

Office of Integrated Learning, Office of Strategic Partnerships, Career Development and Employer Engagement

The Bridge Program

2026 Program Summary



Addressing the Gap: A Bridge Program

Students attain professional development experience.



Community Partners support and address complex organizational needs.

Bridge Program - Background

The objective of the Bridge Program projects are two-fold:

1. To measurably benefit “the Client” – a community-based organization, by addressing an issue, challenge, or opportunity facing their organization.
 2. Provide an opportunity for Katz students to work together on a project that furthers our societal impact in the Pittsburgh region and develops and enhances their professional skills.
- Each project has 4-5 Katz MBA or MS students as well as an Executive Coach.
 - The program duration is approximately eight weeks.



Project Management Office (PMO)

From scoping out the projects to the final deliverables, and everything in between, the PMO is responsible for overseeing the overall success of the Bridge Program. These projects were not possible without the following individuals affiliated with the University of Pittsburgh School of Business:

- **Christopher Barlow**
 - Director of Strategic Partnerships
- **William McShane**
 - Associate Director of Integrated Learning
- **Jennifer O'Toole**
 - Associate Director of Career Development
- **Lynn Rosen**
 - Associate Director of Academic Programs
- **Ashton Brown**
 - Program Coordinator, Integrated Learning
- **Morgan Clark**
 - Student Engagement Manager and MS Management Student



Executive Coaches

From guiding student teams through ambiguity, to sharpening their problem-solving approaches, the executive coaches were essential in ensuring the growth and success of the Bridge Program. Their mentorship, insights, and steady encouragement made all the difference.

- **Jen DeBrincat** – Coach for Pitt News Project
 - Head of Finance and Business Operations - Four Growers, Inc.
- **Eric Fiedler** – Coach for Pittsburgh Tomorrow Project
 - Co-Founder, Chairman – AJINGA and Executive in Residence
- **Theresa Gallick** – Coach for National Aviary and Homewood CEC/Office of Engagement & Community Affairs Projects
 - Principal - T Gallick Consulting and Executive in Residence
- **Bud Kahn** – Coach for Pitt Nursing Project
 - Managing Principal – WMS Wealth Planners
- **Bill Slivka** – Coach for Fort Ligonier Days Project
 - Executive in Residence
- **Linda Topoleski** – Coach for Japan America Society of Pennsylvania Project
 - Principal - Linda Topoleski Communications Consulting LLC





2026 Bridge Program

29
Graduate
Students

7
Organizations



2026 Bridge Program Partners



PITTSBURGH
TOMORROW



THEPITTNEWS



National Aviary



Scope of Work

To identify actionable steps for increasing weekday foot traffic and overall engagement with The Aviary, particularly with the 18-34 demographic.

Student Team

Pranav Balani (MBA), Kelly Delpino (MS Management), Yash Panda (MS Marketing Science), Ella Valencia (MBA)

Project Summary

Team delivered a benchmarked report, a consolidated marketing campaign strategy and an enhanced visitor data survey framework.

Executive Coach

Theresa Gallick

Project Outcomes

- **Benchmarking:** Provided key insights through analysis of nine comparable institutions.
- **Marketing strategy:** Outlined after-hours 21+ events, species storytelling and content matching for social media.
- **Survey framework:** Created a phased roadmap to capture critical quantitative and qualitative data.

Pittsburgh Tomorrow

**PITTSBURGH
TOMORROW**

Scope of Work

Assessing operating models and sustainability strategies for a Newcomer Welcome Center with a focus on realistic costs, utilization, and long-term revenue viability.

Student Team

Shalkar Baikulakov (MBA), Morgan Clark (MS Management), Shannon McCarthy (MBA), Sadman Sakib (MBA)

Project Summary

Project evaluated the financial feasibility of Pittsburgh Tomorrow's Newcomer Welcome Center and developed a sustainable operating model.

The team recommended a hybrid approach, supported by tools to guide future planning and decision making.

Executive Coach

Eric Fiedler

Project Outcomes

- **Diversified business model:** Identified a financially viable hybrid structure, combining B2B sponsorships, corporate anchor partners, coworking revenue and controlled operating costs.
- **Data-driven location strategy:** Equipped leadership with user heat mapping to optimize location placement.
- **Phased launch roadmap:** Provided practical tools to reduce financial risk and guide decision-making through full-implementation.

Fort Ligonier Days



Scope of Work

Evaluating the economic impact of Fort Ligonier Days on local merchants and developing standardized data collection methods to measure and track the festival's impact over time.

Student Team

Christopher Davis (MBA), Carson Liao (MS Supply Chain Management), Ayden Muzzana (MS Finance), Rahul Soman (MBA), Assel Tamenova (MBA)

Project Summary

Examined how Fort Ligonier Days affects local businesses and identified the data needed to better measure that impact over time.

Through stakeholder interviews and festival benchmarking, the team also uncovered key operational opportunities to strengthen the festival's relationship with merchants, visitors, and the broader community.

Executive Coach

Bill Slivka

Project Outcomes

- **Data governance & infrastructure:** Created merchant and attendee survey tools and recommended designating a primary Data Steward to maintain and harmonize data collected across merchants and vendors.
- **Operational & logistics enhancements:** Devised recommendations around vendor placement, parking, community identity, and long-term festival planning.
- **Pre-festival execution:** Outlined a phased implementation timeline to deploy recommendations prior to the October 2026 festival

Japan-America Society of Pennsylvania



Scope of Work

Developing strategies to grow JASP's corporate and individual membership while strengthening member value, improving prospective member outreach, and evaluating the future of individual membership.

Student Team

Artiom Duscov (MBA), Shubhangi Dwivedi (MBA), Shweta Kamble (MBA), Amy Tate (MBA)

Project Summary

Team created a strategy to strengthen member value and grow membership.

Analyzed over 30 unique surveys and benchmarked 15 comparable organizations to identify distinct corporate and individual needs.

Delivered a roadmap to retain members, convert prospective corporate partners, and strengthen each membership tier.

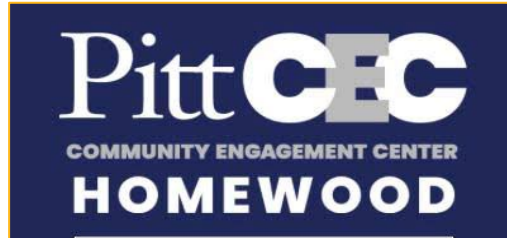
Executive Coach

Linda Topoleski

Project Outcomes

- **Membership refresh:** Provided recommendations to redesign corporate membership, simplify individual memberships and restructure models to better capture donor funds.
- **Lead conversion pipeline:** Outlined strategy to boost retention among current members and systematically convert warm corporate leads.
- **Execution roadmap:** Handed-off a tailored 12-month implementation roadmap.

Pitt Homewood CEC/ECA



Student Team

Benjamin Long (MBA), Yasmeen Stubblefield (MBA), Melanie Wang (MBA), Jordyn White (MBA)

Executive Coach

Theresa Gallick

Scope of Work

Improving space utilization at the Homewood CEC by evaluating reservation processes, stakeholder needs, and operational requirements to inform a more effective digital scheduling solution.

Project Summary

The University's "Neighborhood Commitments are the University's flagship place-based community partnerships."

Team identified opportunities to streamline space scheduling, improve data visibility, and support better decision-making at the Homewood CEC.

Project Outcomes

- **Active prototyping:** Piloted real-time space visibility, streamlined approval processes, standardized data collection, stronger utilization and community-impact reporting.
- **Rollout timeline:** Defined a clear path for implementing the "Bridge Portal," including recommended workflows, platform capabilities, and a 16–24 week implementation roadmap.
- **Scalable model:** Showcased scaffolding that could expand to additional CECs and beyond.

Pitt News



Student Team

Calum Braggs (MBA), Jenny Chen (MS Marketing), Iliana Nazarova (MBA), Utkarsh Thakur (MBA)

Executive Coach

Jen DeBrincat

Scope of Work

Identifying opportunities to improve The Pitt News' financial sustainability by optimizing revenue streams, advertising strategies, and operating costs.

Project Summary

The Pitt News is the daily student newspaper, publishing since 1910.

The team delivered a financial model, sales pitch template, and six prioritized strategic recommendations to help The Pitt News strengthen revenue, expand its platform, and improve long-term financial sustainability.

Project Outcomes

- **Revenue growth projections:** Created and prioritized six revenue initiatives projected to generate approximately \$98K in additional earned revenue over three years.
- **Process standardizations:** Drafted a standardized sales process and corporate pitch deck template to accelerate partner and sponsorship sales.
- **Prioritization roadmap:** Laid out an implementation matrix and timeline to guide the execution of new initiatives.

Pitt Nursing



Student Team

Jessica Boateng (MBA), Nachiket Mairal (MBA), Kseniia Nikolaeva (MS Finance), Ayza Sayany (MS Marketing Science)

Executive Coach

Bud Kahn

Scope of Work

Exploring nursing students' clinical experiences and readiness gaps to identify how a simulation tool could better prepare students and new nurses for clinical practice.

Project Summary

Benchmarked over 25 simulations and training tools across multiple categories and conducted 10+ stakeholder interviews.

Provided a clearer direction for a simulation tool by defining where it could fit within nursing education and what would be needed for successful adoption.

The research pointed toward a focused academic use case before expanding into broader clinical settings.

Project Outcomes

- **Gap identification & feature scoping:** Identified key readiness gaps, illustrating priority product features.
- **Pilot recommendations:** Outlined undergraduate pilot to validate usability, curriculum fit, and learning outcomes before broader development.
- **Innovation presentation runway:** Provided qualitative data for program presentation to leadership for further development.



Student Quotes

"How to turn data insights into practical solutions for real-world business problems."

" [It] was a good foundation into what consulting on a project means. Our coach was very helpful in pointing out what our strengths were, areas we could improve on and how we could leverage this experience in the near future."

" [This project] gave me hands-on experience translating an open-ended client brief into structured, actionable strategy work, which directly complements my MS coursework in marketing science and business analytics. It pushed me to apply analytical thinking and creative problem-solving in a real nonprofit context, and gave me a concrete, coach-reviewed deliverable."

I can speak to [this] professionally when targeting marketing analytics roles."

"One of the most valuable lessons I learned during my Bridge Program project was how to approach complex, ambiguous problems by gathering information from multiple perspectives before developing a solution. Rather than jumping to recommendations, our team met with clients, stakeholders, coaches, and end users to understand their needs, challenges, and priorities."

"How to design the end-to-end research process and how it interacts with planning a project. The whole project management side was something I didn't have a lot of exposure to, but realized it was a strength of mine..."

"I learned that effective business recommendations need to balance data analysis with practical implementation."



Client Testimonial – The Pitt News

“The students were smart, prepared and tremendous to work with. They listened and asked questions. They broke down all the interviews, data and budgets and came up with several excellent ideas that will be of value to our future success. [They] provided several workable ideas that will help The Pitt News in the future. We will take some time and work with our students to rank and decide which idea moves forward first.”

Student Outcomes

- Understand new ways of approaching organizational challenges, under the umbrella of “Societal Impact”
- Students cited program enhanced their **leadership skills, teamwork, project management and adaptability/flexibility.**
- Ability to apply concepts from courses such as **Multivariate Data Analysis, Interpersonal Skills for Manager and Strategic Management** to real-world challenge.



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Thank you to our community partners, coaches, and students!

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