



Final Report of Peer TA Activity #165

Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network Site Exchange  
Maryland Department of Human Resources  
Site Visit to Bidwell Training Center  
Pittsburgh, PA  
August 27, 2008

Prepared for:  
The Administration for Children and Families  
Office of Family Assistance



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**Maryland Department of Human Resources Site Visit to Bidwell Training  
Center in Pittsburgh, PA  
August 27, 2008**

**I. Purpose**

This Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network site visit was conducted to support the Maryland Department of Human Resources in exploring the Manchester Bidwell Training Center in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Maryland Department of Human Resources was interested in visiting the Bidwell Training Center in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to explore the types of education and training opportunities the center provides and various strategies they use to implement the center and serve students. Maryland is redesigning their welfare to work program and wants to potentially replicate this model in their community with their TANF clientele to support education and training that will offer higher wages, more job stability, less recidivism in public assistance, and better outcomes for their low-income population in general. They estimate that 50,395 TANF participants in Maryland could potentially benefit from a training center like this.

**II. Participants**

- Brenda Donald, Secretary, Maryland State Department of Human Resources
- Kevin M. McGuire, Executive Director, Maryland State Department of Human Resources, Family Investment Administration
- William E. Strickland, Jr., President/CEO, Manchester Bidwell Corporation
- Jessie W. Fife, Jr., Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, Manchester Bidwell Corporation
- James Showrank, Ph.D., Director Community-Government Relations, Manchester Bidwell Corporation
- The Honorable Talmadge Branch, Majority Whip, Maryland House of Delegates
- Louis Curry, Director, Maryland State Department of Human Resources, Family Investment Administration, Office of Operations
- Jacqueline Thomas, Project Director, Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network (Dixon Group)
- Stephanie Barr, Associate, Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network (ICF International)
- John Blyskal, Consultant, Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network (ICF International)

**III. Background on Manchester Bidwell Training Center**

The Manchester Bidwell Training Center (BTC) has been changing lives for over 40 years. BTC's mission is to "change lives by providing career training and academic enrichment to adults in transition."

The Bidwell Training Center is one of the subsidiaries of the Manchester Bidwell Corporation, a nonprofit 501(c) (3) with a \$12.1 million operating budget. William Strickland founded the Manchester Craftsmen's Guild (MCG) in 1968 and assumed

control of the Bidwell Training Center (BTC) in 1972. Through funding from the Manpower Development and Training Act, the original Bidwell Training center was built down the road from where it is located today. Mr. Strickland had a vision to move the center into a bigger and better building and was able to secure \$900,000 in a capital grant from H. J. Heinz Company, who has its world headquarters in Pittsburgh. This started a ripple effect, with more foundations and corporations giving the center money to build a new building. After securing another \$3.5 million from private donations, they approached the Governor of Pittsburgh for grant funding and were awarded an additional \$3 million, enabling the center to build and equip a new building with no mortgage.

The road to success was not always easy, but eventually, the center gained an incredible and unprecedented reputation in the community. After closing their construction training programs, they partnered with Warner Cable in 1983 to train a workforce in cable installation throughout the community. Eighty technicians were trained as a result of this partnership. Bidwell also decided to tap into the medical community because of the abundance of long-term care facilities, hospitals, and insurance companies in the area. This turned out to be successful. They partnered with BlueCross BlueShield and started their medical claims processor training program that is still running today. They also contracted with UPMC, a global health enterprise located in Pittsburgh, to train medical coders, pharmacy technicians, and patient information coordinators. The jobs resulting from these training programs built up the center's reputation, and afforded participants secure, long-term positions that included health benefits.

In 1994, Bidwell built their second building which now houses the UPMC contracted training programs and part of their horticulture program, which trains students to eventually work in the landscaping business. In 2003, they raised over \$5 million to build a greenhouse which houses the second phase of their horticulture program. The greenhouse provides the ideal setting to grow orchids and other plants to sell to Giant Eagle, a major grocery store chain in Pittsburgh. Each year, they sell about \$350,000 to \$375,000 worth of orchids.

BTC is one of four subsidiaries of the Manchester Bidwell Corporation (MBC). MBC nonprofit organizations have served thousands of adults and youth in the Pittsburgh region by providing instruction, guidance, and mentorship in career and arts education. The four subsidiaries of MBC are:

- Bidwell Training Center;
- Manchester Craftsmen Guild;
- National Center for Arts and Technology; and
- Manchester Bidwell Development Trust.

### *Bidwell Training Center*

The BTC mission is to “change lives by providing career training and academic enrichment to adults in transition”. BTC provides, at no cost to the student, market-relevant, career-oriented training that leads to entry-level employment. Each curriculum is designed in partnership with leading corporations; several programs require externships with area companies to help with the transition from school to work.

Literacy, remedial education, and academic enrichment services are provided for those that need additional basic academic skills development. Current BTC programs of study include:

- Chemical Laboratory Technician;
- Culinary Arts;
- Horticulture Technology;
- Office Technology; and
- Medical (Majoring in: Health Unit Coordinator, Medical Claims Processing, Medical Coder, and Pharmacy Technician).

BTC also operates a wholly-owned, for-profit subsidiary- Harbor Garden Park (HGP). Formed in 1998 as a stand alone entity, HGP is a four-story office building available for office leasing. The University of Pittsburgh Medical College (UPMC) occupies roughly 60% of the 63,000 square feet.

### *Manchester Craftsmen Guild*

The Manchester Craftsmen Guild's (MCG) mission is to be a "model for education, training, and hope by reshaping social change through art, entrepreneurship, and community partnership." The MCG supports:

- MCG Youth – arts and educational programs serving approximately 2,500 K-12 students with school day programs, after school programs, summer programs, and adult evening programs. The program uses art and photography studio-based learning environments.
- MCG Jazz – provides concerts, recordings, and educational outreach using Jazz music to touch the lives of thousands each year. MCG Jazz artists have won four GRAMMY® awards (recently Nancy Wilson). MCG Jazz has a 350 seat concert hall, state-of-the-art production equipment, and has produced numerous CDs, video products, and two PBS specials, as well as maintaining archives of photographic and audiovisual recordings.

### *National Center for Arts and Technology*

The NCAT mission is to "impart the educational model by catalyzing the creation of centers for arts and technology." The NCAT promotes the creation of sites to increase the number of communities that support the underserved population.

Operational Replication Sites include:

- San Francisco, California;
- Cincinnati, Ohio; and
- Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Communities in the initial phases of replication include:

- Cleveland, Ohio;
- Columbus, Ohio;
- New Orleans, Louisiana; and
- Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

International communities that have expressed interest in the model include Nova Scotia, Canada; Ireland; and Israel.

### *Manchester Bidwell Development Trust*

The Manchester Bidwell Development Trust (MBDT), incorporated in 1998, established an endowment to secure and sustain programs of the BTC and MCG. MBDT solicits funds and distributes the fund's income for the benefit of MCG, BTC, and their programs.

## **IV. Site Visit Highlights**

- The MBC leadership conveyed a deep passion for its mission and vision, along with an energetic, action-oriented, entrepreneurial business philosophy focused on employment outcomes for their students. The motto is: build the center... start... do... show progress quickly... progress.
- Art and architecture is a key aspect of the overall philosophy to promote social change. The buildings are contemporary structures, full of light and space (e.g. Frank Lloyd Wright influence). The halls and passageways are filled with student, staff, and professionally commissioned works that are displayed throughout and easily accessible. Many artistic works, audio/visual, and photographic collections are housed and openly displayed within the center (e.g. a collection of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. photographs hang on a hall used by students, Dizzy Gillespie provided rights to his collection, many artists' works displayed in halls, tapestries on walls, etc.).
- The BTC initially provided community-based trades and arts training (e.g. carpentry and plumbing). They shifted to their current training program by forming a partnership with industry to identify high-demand entry-level employment needs. Partner companies define the training curriculum to fill those jobs with highly qualified individuals. During discussions, comments like "can not train them fast enough" were often used.

### *Student Enrollment, Participation, and Placement Information*

- All services and training are provided *free* to the student, including books, labs, and even culinary knife kits - whatever is needed. Meals in the dining room, prepared by school chefs, are priced at \$3.00 to students and faculty.
- Students include adults of all ages, from young adults with limited skill sets to older adults looking to re-engage in the job market. About 200 vocational students and 350 academic students per year are enrolled in the BTC. The training center's students are 70% female and the average age is 34 years.
- The success rate of the training center is extremely high, with a graduation rate of 83%. Staff compares this rate to the graduation rate of Pittsburgh city schools which is 50%.
- A large percentage of BTC graduates are immediately placed in jobs that include benefits. Both Pharmacy Technician and Medical Coder majors have achieved 100% job placement rates. The working relationship with industry is close, for example, students train on the actual software used by one partner. There have been instances of companies vying for the opportunity to have their products used by the school over competitors. Getting the hiring companies involved in the

beginning is a key to establishing buy-in and student employment success. Training is driven directly by employer need.

- The quality of the education meets (and may exceed) that available from local community colleges. Programs were re-accredited by the Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges of Technology (ACCSCCT) with no stipulations or concerns. The Pharmacy Technician major is accredited by the American Society of Health System Pharmacists. BTC is licensed by the Pennsylvania Board of Licensed Schools, and is affiliated with, or is a member of many national and regional professional associations.
- To maintain the quality of the career program, new students go through an orientation and screening to determine if they possess the basic skills and knowledge to succeed (e.g. reading level). All career participants must have a high school diploma or equivalency. If they do not possess basic literacy skills, they are referred to the academic division for remedial activities (some 9 out of 10 require remedial activities). During orientation and class study the students are held to standards, such as not being allowed to miss more than 10% of clock hours. Criminal background checks are run as part of the admission process. Drug testing is not done. A dress code is in place to emulate the workplace.
- The course load is accelerated over the traditional two-year associate's degree. Students attend five days a week, six hours a day, compressing the traditional two-year associate's degree to one year. This helps align with the time period for unemployment. Some career paths have waiting lists. Students are allowed to select the career path they wish, with guidance (e.g., drug use not compatible with pharmacy track). Courses combine class work, field trips, invited speakers, and full time (e.g., six week) externships with hiring companies.
- Located in Pittsburgh, the BTC serves the entire Commonwealth. Residents outside Pittsburgh may apply and attend. Housing and transportation remain the responsibility of the individual student.
- The training center does not charge students to attend. Instead, they use the fact that their buildings are mortgage free as leverage, use money they make from various programs, and use donations and partnerships to support their students.
- After orientation, there is a lag time of two weeks before students start classes in which the admissions department conducts a background check. BTC has the right to refuse people from attending if they have a criminal history but, as mentioned, they do not drug test. Entrance criteria consist of unemployment or underemployment for admission. The programs/certificates the training center provides are for "chemical laboratory technicians, culinary arts, horticulture technology, office technology, and medical programs including health unit coordinators, medical claims processors, medical coders, and pharmacy technicians." The training programs usually last about 10 months to a year. During orientation (before classes start) students are taught valuable soft skills.

### *Funding Information*

- MBC operates on a budget of about \$12 million. The business funding model relies on a mix of public and private grants and contributions. Partial public funding is established as a line item in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's budget. Revenue is split about 50% public and 50% private/earned income. The organization leverages the latest in-kind donations (computers, software, studio equipment, kitchen equipment, etc).

- Earned income is derived from selling a variety of products and services related to the programs. Opportunities to obtain income include selling plants grown in the horticulture center (e.g., about \$350,000 per year revenue growing and selling orchids and other specimens), producing CDs/DVDs of well known Jazz recording artists (Nancy Wilson), offering digital recording/finishing services, and other endeavors. They have a state of the art Jazz recording studio as part of the Manchester Craftsmen Guild, MCG Jazz, and an amphitheater in which they hold frequent concerts (about 40 a year). Concert tickets sell at \$40.00 each and their theatre holds 350 people. They have produced fifteen CDs which also make money for the organization. They were also able to secure a liquor license to sell alcohol during their jazz concerts. The culinary program at the training center earns about \$35,000 a year from selling lunches to students at \$3.00 each. (If students can't afford lunches, they are given vouchers).
- The corporation is funded by the State Department of Education, the Workforce Investment Board, and from partnerships with many foundations and corporations. Many of their programs are self-sustaining as well.

### *Background on Past Implementation in Maryland*

- The BTC model was tried in Baltimore, Maryland approximately 5-7 years ago but did not succeed as anticipated (Maryland Center for the Arts and Technology). The MBC has learned from several failed and successful replication experiences and has refined a process to help develop new sites. A replication team is available to help other interested entities set up and kickoff new centers. The planning process involves working with stakeholders in government (state and local), other nonprofits, community leaders, foundations, and employers. A winning formula is to start small, build a reputation, and gain momentum. The local leadership will take ownership and help adapt to changing needs.

### *Final Thoughts*

- The importance of independence and flexibility of the organization to diversify and fit within the structure of the community was noted. The organization uses its' discretion to assume risks to further its mission, increase creativity, and respond quickly. Strong backing and support of public, private, and community leaders is essential to long term success. MBC has an independent board established, made up of corporate leaders that can act quickly and decisively to further the course of MBC's mission.

### *MBC Recommendations to Maryland*

- Prepare for a minimum six months to a year of planning to develop a similar training center;
- Look at other nonprofits and foundations in the area;
- Talk to legislative and cabinet members, and community leaders. Each community is different and can use different funding streams, including TANF funds;



- Tailor trainings/certificates to local labor market jobs in demand. From their experience, it takes about \$1 million to get things started and it is best to start small to build a good reputation within the community; and
- Strongly consider that the center be a nonprofit, stand alone entity and not a government organization. William Strickland and his staff are dedicated to helping other areas develop and implement similar training centers. They use their experience and expertise to contract with a community to help them through the process to ensure they are successful. (Their preference is to provide assistance to new training center communities for five years).

## **V. References**

- Manchester Bidwell Corporation Annual Report 2006-2007.
- Verbal communication with William Strickland and Bidwell Training Center employees.

## **VI. Web References**

- <http://manchesterbidwell.org/>
- <http://www.bidwell-training.org/>
- <http://www.dhr.state.md.us/>
- <http://www.dhr.state.md.us/fia/>

## **Appendix A: Agenda**



## Building a PEER TA Network State by State

*Site Visit – Manchester Bidwell Training Center  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania  
August 27, 2008*

### **AGENDA**

#### Overview:

The Manchester Bidwell Training Center provides education, career path and employment opportunities in the technology, culinary and medical fields to the southwestern Pennsylvania community. The Maryland State Department of Human Resources is visiting the nationally recognized Training Center in order to develop implementation strategies for a program of similar services in Maryland.

August 26, 2008	Evening	Team arrives in Pittsburgh, PA.  <b>Hotel:</b> Omni William Penn Hotel 530 William Penn Place Pittsburgh, PA 15219 Telephone: 412-281-7100
August 27, 2008	8:00 A.M. - 8:30 A.M.	Team travels to the Manchester Bidwell Training Center.
	8:30 A.M. - 9:00 A.M.	Introductions: Maryland team to Manchester Bidwell Training Center representatives.
	9:00 A.M. - 12:00 P.M.	Tour of organization; Converse with staff; Review career path and educational programs offered.
	12:00 P.M. - 1:00 P.M.	Lunch (on own).
	1:00 P.M. - 4:30 P.M.	Topics for discussion: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Short and Long term results of program participation;</li> <li>2. Improving participation rates;</li> <li>3. Funding and budgeting;</li> <li>4. Strategic Partners – building and maintaining relationships; and</li> <li>5. Lessons learned.</li> </ol>
	4:30 P.M. - 5:00 P.M.	Wrap-Up.

## **Appendix B: Participant List**



## Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network

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