
What We Do

After hosting 14 community conversations in the winter of 2016, we learned about the greatest obstacles people in our community are having to getting ahead in life: being unable to connect with resources and a feeling of not belonging. Berkshire Bridges will help to change this.

The Berkshire Bridges – Working Cities Pittsfield Initiative will move individuals and families from poverty to the middle class. We will build relationships, open doors to more resources and opportunities, and increase respect between all people, regardless of where you come from or how much money you make.

We believe that all people in Pittsfield should experience a safe, thriving, and just community.

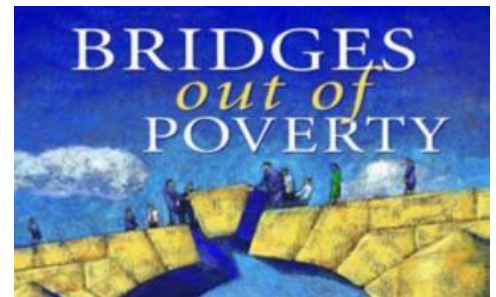
Although the Working Cities grant is focused in Pittsfield, this group and the relationships we are building includes everyone in Berkshire County. To learn more, visit WorkingCitiesPittsfield.org.

How will we do this?

We are committed to using the evidence-based **Bridges Out of Poverty model** (also known as Bridges). Bridges brings people from all walks of life together in communities around the country. Our current partnering organizations have agreed to bring Bridges to their agencies, learning the “common languages” and “hidden rules” of how our society works, and why misunderstandings between people of different backgrounds occur. This, in turn, will help agencies treat all employees, clients, and community members with dignity. We will become a Berkshire Bridges community, aiming to end poverty in Pittsfield.

What is Bridges Out of Poverty?

Bridges is a series of ideas, books, and tools that bring people from all economic classes together to address the root causes of poverty, and support their journey to the middle class. These tools help employers, community organizations, social service agencies, and individuals (1) build individual assets, (2) build community assets (human and social capital), and (3) realize and reduce exploitation, while advocating for political-economic policy change in the government.



Bridges Out of Poverty is not a program. It’s a way of thinking and new strategies that can be used to help you move out of poverty and build stability and sustainability in your life.

If you are living in poverty, you can take the **Getting Ahead** course to recognize what’s holding you back in life. If you are in the middle or upper classes, own a business, or work with community members, Bridges will help you see what your neighbors in poverty are struggling with, and how you can truly support them. Your business, agency, or group can nominate a **Bridges Champion** who will be certified to teach your fellow co-workers about the Bridges Out of Poverty tools. To learn more, visit <http://www.ahaprocess.com/solutions/community/>.



What is Getting Ahead?

Getting Ahead (GA) is a way to analyze your life and to make plans for building personal and family resources (diagram above). It's a learning experience that helps you gain confidence and take charge of your life. You matter in this community, and GA will allow you to see how your knowledge and skills can build a stronger Pittsfield and Berkshires for everyone.

In Getting Ahead, you learn about your community and point out the barriers you encounter as you begin to move out of poverty. The Berkshire Bridges Initiative will train graduates of GA to be Community Navigators that connect friends, family, and neighbors to resources and knowledge in the Berkshires.

How to Be Involved

- Become a member of the Berkshire Bridges Initiative and attend monthly meetings.
- Join one of the Berkshire Bridges committees: Communications, Facilitators, Food, Berkshire Bridge Builders (brainstorming group). Contact Christian for information on how to join at bewaters@berkshirehabitat.org
- Become a Bridges Champion for your organization or business, where you will be certified in Bridges Out of Poverty and become the driver of change in your agency.
- Enroll in the Getting Ahead program to become a Community Navigator to connect your family, friends, and neighbors with the resources they need.



Berkshire Bridges-Working Cities Pittsfield Initiative

About Us
WorkingCitiesPittsfield.org

How to Connect With Us

WorkingCitiesPittsfield.org

Updated regularly with our Initiative work. Post your events and messages in the Ongoing Conversations forum.

[Facebook.com/BerkshireBridges](https://www.facebook.com/BerkshireBridges)

Like, share, and follow what we and the community are doing.

Carolyn Valli, Executive Director of Central Berkshire Habitat: (413) 281-5051

Christian Waters, AmeriCorps VISTA Working Cities Coordinator: bcwaters@berkshirehabitat.org

Who We Are: We Are You!

In addition to several dozen community resident partners, our Initiative agency members are:

Berkshire Children and Families, Berkshire Community Action Council, Berkshire Community College, Berkshire County Chapter of the NAACP, Berkshire County Regional Housing Authority, Berkshire Health Systems, Berkshire Housing Development Corporation, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, Berkshire United Way, BerkshireWorks Career Center, Brien Center, Central Berkshire Habitat for Humanity (Lead Agency), City of Pittsfield Department of Community Development, City of Pittsfield Office of the Mayor, Christian Center, Downtown Pittsfield, Inc., First United Methodist Church of Pittsfield, Fenn Street Community Development Corporation, Gladys Allen Brigham Center, Goodwill of the Berkshires, Greylock Federal Credit Union, Heart 2 Heart Ministry, Manos Unidas, Multicultural Bridge, Pittsfield Public Schools, ROPE, Westside Neighborhood Initiative.

Join our movement today!

Working Cities Wednesday Meeting Guidelines

Community Rules at Meetings (set at the July Working Cities Wednesday meeting)

- Introduce yourself, but leave out your title (we're all community members here).
- Listen respectfully when someone else is speaking—no cross talk.
- If you're usually a quiet person, step up. If you tend to do a lot of talking, be sure to step back so all voices are heard.
- Clarify any abbreviations you are using so everyone understands.
- Be open to all ideas.

What is Basecamp?

Basecamp is our project page and a communication tool. We use this for information and updates about the Berkshire Bridges Initiative, such as: meeting planning, agendas, minutes, marketing materials, and major announcements. There is a message board, documents folder, tasks lists, and a calendar.

→If you want to join Basecamp or have questions about how to use it, contact Christian, the AmeriCorps VISTA Working Cities Coordinator, at bcwaters@berkshirehabitat.org.