

Bridge Foundry 2017-2020 Strategic Plan

SUMMARY

- vision** A technology industry where diversity is the norm.
- mission** To transform tech culture, by generating leaders, teachers and mentors who empower the underserved.
- history** Since 2009, Bridge Foundry has empowered people with technology through teaching and facilitating access, enlarging the community of people who give back and teach others. Bridge Foundry was instrumental in the creation of the learn to code movement. Using our open-source curricula and teaching techniques, hundreds of workshops in dozens of cities around the world have been organized and taught by volunteers.

PROFILE

Bridge Foundry's primary focus is on expanding diversity in specific technology communities by supporting the following Bridges:

- RailsBridge
- GoBridge
- ClojureBridge
- MobileBridge
- ScalaBridge
- RustBridge
- ElixirBridge
- ElmBridge

Each bridge is established when one or more volunteers step up to organize an initiative that focuses on a specific technology, or set of technologies, and shares open source curriculum and program materials with learning communities across multiple geographies. Bridge Foundry supplies tools and operational support to the leaders of these groups. Fostering inclusive and diverse leadership creates a sustainable organization, and more importantly, creates positive effects in changing the landscape for the communities we serve.

Our diversity hypothesis: the biggest gap in tech is the lack of *good* jobs. We need jobs where there is opportunity for advancement based on actual skill and capabilities. The pipeline is a big part of the problem, and our programs do address pipeline issues; however, we have seen that success requires more than skills. There are elements of our programs that are creating change. We're seeing a shift in the culture where our work intersects with tech companies. We seek to research this positive culture change, getting to the roots of what is effective, both in our programs and in the innovative programs of the tech companies we work with.

Bridge Foundry's key differentiator from other tech training initiatives is its focus on training repeat participants as teachers. As teachers/leaders, Bridge Foundry volunteers learn to catch and correct disrespectful behavior in human interaction, along with gaps in technical understanding. While the focus is on technical skill development, we have anecdotal evidence that these leadership skills also contribute to workplace transformation by creating change agents within the tech industry.

All of Bridge Foundry's bridges and chapters focus on expanding diversity in tech via outreach to underrepresented groups. Seventy percent of workshop and outreach efforts are targeted primarily at women with the remaining 30% focusing on other underrepresented groups.

Bridge Foundry's local fundraising model is key to scale. The majority of our funding is from local businesses who support the volunteer organizers and mission with both cash and in-kind donations, streamlined with shared services for accounting and banking. Community chapters can apply to Bridge foundry for grants while operational chapters include leaders who take on fiscal responsibility for their region.

OUR WORK

To achieve our vision we are focused on two key areas of:

1) **Making diverse teams the expected norm**

- Giving majority demographic developers the experience of working in diverse teams, so that they can take an active role in attracting talent and correcting unfair recruiting practices
- Empowering the underrepresented by modeling what good workplaces are like, diversifying the talent pool of programmers.
- Increasing skills and awareness in the general population.

2) **Creating an inclusive community of practice that shares technical knowledge and experience**

- Expanding the community by creating a fun, welcoming environment for all participants (with outreach to expert software developers as volunteers) and providing training on how to engage respectfully and inclusively.
- Community participation results in keeping diverse tech workers in the workforce by providing a network to colleagues and resources.
- Providing professional development for people currently working in the technical roles, deepens and broadens technical skills.
- Open source materials for grassroots organizing enables any community member to develop leadership skills.

STRATEGY

The bulk of our mission is carried out by volunteers who are also our target audience in this transformation of the industry. Volunteers learn to be leaders in small ways, as TAs and teachers, developing communication skills that let them be leaders in their workplaces.

Our impact scales with these volunteers.

- Personal relationships with local companies result in financial support of cash & in-kind donations, as well as a source of valuable professional relationships.
- Central funding accelerates growth, supporting less experienced volunteer leaders and new initiatives.

In 2016, there were 88 workshops funded with \$48,816, with average workshop cost of \$545, however individual workshop costs range from \$0 (with in-kind donations) to \$2500.

With a proven local funding model, our goals for 2017-2020 are:

1) **Scale Current Programs**

Establish a steady growth rate, surpassing 100 workshops per year, by investing in sustainable leadership and outreach.. This requires easier onboarding of new volunteers, better communication, support for volunteers, central recruiting of new volunteer leaders with succession planning and replicable partnership models.

2) **Develop inclusion training that supports our mission**

- a) Prepare our volunteers for handling difficult conversations
- b) Offer standalone training in corporate environments

3) Build a resilient organization

Create a predictable revenue stream and the organizational infrastructure to support the efforts above.

CRITICAL ISSUES

1. *Building a resilient organization: Staffing and Leadership Development*

Changes in board and chapter leadership can have significant impact on programs. For example, SF Railsbridge leaders became mothers, started a YC company, took on leadership role at work, resulting in a gap in SF workshop organizing. New leaders didn't have clear structure and understanding of organizational resources available to them. We need to create relationships and tools that can help the organization weather the inevitable shifts in volunteer leadership.

Creating Continuity As of September 2017 Bridge Foundry is an independent 501c3. Our volunteer leadership team includes: a new, 3 person Board of Directors, continuing Program Board, and CEO. We currently have just one part-time paid staff member: Finance Manager.

For 2018, we must determine appropriate levels of staffing and the balance of employee and contractor roles, as well as further develop the Board of Directors and Program Board. Clearly communicate roles, responsibilities, and operational guidelines.

- a. Recruit additional members of Board of Directors, and create on-boarding process.
 - b. Continue to provide tools such as [BridgeTroll](#) that simplify delivery of workshops by our volunteers and develop new tools that will assist them in organising future efforts.
 - c. Establish an ongoing fundraising capability that lets us maintain one year of reserve for baseline operations.
2. *Fundraising for development and delivery of inclusion training.*
- a. Determine success metrics based on our theory of change, improving tracking of participation and outcomes using qualitative and quantitative metrics
3. *Fundraising for development and delivery of inclusion training.*

Our volunteers and the majority of tech workers need help learning how to take a more active role in creating respectful and inclusive interactions.

Our mission requires eliminating disrespectful behavior in technology teams. In 2016, we piloted "Inclusion training" for technical teams. Making this training available as part of the core workshop curriculum and as a standalone training for corporate environments is key to our mission of transforming tech culture.

SECONDARY ISSUES

1. *Brand development*

Bridge Foundry is known more by its bridges than the umbrella organization, however in order to expand fundraising for ongoing and new initiatives, a new identity and messaging package is needed. A strong brand helps to communicate the shared vision to our distributed volunteer network, creating sustainable regional chapters by providing a cohesive identity, enabling outreach efforts by staff for

continuity. However, it is important that any branding effort by Bridge Foundry embrace the strong identities that our Bridges and chapters have built independently.

2. *Thought Leadership*

Bridge Foundry has deep knowledge in the research and practice of diversity and inclusion with insights that are not widely understood across the industry. A stronger Bridge Foundry presence in discussions on diversity and inclusion in tech could raise awareness of workplace challenges and opportunities, in addition to the “college pipeline problem” narrative. Specific conference talks and blog posts have had big impact in the past. Some examples:

- a. Sarah Mei, [Moving the Needle: How the San Francisco Ruby Community got to 18%](#) led to Eric Ries’ focus on diversity in Lean Startup conference participation
- b. Sarah Allen, [Power of Transparency](#), led to Bill Kennedy & Carlisia Campos starting GoBridge

3. *Communication to Stakeholders*

Bridge Foundry’s bridges and chapters operate independently; the option of having a loose affiliation allows for innovation and viral growth. More effort is needed to create a shared understanding of the org and our shared resources, to create more resiliency.