

**College:** Elizabethtown Community College  
**Location:** Elizabethtown, Kentucky  
**Practice:** REAL Get Up and Go! Business Start-Up Simulation  
 Developing entrepreneurial skills in middle-school students

<i>Year Started</i>	1997
<i>Budget</i>	\$30,000
<i>Program Participants</i>	2,000
<i>College FTE</i>	4,000
<i>Target sector</i>	N/A
<i>Staff size</i>	3 FT
<i>Structure</i>	The Get Up and Go Program is run through the Business and Industry Technical Assistance Center (BITAC), a component of ECC's Center for Quality Training
<i>Key outcomes</i>	Increased understanding of entrepreneurship Greater familiarity and comfort level with higher education

## Introduction

In the rural counties surrounding Louisville, Kentucky, industry and small businesses are in short supply. As a result, many of the region's students have little exposure to different career possibilities. As part of a statewide initiative designed to help students understand and prepare for different career paths, Elizabethtown Community College implemented the REAL Get Up and Go program.

Get Up and Go leads students through a series of simulations designed to give them the experience of starting a business, from analyzing the business needs of their communities to obtaining start-up "loans." By showing students how learning can lead to a variety of career options, the program helps them understand the relevance of education and prompts them to begin thinking about college and careers.

## Community Background

Elizabethtown Community College (ECC) serves a four-county region with a population of nearly 150,000. Three of these counties (Breckinridge, Larue, and Meade) are primarily rural and have little or no industry. These counties were formerly dependent upon agriculture, but the farm economy has been declining in recent years. The region also used to contain several garment factories, but most of them have closed or relocated. The fourth county, Hardin, is the industrial hub of the region, and many residents of the other three counties commute an hour or more to work there. Still other residents of the region commute even farther to jobs in Louisville.

Program focus	Sector specific	Economic conditions	Economic base			Target populations
			Mfg	Agr	Svc	
Entrepreneurship	No	Distressed	21	2.6	35	Economically disadvantaged, entrepreneurial candidates, youth/students

<i>Service Area</i>	<i>Hardin, Larue, Meade, and Breckinridge Counties</i>
<i>Total Population</i>	148,000
<i>Median Household Income</i>	\$26,000
<i>Below Poverty Level</i>	18.0
<i>Unemployment Rate</i>	5.4
<i>Minority Population</i>	10.4
<i>Rural Population</i>	71.9
<i>High School Graduates</i>	66.3
<i>College Graduates</i>	9.6

## Program Description

Elizabethtown Community College (ECC), a public comprehensive community college, opened in 1964. Today, its student body of 3,200 students is the second largest among Kentucky's community colleges. In addition to general associate degrees in arts and science, the college offers occupation-oriented associate degrees in business technology, computer information, nursing, office systems, and quality technology. Each of these programs contains concentrations designed to prepare students for a specific career; for example, the business technology program offers options in management, banking, and real estate.

In addition to its academic programs, the college provides a variety of services to the community through its Center for Quality Training. The center offers an art program, speakers' bureau, a children's career exploration program, and recreational continuing education classes for adults. The center is also home to the Business and Industry Department, which develops customized training programs for local firms, and to the Business and Industry Technical Assistance Center (BITAC), which provides consulting services to small business owners and potential entrepreneurs. BITAC, which also operates on two other Kentucky community college campuses (Hazard Community College and Madisonville Community College), runs the REAL Get Up and Go program.

The program is part of a five-year-old statewide initiative to implement school-to-work programs throughout the Kentucky public school system. The initiative began with a grant from the federal

School-to-Work Opportunities Program, which provides seed money for states to design and implement their own programs. Kentucky used part of its grant to divide the state into 22 Local Labor Market Areas and support each in creating school-to-work programs that fit its labor force, skills concentrations, and industry base. As part of that effort, ECC helped create the Regional Education Partnership (REP) to implement school-to-work in its area. In turn, REP initiated a number of efforts at every educational level—from kindergarten to post-secondary—and received a federal Urban-Rural Opportunities Grant to support them. REAL Get Up and Go was part of this grant.

Created in 1990, REAL (Real Entrepreneurship through Action Learning) is a national program that helps rural areas foster entrepreneurship through hands-on facilitated learning programs. Its goals include helping students learn about their communities; helping them develop critical thinking, leadership, and business skills; and identifying and encouraging the students that have entrepreneurial characteristics. REAL believes that entrepreneurship does not lend itself to traditional teaching methods—partly because entrepreneurs are more interested in hands-on participation than in passive learning.

While REAL is most often used in high schools and post-secondary programs, BITAC adapted the program for use in middle schools to create the six-hour Get Up and Go module. Two BITAC facilitators either travel to the middle schools or host students at ECC for one all-day session or shorter sessions over several days. The module begins with a large group discussion with students on entrepreneurship, explaining what it means to be an entrepreneur and giving some examples of famous entrepreneurs. The students break into teams to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of their local community, develop an enterprise plan based on the needs of the community, and present their plan to the REAL bank to secure a loan. The teams go on to learn about and practice many aspects of running a successful business, such as customer service, personnel, finance, and marketing. The teams then tape commercials promoting their businesses and present them to the class.

## Outcomes

In its first year of operation (1997-98), BITAC brought the REAL program to over 1,100 students. Because of the enthusiastic response they received from the schools, BITAC invited all schools within a 100-mile radius to participate in the program's second year and thereby brought the program to nearly 2,000 students.

Because the program targets middle school children, it is too early to detect any effects on the entrepreneurial tendencies or success of the students, much less any effects on the region's economy. It will be several years before students who have participated in the program have the opportunity to make career choices. Interim outcomes, however, all indicate that the program is effective in communicating the principles of entrepreneurship. Tests show that the students' understanding of the aspects of running a business increases after the program.

In addition, teachers report that following the Get Up and Go program, students show more interest in learning, more self-motivation, and more demonstration of leadership—especially from students who didn't show these qualities before. This upholds one of the principal ideas behind the REAL teaching method—that students with entrepreneurial skills and tendencies may not be those that traditionally excel in school. Facilitators and teachers have also noticed that following the REAL program, students have an increased comfort level and sense of familiarity with Elizabethtown Community College and with the idea of attending college in general—evidence that REAL is meeting one of its primary goals: increasing students' perception of the relevance of education.

## Strengths, Challenges, and Replicability

Those familiar with the program agree that one of its primary strengths is the ability to tap students' learning and leadership skills in new ways. By allowing the students to lead the learning process, the Get Up and Go program gets students interested in learning and in the possibility of higher education. The program's administrators also note that the support of the community and the Regional Education Partnership has contributed to the program's success.

One challenge the program faces is to grow and

sustain the effort. ECC wants to be able to offer the Get Up and Go training module in more schools, but there are no funds to train more facilitators. ECC's innovative approach to this problem is to integrate the Get Up and Go module into high school business management classes, instructing high-school students not only in the module itself but also in how to lead it—turning them into Get Up and Go facilitators.

ECC's Get Up and Go program is one that many community colleges can emulate, especially since the national REAL organization can provide support to any college that wants to institute the program. One advantage that ECC has is Kentucky's statewide commitment to integrating school-to-work programs throughout the public education system, which means that programs such as REAL enjoy a great deal of state and regional support. Community colleges in states whose priorities lie elsewhere may not find as much support for implementing entrepreneurial programs.

*For more information, contact:*

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