

**Promising Practice: Boot Camps**  
**South Carolina Department of Social Services**  
**Health Occupations Preparation for Employment (Project HOPE)**

A boot camp-style training can introduce program candidates to the type of commitment needed to complete coursework, as well as enhance their prerequisite skill sets. The primary objective of the boot camp approach is to provide a realistic environment where students must learn to adapt to demanding situations typically encountered during their training program and professional life. In the case of HPOG grantees, this approach can be used to introduce individuals to healthcare occupations and their training requirements. Boot camps can also provide concentrated emphases in prerequisite knowledge and skills needed to enter the training program. This introduction allows the participant to begin to develop strategies for time management and gain an understanding of the daily preparations and lifestyle adjustments necessary to complete the program. Boot camp training can also provide students with an opportunity to build relationships with peers and instructors, initiating a support network to accompany them throughout the progression of training courses.

The South Carolina Department of Social Services utilizes boot camps in its Project HOPE program to address work-related behaviors (e.g., attendance, working with supervisors) and soft skill improvement (e.g., customer service orientation, time management) among its HPOG participants. The boot camps were developed from the project director's experiences in workforce development over her 40-year career. The boot camps are located in four different locations statewide and are conducted in four-week intervals on a residential basis for participants. The residential nature of the boot camp is similar to the practice used by Job Corps. During the Boot Camp, participants are screened and assessed to determine academic, economic, social and emotional barriers to success. This intensive approach involves pairing participants with mentors and HPOG program staff to enable participants to focus and develop their individualized training/career plans, eliminate barriers to employment, and link participants to supportive services. A key positive of the boot camp is the shared experience that the cohort of participants jointly undertakes. They report that this shared experience helps increase retention rates and bolsters participant camaraderie in the long run.

Project HOPE uses a boot camp as a first-step for students to support the successful completion of the condensed training sessions. The boot camp sessions also include adult basic education where deficient math, reading, and writing skills are remedied, so participants are able to transfer more easily into a local community or technical college for healthcare training classes.

There are some important factors to consider when implementing a boot camp. First, a location that is easily accessible to public transportation is important for participants' ease in accessing the camp. South Carolina also stresses the importance of focusing on communicating a sense of upward mobility in selecting a location. For example, selecting a community college (rather than a TANF agency location, for example) as a location for the camp conveys the feeling of higher education and upward mobility. Participants will gain the experience of being on a college campus by participating in the program. On the college campus, additional resources

and facilities, such as lab facilities, are part of the participant experience rather than only a traditional classroom. The college setting conveys to HPOG participants that moving upward through a career trajectory is a focus of the program.

Second, programs may want to work on marketing and promotional materials that describe the boot camp process and purpose to potential participants and potential program partners. Materials that are developed for prospective participants should realistically depict the investment that potential HPOG students will need to make along the journey. Truthful and genuine representation will help participants anticipate some of the difficulties that may arise and understand that many students have encountered these obstacles and overcome them in order to succeed. It is important to strike a balance in developing promotional materials that are worded in a positive and encouraging manner, while accurately conveying some of the challenges students will likely face.

Third, programs will need to recruit mentors to pair with participants during the boot camp and beyond into their subsequent employment. South Carolina recruited healthcare professionals statewide to become mentors. Mentors should be individuals who have experienced some of the same academic and personal struggles that HPOG participants are likely to face, as well as being in the same career field as HPOG participants are training for. South Carolina spoke to their HPOG partners about their employees serving as mentors. Many hospitals have community service requirements for employees. Hospital employees can fulfill these service requirements by serving as boot camp mentors.

Finally, it is important to ensure that selected mentors understand that they have a vital role as part of the case management team for HPOG participants. Frequently, the mentors have more regular contact with HPOG participants than others on the HPOG team. As a result of this greater contact with HPOG participants, mentors may become aware of potential issues and problems earlier than other HPOG staff might. It is important for mentors to share their case management notes and observations with others on the HPOG staff team so that appropriate resources and supports can be made available to assist the HPOG students in their journey through boot camp and beyond.