

## **Elements of a successful career ladder program**

Career ladders for employees interested in pursuing a nursing or allied health profession should incorporate the following elements:

**(1) Career ladders should be created for incumbent employees to become nurses or allied health professionals.**

Career pathways should be developed for staff interested in health professions such as nursing or allied health. Collaboration with higher education and workforce development organizations is critical in program development.

A career ladder should provide a continuum of educational opportunities for staff at different levels in their education/training. English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes could be offered to allow staff to gain basic English competency. For others, “bridge” coursework (e.g., introductory math, science and English courses) may be necessary before entering nursing/allied health educational programs while a separate pathway is appropriate for those employees academically prepared to begin an Associate’s Degree in Nursing (ADN) or Bachelor’s Degree in Nursing (BSN) programs. Since there is a shortage in nursing faculty, an additional career ladder could be developed to enable BSN trained nurses interested in teaching with an opportunity to pursue a Masters Degree.

A Health Care Consortium is being developed through the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC), and through this, hospitals will be able to participate in a comprehensive analysis of labor force needs. Individualized assessments will also be available for hospitals that become Consortium members. The PIC is an important partner in implementing and strengthening career ladder programs, because they have worked with many of the hospitals on different workforce development initiatives.

In order to recruit staff from various hospital departments and in different positions, the program should be promoted to all employees through outreach and informational campaigns.

**(2) Career ladders should offer support that maximizes opportunities for successfully completing the program.**

In order to enhance participation in educational programs, courses should, whenever possible, be offered onsite. This is critical in keeping staff engaged and facilitating participation, because travel time and transportation are often barriers for staff.

Additionally, release time could be offered or staff given flexibility in their work schedule to attend classes.

Tuition and registration fees, whenever possible, could be covered by the hospital; however, if full coverage is not financially possible due to budgetary constraints, programs could provide partial assistance through scholarships and tuition reimbursement.

Employees often experience challenges in completing programs because they may be juggling multiple jobs, childcare and/or transportation issues. Hospitals can connect staff with the Higher Education Information Center (HEIC), which provides free, individualized educational planning information and counseling.

**(3) A formal mentoring infrastructure can support employees interested in nursing and allied health careers.**

Career ladder programs benefit from a formal mentoring infrastructure that matches participants with health professionals for social support, academic, and career guidance. Many hospitals have staff persons who volunteer to be mentors. Programs could formalize the mentoring infrastructure by developing a database of staff available to serve as mentors for career ladder participants. This database could also include information on a mentor's professional background or career path.

Hospital staff persons who volunteer as mentors should have an opportunity to participate in a structured training to develop coaching and mentoring skills and to meet other staff that will serve as mentors.

**(4) Career ladder programs can benefit from an evaluation plan to measure success and identify challenges.**

Measures should be established to assess levels of participation, program satisfaction, and improvements in work performance as a result of completing the program.

Evaluation plans should also include a method for tracking the number of participants successfully completing the program and being hired for the position they trained. This data could be used by hospitals in pursuing local, state, and national funding opportunities.