Distinguishing Characteristics of
Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin'-By World and the GA Series of Books

Philip DeVol

There are four books in the Getting Ahead series:

1. *Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin'-By World* (GA): the original workbook and accompanying facilitator notes; used in many institutions and communities; first published in 2004 and revised twice since then. Author: Philip DeVol.
2. *Getting Ahead While Getting Out* (GO): the pre-release workbook and accompanying user guide used by correctional facilities, Bridges collaboratives, and/or reentry programs; published in 2015. Authors: Philip DeVol, Michelle Wood, Mitchell Libster.
3. *Getting Ahead in the Workplace* (GAW): for people preparing to enter the workforce and those in entry-level jobs; utilizes the facilitator notes from GA; published in 2015. Author: Philip DeVol.
4. *Investigations into Economic Class in America* (IECA): for first-generation, low-income postsecondary students; published in 2011. Authors: Philip DeVol and Karla Krodel.

Distinguishing characteristics across four aspects of the work: 1. Methodology (most important); 2. Target Population and Content; 3. Managing/Conducting/Sponsoring; and 4. Post-GA Support for Investigators.

1. Methodology

The way the Getting Ahead series is presented is what makes it work. The methodology is identical across all four books. Adhering to the methodology described in the facilitator notes and user guide is crucial. Some concepts covered in the facilitator notes, user guide, and facilitator trainings:

• Investigators are understood to be and are treated as problem solvers.
• Getting Ahead is agenda free; investigators make their own arguments for change.
• Facilitators do not teach; they guide the sequenced learning process and participate in discussions as co-investigators.
• GA uses life itself as the principal context for learning. Recruiting a diverse group of up to 12 investigators deepens the experience; half of the learning is in the content of GA, half in the discussions.
• The theory of change is embedded in the content and process of GA and helps investigators to develop a future story and plan.
• Investigators, regardless of their literacy skills, can contribute to the learning experience by participating in discussions and the development of mental models.

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- The discrepancy between what life is like now and what it could be creates the cognitive dissonance that can be the foundational catalyst for change.
- The purpose of GA is not to get investigators to 'behave' or 'comply' but to "… deal critically and creatively with the reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world."

2. Target Population and Content				
	GA	GO	GAW	IECA
Target population	Under-resourced population, 17 years and older, diverse groups of 8–12 investigators.	Inmates soon to be released from prison or jail; groups of 8–12 with as much diversity as possible.	People in workforce development programs and under-resourced, lower-waged, entry-level employees.	First-generation and under-resourced students entering postsecondary settings. Offered as a "bridge course" to prepare people for postsecondary education. Offered as a credit bearing course, an FYE course, and/or as the centerpiece of a learning community model. Offered for dual credit with high schools.
Modules	10 modules.	11 modules, language is moved to #2, new module #7 is a threat assessment. Three plans are developed by the returning citizens: 1. 72-hour stability plan 2. SMART plan for immediate needs 3. Resources development plan for future story	10 modules: same sequence as GA.	12 Modules (two new modules added to the original GA): #1 Introduction and #8 Stages of Change. In GA this information is found in Module 2.

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Language	Seventh-grade reading level.	Seventh-grade reading level adjusted to reentry population.	Seventh-grade reading level adjusted to workplace. Less use of the word *poverty,* focus on *stability* and *under-resourced*.	Modules presented in outline format, slightly higher reading level, adjusted to address postsecondary experience. Journal reflections, four writing assignments, in-class assignments, portfolio.
Number of hours and sessions	16 sessions at 2.5 hours each; done no less than once a week, no more than twice a week.	20 sessions at 2.5–3 hours each; done no less than once a week, no more than twice a week.	16 sessions at 2.5 hours each; done no less than once a week, no more than twice a week	16 weeks at 1.25 hours each, meets twice a week.
Additional resources for professionals and other community members	*Bridges Out of Poverty* for agency staff and general public and *Bridges to Sustainable Communities* for CEOs, executive directors, legislators, and other community leaders.	*Tactical Communications* for corrections staff. GA for family members of returning citizens. *The R Rules* for children of returning citizens.	*Workplace Stability*, strategies for employers, middle managers, and supervisors. *Why Don't They Just Get a Job?* workforce assistance for employers, funders, and donors. *Hidden Rules of Class at Work,* resources reviewed for employers, middle managers, supervisors, and GAW graduates.	*Understanding and Engaging Under-Resourced College Students* for administrators, faculty, and staff.

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3. Managing/Conducting/Sponsoring

	GA	GO	GAW	IECA
Training and certification requirements to offer a complete model	GA facilitators will be certified and offer a complete Bridges and GA model.	Certified GO facilitators sign an agreement to implement the whole model.	Certified GAW facilitators sign an agreement to implement a complete model.	IECA encourages the development of an on-campus support system and participation in a community initiative. Certification not required.
Facilitator training	Certified facilitator training on-site and online by author or authorized local area consultants. This is the foundational training for GA, GO, and GAW. Those who are trained in GA can take a short, 1–3 hour course to be authorized to train GO and GAW.	Certified facilitator training, on-site training by authors. Or an online training in GA followed by a three-hour online training to facilitate GO.	Certified facilitator training on-site by the author or authorized local area consultants. Or an online training in GA followed by a one-hour online training to facilitate GAW.	Onsite and online training by the authors.
Sites/locations	Various sites in the community; agency and community-based GA. For the sake of diversity, GA sites accept referrals from other sites.	Prisons, jails, and work/release sites that can offer GO as a pre-release experience.	Community settings; not done at the workplace.	On campus.
Payments to investigators	Yes.	No.	Yes. Hourly wage or GA stipend recommendation.	No.
Data collection and reports	Highly recommended; can use CharityTracker, MPOWR, or Charity Check.	Highly recommended; can use CharityTracker, MPOWR, or Charity Check.	Highly recommended; can use CharityTracker, MPOWR, or Charity Check.	Independent data collection, report writing.

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4. Post-GA Support for Investigators

	GA	GO	GAW	IECA
Regular meetings	Design follow-up support meetings with GA grads, their families, and community partners.	Returning citizens can join existing GA support systems and reentry programs. If none exist, a reentry program must be developed.	GAW graduates can join existing GA support system.	IECA graduates can join or develop a support system on campus and join or develop a community support system.
Bridging capital	Provide opportunities for GA grads to meet and work with people from all classes and sectors. Train potential allies in Bridges.			Provide opportunities for GA grads to meet and work with people from all classes and sectors. Train potential allies in Bridges.
Stability and resource development	Develop strategies to stabilize the conditions for GA grads, develop resources, address barriers, and change policies. Resource development should include financial literacy, emotional competence, leadership skills, and more.			
Board and community training	Achieve critical mass by offering Bridges training to personnel and board members for all interested sectors (arts and entrainment, business, education, faith-based, financial, government, health, legal, media, and social) and community groups (anti-poverty groups, Community Action Agencies, foundations, reentry programs, United Way).			
Learning communities	Create learning communities for certified Bridges trainers, GA facilitators, and Bridges collaboratives at the county and state levels as the initiative grows.			

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