**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**H-1B Ready to Work**

**Promoting Paid Work Experience to Employers Using Benefit-Driven Recruitment Strategies**

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LAURA CASERTANO: All right. Great. Now I'm going to turn things over to your moderator today, Ayreen Cadwallader. She's a workforce analyst with the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. Ayreen?

AYREEN CADWALLADER: Great. Thank you so much, Laura. And welcome, everybody, to today's webinar for the Long-Term Unemployed Subject-Matter Expert webinar series. We're really excited to have you on the line here.

Today's subject-matter expert is Bronwyn Drost from the Upjohn Institute, who will discuss strategies to promote paid work experience with employer partners, with a goal of establishing opportunities for individuals to earn a wage and (dival ?) training experiences.

Work-based learning is certainly a key component for the H-1B Ready to Work grant program, so we're really very excited to hear from Bronwyn. And really also excited to hear from the grantees to see of any promising practices that may come from the Ready to Work partnership grants, since paid work experience is still a very new work-based training model.

And so with that, thank you so much for being available this afternoon. And I'll turn it over to Angel Harlins, our TA partner from High Impact Partners. Angel?

ANGEL HARLINS: Perfect. Thank you so much, Ayreen. My name is Angel Harlins. I'm with Performance Excellence. And I'm here to just introduce Bronwyn. Really excited, I got a chance to look at Bronwyn's presentation and we are just really excited for her to talk about paid work experience with you guys today.

We want this conversation to be very interactive. So if you have questions, please feel free to enter those into the participant chat. And also, if you're interested in raising your hand, we can also answer questions throughout the webinar. We want to keep this very interactive, like we mentioned before.

And I'm going to hand it over to Bronwyn now, who's going to introduce herself and some of the work that she does.

BRONWYN DROST: Good afternoon, everybody. My name is Bronwyn Drost and I am excited to be your subject-matter expert this afternoon. I have worked in the workforce development field for a little over 10 years now. I started out as a case manager for Workforce Innovations' adult and dislocated worker programming. And then I've also run a couple of job centers in southwest Michigan. And then I moved over to our Economic Development Corporation of Michigan, working for the state, to help businesses grow and thrive in our region.

As I was out meeting with employers, hundreds of them each year, the common themes that we heard about was the fact that talent was really tough to find and that was inhibiting their ability to grow. So an opportunity came up for me to move back into the workforce development world by becoming a project manager for a Workforce Innovation Fund grant.

So here in southwest Michigan, we've decided to use our Workforce Innovation Fund grant to grow these things we call employer resource networks. Employer resource networks have basically consortiums of employers or businesses who come together and express common needs. And we try to address those needs by developing customized training, by putting success coaches on site to help folks who might be struggling with productivity issues, and to just overall improve their retention rates and help them to attract new talent to their organization.

So that's a little bit of background of how I've worked with companies in the workforce development system over the past few years. And again, I'm pretty excited to be talking to you all today and would love to hear any feedback that you have.

We're going to cover a few different things, but I'm sure that all of you have your own examples of things that aren't working or are working. And again, feel free to share those with us and the rest of the folks who are joining us this afternoon.

So we are going to go ahead and get started. Our objective today is to provide all of you with targeted strategies to assist you in building mutually productive partnerships with employers who are seeking to expand their talent pipelines via the hiring and training of paid work experience candidates.

And our agenda today is going to consist primarily of reviewing the demand-driven business services model and the dual customer method of engaging employers. I'm sure a few of you are familiar with those models, and hopefully employ them already.

We're also going to explore a variety of ways that grantees can frame paid work experience in a language that resonates with the businesses that you serve, and helps them to understand the true value that paid work experience can really provide to their companies, if they take advantage of it and engage in the process.

We're also going to briefly examine a few strategies and techniques for pitching paid work experience to our employers, and hopefully learn a couple of methods and best practices for approaching employers about paid work experience.

Last but not least, we're going to discuss very briefly this tension between moving at the pace of business and adequate documentation of paid work experience. All of us are familiar with the performance measures and tracking requirements that are subject to, so it's definitely important to kind of touch on how we can make that as easy as possible for the businesses that we're serving.

So here we go. We are going to set the stage by reminding all of you that our employment rate is holding steady. So as of January this year, both the number of employed persons – 7.6 million – and the unemployment rate – 4.8 percent – have been staying about the same.

The number of long-term unemployed – those jobless for 27 weeks or more – is essentially unchanged as well, at 1.9 million. And that accounts for about 24 percent of all of the unemployed as a group.

Since the labor market is so tight, and as businesses work toward becoming employers of choice by creating welcoming and inclusive workspaces, HR teams are actively looking to broaden their talent pipelines by recruiting non-traditional candidates. The time to capitalize on this current labor market is now.

So we're going to talk about the demand-driven model to start. The demand-driven model is largely recognized as a supply chain term. For example, I'm going to give you a quote right now from Michael Lipton that puts it in easy-to-understand terms.

"Given typical supply chain lead times, suppliers generally produce enough to meet their demand forecast, which is only marginally accurate at the granular level at which inventory decisions are made. However, as soon as it is known that the actual demand differs from the forecast, the supply levels need to be adjusted accordingly at each step of the supply chain. But due to the lag time between when the demand changes and when it is detected at various points along that supply chain, its effect is often amplified, leading to shortages in inventory or excesses in inventory."

So it's kind of the push/pull that we'll be talking about today. For those of us who are engaged in the workforce development system, demand-driven really refers to kind of the shift in paradigm that positions businesses – or employers, as we typically call them – as our primary customer.

So utilizing that demand-driven model of local or regional businesses to inform the focus of service delivery for each unique workforce development service provider. So that's being out in the field, meeting with businesses, figuring out where their hiring needs are, finding some commonalities, and then making sure that you're doing everything you can to meet those needs.

So I put a little graphic up there just to kind of show the picture. Again, you're looking at the employer need. You are developing a training solution. You are connecting your jobseekers, your long-term unemployed, with those opportunities that exist right now at the businesses in your area. And you're training those folks for the positions that the employers have indicated that they need, giving those high-demand skills, and then transitioning them over to hopefully a long-term career in a new field.

So I know that it looks simple and sounds simple and it's a little bit different when we're out in the weeds implementing all these strategies. But really, it's pretty basic.

So we are going to cover three key ideas when we're talking about the demand-driven model this afternoon. The first key, I think, is multi-partner collaboration. Multi-partner collaborative that integrates workforce and economic development principles to create responsive, flexible programming. And that programming should be customized to meet the needs of individual businesses or industry clusters.

Another key idea in the demand-driven model is the idea of a skilled workforce. When we're kind of focused on jobseekers that we're serving – in our case, the long-term unemployed – we kind of lose focus of the bigger picture sometimes and you don't always recognize how important our role is business engagement and economic development.

It really is important that we're meeting with these folks all the time, so that any customer who walks through our door or takes advantage of our programs is receiving the best possible advice that they can, regarding their career.

Another key of the demand-driven system is to ensure that workforce development programming is closely intertwined with education and training systems; and, based upon the needs expressed by the employers that you're serving, that we're poised to prepare those customers to serve as strong candidate matches for any open positions that have been identified at the employers you're working with.

We also want to make sure that those positions have good opportunity for growth, that these are positions that our long-term unemployed can transition to for the long term.

Again, I just kind of want to reiterate that business and industry prosper when they have access to a well-prepared and well-trained workforce, as well as the support of their partners from workforce development, especially when that system is aligned with the demand-driven model and well integrated. Meaning that all of our different partners are operating as a unified entity – education, economic development, municipalities, government and any other key stakeholders who are invested in the success of a community.

I think that paid work experience can be a really unique tool for enhancing our region's talent pool and providing businesses with the support that they need to thrive and grow.

So we're going to move into here a few quick tips that are – hallmark the demand-driven system. Again, some of these things you're hopefully already doing, but want to review for the good of the group here.

Number one, I think it's really important to identify a single point of contact for each business that you're working with. Or maybe a program champion who can serve as a good fit with each particular business, based on their personality; the kind of relationship they might have with the business; any history that they have in working with that business; expertise in a certain area, industry, or field; or somebody who the business trusts because of a variety of factors.

I know that all of us are out in the field and there are many other partner organizations who are working toward the same goal that we are – helping businesses find talent that they need.

Where we can work as a team rather than continue to duplicate asks of these companies and bother them by sending out 10 different representatives from 10 different programs to ask them to participate in their own particular project or program, it really – we find much better success when that single point of contact can adequately represent all of the partners at the table and make things easy for the employer so that we're not really wasting their time always having to distinguish your program from somebody else's program and kind of losing the point of the meeting there.

Another really important tip is to understand the industry that you're serving. As you know, things are a little bit different in the IT world than they are in the manufacturing world or the health care world, hospitality world. The needs are different. The way that they operate is different. Their HR teams often function differently too.

So it's really important when you're going out to meet with businesses, that you research the company or the industry – or if there's a certain cluster – prior to engaging with that business. So before you even reach out for the first time, take a look at their website. Seek out some general news on the industry. Find recent articles that relate to the business. And try to come to the meeting prepared with information on potential challenges, recent successes, or maybe a current industry focus.

For example, right now we're hearing a lot about the baby boomer generation aging out of the workforce, and particularly a looming shortage of skilled tradesworkers, as well as a lack of interest in the manufacturing industry from the millennial generation.

So those are kind of the things that you want to come to the table prepared to address when you're at your meeting, so that the business believes that you are tuned into what you're doing, that you're working hard to make sure that they're getting what they need. And hopefully you can offer them some tips to address any of those things that might come up.

The next tip that we want to talk about is to make sure that you're serving as a trusted resource and maintain excellent follow up. Use business language, all of those things that we see on the slide there.

I think some of us have a tendency, because we've worked in the workforce development system for so long, to fall back on our language when we're talking about our programs. So if we're using acronyms like PWE or LTE, LTU, what have you, that's kind of difficult for our employers to connect with. So make sure that, wherever you can, you can take out any acronyms or workforce development-specific language and speak in a language that businesses can understand.

Make sure that you are well-versed in all the programs and services that your partners can provide too. We kind of talked about that earlier. But just know all the things that you can bring to the table. Obviously, no need to be an expert on every program and service that exists under your umbrella, but make sure that you do know enough that you can introduce any of your partners to meet any identified needs of that business.

So if you're going in and you're meeting with a business to talk about paid work experience and, for whatever reason, paid work experience might not meet their needs or work as a good tool for them, at least you can maybe suggest another program or partner that could meet the needs that they've expressed. And thereby kind of gaining their trust, making sure that when there is a good fit for paid work experience or another program that you're representing, they'll come back to you because you've helped them and you've successfully listened to and met their needs.

I think it's also really important to build that trust by maintaining the highest level of confidentiality that you can when working with businesses. And I know that's kind of fundamental, but I found especially while I was working with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation that it was very, very important to ensure that I didn't share any information learned in any of my meetings with businesses with any of my partners or folks who didn't need to know what was going on.

And that went a long way in gaining their trust and made them much more willing to work with me on any capacity, because they trusted that I would act in their best interest and that I wouldn't share any proprietary information about hiring or their workforce or anything like that.

I think it's also very important to note that follow-up is of critical importance. Again, kind of a fundamental skill there. But any time you're talking with an employer, if you're running into them out in the field somewhere or at a meeting or when you have a one-on-one meeting, always send them an email to summarize what you talked about and indicate what next steps are. And make sure you follow up on that on a regular basis. That goes a long way, too, in gaining their trust and building a long-term relationship.

Sharing resources judiciously, also kind of important. Want to make sure that you're not bringing too much to the table and that the things that you're sharing with these folks are relevant to what they express their needs to be.

Those are six kind of basic tips. Again, for the sake of being interactive, if anybody else has any tips that they have found to be really effective in terms of engaging employers or businesses that seem to have worked well, please feel free to show those – get those into our chat box. We'd like to hear them. (Pause.)

So the second model that we want to talk about today is the dual customer approach. And again, just to kind of bring it back, we're talking about the demand-driven approach and the dual customer approach as a great way for you guys to sell paid work experience and build relationships with companies who can help put your long-term unemployed back to work.

So the dual customer approach is even more simple than the demand-driven approach, I think. Essentially, it just addresses the needs of two primary customers simultaneously – employers or businesses on hand, and jobseekers on the other hand.

We kind of want to ensure that – so we're focusing on the needs of business to inform our service delivery. We're also respecting the long-term unemployed who have trusted themselves to us to help them get back to work, and recognizing their need as well throughout this process.

I'm going to read a nice long quote here for you. "Perhaps the most fundamental attribute of workforce intermediaries, in contrast to traditional job training and placement organizations, is that they deliberately address the needs of two customers simultaneously: employers and jobseekers. The ability to serve both sides of the labor market depends in part on an organization's structure, and it is also a matter of its culture. Intermediaries that respond to both employer and worker needs, and are valuable to both, are organized to meet these goals."

And that is Jobs for the Future. They have some good articles out there on the dual customer approach. I would encourage you all to do a search for that at some point after the webinar.

Basically, our system – the workforce investment system – under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, is kind of premised upon a dual customer approach right now, to serve labor demand and labor supply concurrently. With the rhetoric right now about the jobs and skills debate, it's easy to take for granted what is at stake behind supply and demand-driven approaches within the workforce system. There's a couple of good journal articles as well that we can share after the fact that kind of address that same idea.

So we have three key ideas for the dual customer approach as well. Number one, obviously, the jobseeker must be prepared for the local labor market. And I know that all of you are doing that, helping with résumés and interviewing and some of those soft skills which are really, really important to employers and go a long way in preparation for the local labor market.

I think it's also important to prepare that jobseeker to meet customer demand. You need to understand what sectors, industries, and jobs make up your local labor market. And you must engage in research and relationship building with those businesses and industries. So again, gaining what you've learned out in the field to help you shape your workshops or your case management styles or the way that you're serving your long-term unemployed, so that you're giving them the best possible service that they can receive.

A third key idea of the dual customer approach is to seek to understand the hiring needs of your business customers, and to do that through direct contact with those businesses. Again, it's important to build a vocabulary that conveys to both jobseekers and customers the types of job skills, experience, training, and qualifications that are required for mutual success.

Three quick tips from the dual customer approach as well. These are really, really basic sales fundamentals and they kind of echo what we talked about on the demand-driven tips as well.

Number one, sincerity. Make sure that when you're meeting with businesses and you're meeting with your customers, your jobseekers, you're listening without an agenda. It's really important to go into these meetings open-minded. Not coming in prepared to give them a big long spiel about what you can do for them, but to kind of sit back and frame the conversation as, what can I do for you? And let them tell you what they need. Listen to that very clearly. Make notes. And then make sure that you're addressing what they've told you needs addressing.

I think that we find that relationships build capacity much faster when we approach conversations that way, rather than going in there and just, again, giving them all the information that you think they should have when we might not even understand exactly what their chief needs are on that given meeting.

Ethics, obviously another important thing, that we don't want to push our programs, services, or training on either customer. I'm sure that there are lots of folks that you work with who really want a career in a certain field but might not be a good fit for that field due to things beyond their control.

Some companies, though we think they could use paid work experience – it would really enhance the way that they do business – just can't handle that at any given time, or they might not be interested in it during your first meeting. So again, to build that long-term relationship, really important to just listen, be gracious, and provide for them what they're telling you they need.

Asking some clarifying questions, that there is another great way to build relational capacity. And it will demonstrate that you're listening very clearly to them. It will also ensure that the solutions you're bringing to the table – hopefully paid work experience – is what they really need. And you'll find that out by making sure that you're communicating with them in a business-friendly way.

So we're going to pause again here for any questions or comments, either about the demand-driven model or the dual customer approach. Again, if you have any tips that you've learned or have been successful or completely unsuccessful, we would love to hear those.

MS. CASERTANO: So right now everyone's lines are muted. But I'm going to open up the lines so you can ask your questions or make comments verbally.

MS. CADWALLADER: Thank you so much for doing that, Laura. This is Ayreen here at the national office. And we realize we have a small group that can allow for some discussion through an open line. So if you do have any direct questions to Bronwyn now about the first two topics that we addressed for this webinar, you're welcome to address them verbally. And if you'd like, you can press \*6 to do that.

So it sounds like we may not be getting any questions coming in. We can certainly – before we proceed, Bronwyn, I did want to ask – I know there's a lot of new terms that we're starting to hear out of WIOA. And is the dual customer approach similar to the human-centered design efforts?

MS. DROST: Yes, I think that – yeah, I think it definitely is a complementary and very similar model. I think a lot of the work that we've been doing in the workforce development system recently has gone a long way in, again, kind of respecting our customers who come through the doors of our service centers and who are accessing our programs, as well as the businesses that we serve too.

So whether we call it a dual customer approach or human-centered design, I think it's just that idea of really making sure that we are meeting demand rather than, again, telling people what we think they need for certain reasons and building our programming that way.

MS. CADWALLADER: Sounds good. Thank you for clarifying that. Let's go ahead and proceed with the next section of our presentation today.

MS. DROST: All right, guys. We are going to go back to basics. Now that we've laid out some of the fundamental framework for building a mutually-productive partnership with employers who are seeking to expand their talent pipelines via the hiring and training of paid work experience candidates, hopefully, I want to cover a few of the basics concerning how we can best build a good pitch for employers.

So from the perspective of both the dual customer approach and the demand-driven model, like we just talked about, businesses are the job creators, or our primary customer. They create the demand side of this equation.

To foster mutual success, we have to prove invaluable in meeting that demand, using paid work experience as a resource, and ensuring that all of our participants are adequately prepared for each employer's job openings and workplace.

So framing paid work experience for business outreach. Again, employers are most interested in meeting their bottom line. They're not familiar with the workforce development system always and how it works. Their key areas of interest are filling their open positions. We hear from businesses, again, every day, that they're struggling to meet demand because they can't find people to do the work that needs to get done.

That means mandatory overtime. That means they're not getting orders out the door. They're not meeting their customer demand. And that's of chief concern to them. They need to be well-staffed and have the skills and talent at their organizations to ensure that they're thriving and growing.

They are looking to enhance their talent pipeline. Again, since our unemployment rate has been much lower these past couple of years, we find that we're just not able to help businesses as easily find good candidates for their openings, which is again why I think paid work experience is a really unique opportunity to pitch to them as a great way to help grow and enhance the talent pipeline.

Some of these folks might not otherwise consider hiring the long-term unemployed or folks who might have other barriers to work. But because of the unemployment rate right now in the labor market, I think that they'd be more open to hearing about these paid work experience candidates and the support that comes along with them that can help them to be probably among the most committed and high-performing new hires that they find.

So again, from that primary customer approach, it's our role to clearly convey to businesses how we can help them do just that – fill their open positions, enhance their talent pipeline, onboard effectively, and improve their retention. We can do that by providing HR teams with well-prepared candidates, by introducing new labor pools into the pipeline, and by supporting the onboarding and retention of these paid work experience candidates via wraparound support.

I think we hear from employers a lot that chief reasons that folks aren't staying at jobs or aren't successful at work are things like transportation, lack of a backup day care plan, not great problem solving skills. The work that all of you are doing with your folks is – you're addressing those before they're even walking in the door at the employer. So that I think is a really compelling sell for these folks as you're meeting with them and telling about why paid work experience is a great tool for them.

We need to make sure that we're framing this in a way that has value to these businesses, and we have to learn how to discuss that value in a way that their business contacts can understand.

So business-friendly language; we've alluded to this a couple of times already. Workforce development folks, I love them dearly and I am proud to be one of them, but we have a language all our own. Like we said, we use a lot of acronyms. We use a lot of industry-specific terminology. We use a lot of program-centric language. And we are often very focused on rules and eligibility and documentation and things like that.

I find that when I'm out in the field, a lot of us have more of a negative script. We spend a lot of time in presentations and outreach telling folks what we can't do or why things won't work. I think it's really important for us to be aware of that and help each other – give your coworkers reminders every now and then that not everybody knows what RTW means or even paid work experience probably wouldn't mean a lot to some of the businesses that you're working with. So it's really important to deliberately craft some terms and some outreach materials that use business-friendly language.

We need to try to avoid things like career services jargon, generalizations or descriptions of populations that we serve. Again, we're working with those populations day in and day out and we are used to calling them a certain thing. I think it's better if we can just call them talent, right? Or candidates. Or something a little bit more general that doesn't stigmatize them or give an impression that they're a group that needs a little extra TLC.

I think we need to be very wary of implementing bureaucratic barriers. Again, we talk a lot about requirements that we'll ask of to implement paid work experience. And we kind of have to avoid thinking about referrals of candidates that we're making from the perspective of quotas or placement goals.

Again, we live and breathe this every day, so it can be kind of challenging to step outside of that. But I definitely encourage everybody to do what they can to make sure that we're using a language and presenting our programs in a way that really resonates with the businesses that we serve. And that typically means that we can't use a lot of our common language.

So I'm actually going to say too, I keep calling businesses "employers" and I don't think they would ever refer to themselves as an employer. So that's one that I have to keep reminding myself not to use as much. I always think they think it's kind of quaint that I come in there and call them that when I'm at a meeting. It's an ongoing process for all of us.

We referenced a couple minutes ago the dual customer approach and the demand-driven model, kind of that focus on meeting the needs of business as a primary consideration. And yeah, we really need to build a common vocabulary that transcends our workforce development language and frames things in a way that makes sense.

So we have another poll here. Hopefully folks can share a little bit of input. We're asking you, "How many of you are already using one or more of these outreach strategies?" Some of those quick tips that we kind of covered – demonstrating genuine interest in what the business does, asking them questions to enhance your understanding, listening carefully to those employers to ascertain what their key needs are, and doing a quick analysis to make sure that paid work experience is actually the right fit for that business. Or whether that's following up to make sure that you've done what you committed to doing in your meeting. (Pause.)

Good. So looks like a lot of us are definitely using some of those tips. Great.

MS. CADWALLADER: And it also looks like – this is Ayreen – that the grantees on the line may be using a combination of the strategies that we've presented here. That's also a great thing to note. Perfect. (Pause.)

MS. DROST: OK. So we'll keep moving through the presentation here.

A follow-up group question, "Have any of you successfully sold paid work experience to an employer by clearly expressing value on the company's terms?" Whether that's talking about expanding their talent pipeline, introducing them to a previously untapped labor pool that they might not otherwise have considered. So far it's an unequivocal yes; that's great too.

Be curious if anybody feels comfortable commenting in the chat box which of those – how you kind of expressed that value. (Pause.) OK.

MS. CADWALLADER: And excuse me, Bronwyn. We'll have the follow-up roundtable call a couple of days after this webinar and we can certainly continue this conversation in more detail then.

But yes, it's certainly exciting to see that a lot of the grantees on the call now are successfully using paid work experience to promote their Ready to Work grant training program. Again, these are models that we definitely want to see and hopefully there's some success in that.

MS. DROST: Absolutely. Good. All right. So let's keep moving through. I think we've made good progress on understanding a solid approach to business development and the idea of businesses as a key customer. We've talked about the importance of framing paid work experience as a value proposition that resonates with employers, using language that is compelling and easy to understand.

Let's talk for a minute about some ways that we could put everything in practice. So how are we going to grow opportunities to get that paid work experience foot into the door? So we're going to talk about framing again from our two demand-driven models here.

So you've landed a meeting with an employer that you think is a great fit for paid work experience. You worked that demand-driven model and the dual customer principals and it looks like paid work experience is a go. Then the conversation turns to implementation.

So we're going to talk about a couple of different easy ways that we can engage employers and get that foot in the door. And then we'll talk a little bit more about implementation down the road.

So a couple of basic techniques for closing a deal. When you're in that meeting, make sure that you can really clearly convey what's in it for the employer. Sometimes we focus on the reimbursement or other things when we're trying to sell paid work experience to these folks. But again, through our – the work that we've done already to kind of figure out what that need is, what the employer is really looking for, we need to express that "what's in it for me" in a way that makes sense to them.

We want to make sure that we're clearly communicating the solution that we're bringing to the table that aligns with that previously-stated need that the employer has expressed to you.

And then another great way that we find is super successful, we like to connect employers with other businesses who have already utilized the services that we have to offer. So if you have a couple of great employer champions, as we call them, already – some companies who have utilized paid work experience a lot and who are always excited for new candidates – see if they'd be willing to – whether that's writing you a little testimonial, giving you a quote.

Or lots of times the best way to do it is I introduce folks by phone or email, and then they can ask each other, what did you like about paid work experience? What didn't work for you? Any challenges? Or what are your successes? And I find that employers can have that conversation with one another much more effectively sometimes when I'm not there intervening.

So that's a really, really helpful tool when you're working to engage other employers. Just have one or two folks that you know will speak well of their experience with you and the success of paid work experience.

Want to also address here sometimes the potential stigma that can happen when folks are working with the long-term unemployed. Sometimes folks think that our programs and our services are only for poor and low-skilled folks who wouldn't otherwise come through our service center doors. A lot of folks might think that our long-term unemployed candidates have multiple barriers to employment, which many of them do, but we're working really hard to resolve those.

Another common stigma that I hear from folks out in the field when I'm telling them which program I'm with and what I'm doing, is that these folks who have been unemployed for a while are lazy and don't really want to work, and that they're ill-equipped to enter the workforce.

They also believe sometimes that us, as government folks, are really bureaucratic and have a lot of red tape that makes our programs difficult to navigate. They might think that what we're doing in the workforce development system really doesn't apply to the business sector, that there's too much compliance and reporting and that we're asking for when we're trying to bring these new programs to them, that we're slow moving and difficult to navigate. And sometimes folks are hesitant to bring the government in because they feel like it might be invasive.

So those are definitely some things that we run into when we're out trying to engage employers in some of our different programs and services. And I'm sure many of you have run into that as well. That kind of goes back to ensuring that we have a good script and some good language to really convey the value of these folks and the paid work experience program.

When we're addressing the stigma of partnering with government agencies, or the potential pitfalls of hiring the long-term unemployed, you want to make sure that we're bringing it back to basics. There are so many benefits to engaging with paid work experience programs. And you're enhancing the ability of each business by broadening their candidate pool while offering important support to the onboarding and training process.

So again, it just goes back to clearly expressing the value, moving away from the stigma, and just being able to really tell them all of the cool things that you've been doing, to make sure that these folks are really prepared for this opportunity.

We also want to make sure that we are creating a streamlined paid work experience experience for everybody who's interacting with your program. I mean, at this point in the grant, all of your eligibility and performance tracking's been taken care of. You've probably developed good systems and tracking mechanisms and things like that. Anything that you can do to make sure that the paid work experience process from your standpoint is as simple and as easy to navigate as possible, is really important.

To do kind of all of the background work on your end quietly, so that anything that you're asking for from the business is minimal and won't take up too much of their time. For example, if you're tracking hours or looking at different job skills being worked at, try to use the employer's existing employee management systems to get the documentation you need, rather than bringing them your particular form that needs to be filled out.

I know that there are some ways that we really can't be flexible in that area. But as much as we can, I would advocate for innovation here, because I think that can be huge in making sure that folks come to the table; are excited to participate with us in paid work experience; and again, speak well of us to other companies who might benefit from that as well.

DOL obviously has many templates and examples of contracts or training agreements that can be modified for use. I know that you guys have access to a paid work experience toolkit. So definitely don't create the wheel when you're looking to revise your materials to make sure that your processes are streamlined and easy to navigate as possible.

Using your local policy issuances, as well as your grant requirements, see if you can adapt some of your agreements to fit the obligations, while putting the burden of proof on your program staff rather than those businesses. Again, the less we have to ask them for, the better.

If we can, what we've done in our area here is provide our businesses with templates that can be customized to meet our reporting requirements. So we kind of give them example letters, for example, that they can use to craft their own letter, verifying completion of work hours or successful skills attainment and things like that. We find that if we can give them a document already and they just have to fill in the specifics, we're much more likely to get that back in a timely fashion and it's much less difficult for them to work on.

I think one thing that I just want to throw in here too that is a hallmark of the demand-driven system, as well as the dual customer approach, we want to make sure that we're really clearly managing expectations. So when we're out meeting these businesses and we're talking about paid work experience, remember our demand-driven and dual customer objectives. Be really upfront and transparent of what's going to be required from these employers to capitalize on paid work experience. Let them know ahead of time what they're committing to when they engage with the program.

Again, be really transparent about tracking requirements and any upcoming asks that you might have. If you give them kind of a ballpark timeframe of when they can expect to hear from you and – I don't know – I'm going to send you an email on this date to remind you that I need this. Make it as easy for them as you can. But again, make sure that they are well aware of anything that might be coming down the pipeline from the bureaucratic standpoint.

I think it's also really important here, in managing expectations, to frame data collection in a business-friendly way. Make sure that they can clearly convey their investment. Sometimes, often you're working with human resources folks who report to other leadership teams at the company.

And to help a company move from one that's worked with you to more of an employer champion for you, it's really helpful if you can help those HR folks convey to their leadership teams what the ROI is, for example. How has it lessened turnover? How has it enhanced workplace culture? How has it gone in terms of making onboarding better?

So there are a few different ways that you want to frame the paid work experience that will help your folks tell that to their leadership teams as well, and hopefully engage with you even more.

So we want to talk a little bit too about integrating paid work experience into a broader spectrum of workforce and economic development strategies. We think that all of the things we talked about today so far are really important and can go a long way in engaging employers and bringing them to the table. Again, we're talking about growing the talent pipeline.

Sector strategies. Not sure if any of you do the sector-based approach where you are in your areas. But again, where we can find commonalities between employers and find distinct need there, it can be really, really successful.

An example that we have here recently is a high need for CNC machine operators. And so we had a consortium of employers that we had worked with and who kept telling us we need CNC skills. We need CNC skills. And so we were able to work with the local educational institution to develop a program that was based on the feedback of those employers who were at the table from that sector.

And then we were able to incorporate a lot of our soft skills or essential skills training that the participants needed to be successful at work. Put them through an academy and I think every single one of those graduates – our first cohort we had about 15 – they were working within two weeks after the training program was done. All of them at employers who had belonged to that consortium and helped developed the curriculum.

So that was a really great example of finding that common need by going out and using these demand-driven and dual customer approach models can work for you.

Career laddering is another thing that is really of interest to employers right now. Again, as we have a lot of workforce aging out, it's important to bring new folks in that can grow with the company long term. If we can talk about paid work experience as a broader career laddering idea as well, I think that would be something that would resonate with the employers you're meeting.

And make sure that your folks who are engaging in paid work experience understand how they're tied into the big picture. Sometimes if they're standing at a machine making a particular part, it's hard to understand that you're a critical part of the manufacturing process. But when you think about the fact that you might be making a little scoop for infant formula or a piece that goes into an airbag in a car, the things that you're doing are really important, big picture-wise. And your job is important. And it's important for us to be able to show employers that we help our paid work experience kind of tie into that overall big picture of why their job matters.

On the other end, I think we want to talk about the way that paid work experience can create changes in the labor market for mutual benefit. How it can increase retention; how it leads to stronger engagement, motivation, and morale, to bring different folks from unique perspectives into the workforce. Talking about the creation of sustainable training and growth opportunities; and control HR-related turnover costs. Again, all of these things are kind of an important way to show employers what their investment in paid work experience will do for them from a broader perspective.

So presentation takeaways. We are nearing the end of our call here today. Want to make sure that all of you feel pretty confident that paid work experience is a critical tool that can be really appealing to businesses in your industries in the current climate of the labor market.

We want to definitely make sure that we understand that paid work experience can lessen turnover and improve retention for companies' key positions. And that the incorporation of paid work experience can create a stronger talent development pipeline for your region and increase engagement, motivation, and morale for the companies who embrace the model.

Again, the value proposition of paid work experience can be framed by lower turnover costs, dedicated dollars to support sustainable training and growth opportunities for your paid work experience companies.

Your paid work experience teams can uniquely position themselves as valued partners by using paid work experience to support a variety of functions at a company, including recruitment, education and training, career advancement, and talent foresight.

All of that said, I think it's really important to make sure that you're practicing these demand-driven and dual customer approaches on a regular basis. It doesn't happen overnight that you find businesses who are excited to engage with you or entrusted in learning all the details about paid work experience.

But I really do believe that when you're using that model and conveying things in a language that businesses can understand, it really goes a long way in engaging those employers and bringing them to the table. And then again, when you're making the processes easy to navigate as possible, they'll come back for more, hopefully.

So with that, we're going to pause for questions again for a second. (Pause.)

MS. CADWALLADER: Thank you so much, Bronwyn. I see a couple of grantees that are on the call and I kind of wanted to give a – just an open forum for us. So it looks like we've got WSOS Nebraska, San Jacinto in Rochester. We might have a couple of other grantees on the call.

But if you could – if any of you want to speak up about any of the challenges that you're facing in paid work experience, I think that would give some oversight to Bronwyn and help her answer any questions that you guys might have in this particular area.

And the line should be unmuted, so I really hope you guys take advantage of this opportunity. (Pause.)

Q: Hello?

MS. CADWALLADER: Hi.

Q: Hi. This is Roger with WSOS.

MS. CADWALLADER: Hi, Roger.

Q: Actually, the hardest part we have – and I think most grantees would have it too – is when you approach some employers about doing work experience and/or on-the-job training, they tend to be hesitant sometimes because they think that this a government programs and all the requirements the government's going to have on them and that kind of issue.

So it takes some explaining to them that this is a benefit to them, that the government's not going to come in and look at their books now and that kind of stuff in this program. But that tends to be some of the hesitations we find over the years. Now, I've been doing work experience type activities for almost 18 years.

MS. DROST: Yeah. I've definitely experienced that myself too, Roger. That some of the meetings that I go to, you can tell the employers feel like they're kind of doing me a favor by letting me go in and start pitching things to them. And I really find that it helps to kind of focus on the positives of the folks that we're working with through paid work experience.

So again, reminding them that these candidates are really motivated to work. They're eager to start a career in, say, the health care field or the manufacturing field or the IT field. That they have some extra support behind them that can really help through the onboarding process. And troubleshoot any issues that might come up, to address from the retention perspective.

Notice we didn't really talk about any financial components of paid work experience. We find that the money is often not the big sell for employers when we're trying to tell them that, hey, you need to do on-the-job training and we'll give you 50 percent of the hourly wage back after six weeks and eight million forms. That just doesn't seem to resonate well with those employers.

But again, framing it from the perspective of, hey, you need folks to work for your business. This is what the labor market looks like. We have these wonderful individuals who have committed to some pretty substantial work preparation activities, have great soft skills and problem solving skills and a really strong network of support behind them. And we find that we get a little bit more traction sometimes there when we focus on the positive things and, again, try to mitigate as much as we can some of those bureaucratic requirements.

If you look online at the DOL's website, they have tons of different templates and tools that I've used in the past and modified locally to meet demand. We are fortunate to have a workforce development board here who's pretty innovative and willing to listen to folks who are out in the field, and have worked hard with us to make sure that our processes are as seamless as they can be.

Q: Right. And like I said, we've been – I've been in it almost 18 years. You learn how to get around it, but you've got to have tough skin and trying to show the employers that this doesn't mean the government's going to come knocking on your door.

The only other big barrier we run into – and I'm sure a lot of other grantees do – is when you want them to sign something. We tend to try to stay with the smaller companies, because if you're working with larger companies, they want to run everything through their legal department. Takes forever.

MS. DROST: Yes. I see that. Nancy Pierce (sp) commented too that sometimes the lawyers at different companies that she's working with don't want to take on the liability of programs like that. That's definitely a challenge, I agree. Which is why I guess not all companies are a good fit for paid work experience.

And it's that kind of sweet spot to figure out what kind of climates seem to be more interested in it, what types of businesses, if there's a size that works really well. We find that a lot of smaller companies are more motivated by receiving any reimbursement that they can. Or they might not have the resources that a larger company has, so we've implemented a lot of paid work experience at companies like that.

And I think a lot of – we didn't really have time to talk about networking or LinkedIn or attending industry events or some other things that we were going to cover in terms of how to get your foot in the door.

But yeah, I think you guys – obviously your challenges are real, for sure.

Q: Yeah.

MS. CADWALLADER: And certainly I think we do have the follow-up opportunity to discuss some of these things that Roger had Nancy have brought up, during our follow-up roundtable call.

And again, we're at the top of the hour, so we'll soon wrap up. But Bronwyn, I did want to take this time to thank you for the informative presentation. The team here, we're writing notes fast and furiously with all the strategies that you were providing. So definitely certainly appreciate the subject-matter expertise that you bring to our team.

And with that, I'll turn it over to Angel. We have a few more slides to just close out today's presentation. And Angel?

MS. HARLINS: Thank you so much, Ayreen. So I just wanted to go through the last set of slides that we have here.

Once again, thank you so much Bronwyn. And this is a slide here with her contact information, if you guys are interested in connecting with her and asking her any other questions that pertain to your Ready to Work program.

Next steps. Like Ayreen mentioned, we do have our roundtable discussion this Thursday at 2:00 p.m. It's going to be on our WebEx platform. You all should have received an Outlook invitation for that. If you need another invitation, please feel free to contact the Ready to Work mailbox and we'll send that off to you promptly.

An additional resource we have here, we had our paid work experience toolkit here from about maybe three LT series ago. And it's just some good information here for you guys to re-reference again.

And once again, of course, we do have resources at our community of practice online. And if you have questions, discussions, please feel free to contact us on our LinkedIn platform.

Bronwyn did provide some additional resources. Like she mentioned before, the Department of Labor does have some information on paid work experience as well as on-the-job training, a few toolkits here and also a little bit more information on the dual customer approaches as well.

As we said, you can always contact the Ready to Work mailbox or contact your federal project officer if you need any clarifications on your policy or modifications.

And before you guys go, I kind of wanted to get a quick feedback too from you, just to see how you thought of this session so that we can better prepare our next few sessions and make sure that we're addressing the topics that you guys have the most challenges in. And also discuss topics where you have successes in so we can kind of discuss different cases and scenarios.

Once again, thank you so much for joining us today. We really appreciate you joining us and we look forward to hearing you on the roundtable discussion this Thursday.

MS. DROST: Thanks so much, everyone.

MS. HARLINS: Thank you.

(END)