

The Bronx Opportunity Network

The Bronx Opportunity Network (BON) is a neighborhood based group of seven Bronx-based organizations with long histories of performing social services in the South Bronx region. In 2008, Bronxworks, CUNY Prep, East Side House, FEGS, Good Shepherd Services, Grace Outreach, and New Settlement began conversations with JobsFirstNYC to create a collective entity to support the out-of-school, out-of-work students they served toward college persistence and completion. The original eight community based organizations partnered to create the Bronx Opportunity Network (BON). Launched in Summer, 2011, the BON's mission is to enable underprepared Bronx students to improve their academic skills, overcome personal barriers, and enroll in and complete college.

Now on its fifth cohort, the BON includes Bronxworks, CUNY Prep, East Side House, The Door, Good Shepherd Services, Grace Outreach, and New Settlement. The current model includes continued intervention with participating students through their entry into college alongside the intensive summer bridge program. With this access to help in addressing academic and life issues as they arise, the BON has enrolled a total of 426 students, and each cohort has seen three-year graduation rates that are higher than their control group counterparts at Bronx Community College.

How It Works

The BON serves students in the South Bronx who are graduates of GED programs, transfer schools and other alternatives to the K-12 system. BON partners provide students with a six-week, 50-hour summer intensive

bridge program to prepare for their first college semester. Through the bridge program, the BON provides academic coaching and instruction as well as individualized mentoring. Participating students also receive cash stipends they can use to offset school-related expenses. Upon completing the bridge program, students who enroll at Bronx Community College and Hostos Community College in the fall semester are supported by BON staff members, who continue to work with them through their entry into college. Each member organization has established a presence on both college campuses, making them more accessible to help students in addressing academic and life issues as they arise. This accessibility has helped the cohorts persist at high rates.

As one of the BON's first major accomplishments, the seven member organizations, acting collectively, successfully persuaded Hostos and Bronx Community College to re-administer the COMPASS tests, which determine placement for entering students, to participants who completed the BON's summer bridge program, an unprecedented concession in the field. This allowed the partners to gear the summer bridge program towards preparing participants to retake the CUNY COMPASS admission tests.

For individuals striving to get on track toward career success at family-supporting wages, earning an associate degree is often a crucial step: compared to high school graduates, associate degree earners in New York City earn nearly \$10,000 more per year. The BON increases access for individuals who might otherwise struggle, as the odds facing new college students coming out of alternative secondary schools or high school equivalency programs are particularly long. Every year in New York City, thousands of students

leave college without completing their degrees, often after having expended their financial aid in remediation courses. Through the BON, we are able to intervene.

JobsFirstNYC's Workforce Partnerships

JobsFirstNYC is an intermediary focused on improving employment and educational opportunities for out-of-work and out-of-school young adults in New York City.

The development and support of collaborative, inter-organizational Workforce Partnerships, such as the Bronx Opportunity Network, is a key component of JobsFirstNYC's strategy to advance practice in the workforce development field. By capitalizing on JobsFirstNYC's role as a neutral intermediary, fundraiser, and facilitator, these inter-agency partnerships benefit both employers and young job seekers directly, by fostering long-term collaboration and sharing of resources and services.

JobsFirstNYC plays a critical role in supporting workforce partnerships by affording CBO's the opportunity to collaborate on common issues challenging their work in their neighborhood. As an intermediary, we support these organizations as they design and implement an effective and different way of working with each other. Through an organic process, these CBOs work together to determine the best strategies to effect change at a programmatic level as well as to define an appropriate outcomes framework. In addition to piloting Workforce Partnerships and carrying them through their demonstration stages, JobsFirstNYC hopes to ultimately create opportunities for their replication and implementation on a wider scale and at the systems level.

The community organizations currently participating in the BON include:

