools, including apps and workbooks.

Additional Resources

Contact Brandeis University's team for more information about how to implement these strategies in your own organization. The team is available to provide technical assistance, as well as additional information and references to support the recommendations provided in this brief. Email iere@brandeis.edu or smadstewart@brandeis.edu or visit their [website](#).

Want to learn more? Check out these additional resources.

Career Pathways

- Rethinking Career Pathways and Advancement in Health Care <https://heller.brandeis.edu/iere/pdfs/jobs/rethinking-career-pathways-and-advancement-in-health-care.pdf>
- Mapping the Solution: Equitable Career Advancement for Entry-Level Healthcare Employees - Employer Engagement <https://heller.brandeis.edu/iere/pdfs/jobs/employer-engagement.pdf>

Labor Market and Workforce Diversity

- Perspectives and Practices of New Hampshire Health Care Employers: Improving Quality, Reducing Costs, and Planning for the Future by Building Culturally Effective Health Care Organizations <https://heller.brandeis.edu/iere/pdfs/jobs/perspectives-practices.pdf>
- Culturally Effective Healthcare Organizations: A Framework for Success <https://heller.brandeis.edu/iere/pdfs/jobs/culturally-effective.pdf>

See the next page for stakeholder reactions to *The Passport for Career Advancement* and more information about contacting our team.



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“The Passport for Career Advancement curriculum provides a valuable framework for implementing career advancement workforce training in healthcare and beyond. By co-developing the content with Brandeis University, our team at JVS strengthened our own equity and career advancement knowledge and will incorporate that into our programming going forward.”

– Jerry Rubin, President and CEO, JVS

“This curriculum is vital, relatable, and effective at getting our participants knowledgeable about the advancement process. They constantly talk about the mapping exercise, the connection to the stories of past participants, and how well the series has been put together. I hope this project gets replicated in all industries!”

– Nordia Savage, Vice President of Strategic Initiatives, The Workplace, Inc.

“I think the curriculum that I was given to facilitate and disseminate was excellent. It is very informative and provides ample time and exercises for discussion between the facilitator and the clients as well as among the clients themselves. “

– Libby Johnson, Facilitator and Career Counselor, The Health CareRx Academy at the WorkPlace, Inc.

“[The Curriculum] puts it in black and white on paper about where I am and where you want to be. It kind of gives you that motivation like in order to get here I need to do X, Y, and Z.”

– Monica, Health CareRx Academy Participant

“[The Workshop Week] was the only place where we had that time and space where we worked with each other and we worked with a person who was lecturing us to work on those things.”

– Grace, Health CareRx Academy Participant



The five workshops that comprise *the Passport for Career Advancement* curriculum were designed to address some of the common challenges facing employees in entry-level healthcare jobs. While it was developed with healthcare in mind, many parts of the curriculum can be used and adapted in other fields.

Visit the Brandeis University Institute for Economic and Racial Equity website <https://heller.brandeis.edu/iere/> to learn more about how their advancement curriculum helps people launch and retain careers in healthcare that go beyond entry-level.

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