**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**Building Strategic Alliances between College and Workforce Boards**

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JENNIFER JACOBS: So again, we want to welcome you to today's "Building Strategic Alliances between College and Workforce Boards" webinar. And if you haven't already done so, please introduce yourself in that chat window.

Now without further ado, I'd like to turn things over to our moderator today, Cheryl Martin, TAACCCT program manager, Division of Strategic Investments at the U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration. Cheryl?

CHERYL MARTIN: Hello. Thank you and welcome and thank you so much for joining us today. Special thanks to our presenters for joining us and to Erin Berg from the Department of Ed. We'll be – I'll be introducing them shortly, but we're really delighted that more than – well over 200 of you have joined us today, which is quite a few folks – and counting. Looks like about a quarter of you are from colleges, and about half of you are from the workforce system, and then the other quarter is from a number of different other places.

So that's great because today of course we are talking about building strategic alliances between colleges and workforce boards, and I want to say that this presentation is based on – or comes out of a written piece that is called Powerhouse Partnerships.

It's there in your links right under the slides. And that piece is something that I think we strongly recommend that you take a look at and share around as you think it would be useful – with your colleagues as well, because there are a lot of other really good examples in there besides the ones we're going to be talking about today – that talk about partnerships.

I'm from the Department of Labor and I'd like to introduce my co-moderator for this series – Erin Berg, who is from the Department of Education, and we'll hear from Erin in just a moment. But I wanted to say first that our three presenters today are all grantees from a U.S. Department of Labor program called TAACCCT.

And for those not familiar with TAACCCT, it stands for the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training Program. And it is coming up on the end here in September, 2018 – a $2 billion, seven-year time frame that it's covered – grant that is wrapping up in September, 2018. It's unique from a lot of the grants that we've done at Department of Labor because it provides funds for capacity building for community colleges to support the kind of changes that would make it easier for adult learners to attain industry-recognized credentials to improve their job prospects.

The 700 TAACCCT funded colleges developed nearly 2,700 new or revised programs of study. That's a lot because a program of study would have to be a whole credential-based program. And it could be like the curriculum for manufacturing or a healthcare program at a community college or so on.

It's also developed a lot of new ways of doing things, like building strategic alliances between colleges and workforce boards. And I'd like to take this opportunity to mention that our presenters today – and all the other grantees that we have – have put the materials that they developed from that curriculum or from those programs – changes that they made, including a vast amount of free and open educational resources on a website called skillscommons.org. And we'll be talking a little bit about that now, a little bit at the end. But that is a website that makes it possible for you to share in the learnings and the deliverables that these grantees developed.

In some cases, you can get a full curriculum that a college developed, and in other cases you can get information about employer engagement or similar. We'll talk at the end a little bit – we'll be hearing from Wisconsin about a curriculum that they did on digital literacy, for example. So it's not just degree curriculum. It's also things that can be used very broadly, like say in an American job center or something like that.

So we wanted to share some of that today because even though these grants are ending, others can benefit from what grantees learned and built. So you'll hear more about those free resources and you'll hear three great stories of how grantees in Kansas, Missouri and Wisconsin made some really exciting things happen around partnerships.

Let me turn it over to Erin for a moment – Erin Berg, my colleague at the Department of Education in the Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education. Erin?

ERIN BERG: Hi, everyone. As Cheryl said, my name is Erin and I'm with OCTAE, the Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education. And it's my pleasure to serve as a liaison to all of the community colleges in the United States.

And since the inception of the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training program – or TAACCCT if you don't want to have that whole mouthful every time – the U.S. Departments of Labor and Education have been working to support TAACCCT applicants, grantees, and now through SkillsCommons, the greater workforce development community.

In my role, I'm able to hear about the many successes and innovations at community colleges. However, I'm also often asked what resources might be available for colleges that are facing challenges, or those seeking to improve and update their curriculum and instruction.

Today's webinar addresses one of those challenges that I hear quite often about how to work with workforce development boards – create dynamic partnerships, address the local workforce needs. We'll hear about these excellent resources available in the TAACCCT repository – skillscommons.org – for colleges to use in creating new and innovative programs in conjunctions with workforce – local workforce boards.

We at the Department of Education have been excited to be a part of this SkillsCommons webinar series, to which links can be found I think on the next slide right here. And if you see any other topics and you missed that, I believe there's a recording available at those links. But we're also hoping to continue this series in the future, so keep an eye out for more information in the fall.

So thank you very much to our colleagues at the Department of Labor and our excellent presenters from KansasWorks, from Missouri Department of Economic Development and from Western Technical College. I'm really looking forward to hearing your presentations. Cheryl?

MS. MARTIN: Yes. Thank you, Erin. And thank you very much to Amanda, Mardy and Tonya for joining us today.

We've got Amanda Duncan, the vice president and chief business development officer for the Workforce Alliance of South Central Kansas – that's near Wichita. We have Mardy Leathers.

So Amanda will be speaking about partnerships at the local level between a community college and a work – workforce areas. And Mardy will be taking us to the state level because Mardy Leathers is the director of the Division of Workforce Development at the Missouri Department of Economic Development.

And then Tonya Wagner, the Dean of General Studies and Liberal Arts at Western Technical College in Wisconsin, will be taking us back to the local level to talk about how things – how their partnerships worked there.

So we're excited about this and I'm going to turn it over now to Amanda.

AMANDA DUNCAN: Good afternoon. Excuse me here as I get my slides ready. I'm just going to give a brief overview of the Workforce Alliance of South Central Kansas. We are the local workforce development board for area four of the state – so that includes the Wichita Metro area, a six-county region – and you can see it there on the map in the purple. And we are the workforce development board, but we view our WIOA programs as the floor of our operations and build upon that.

So in the past 10 years, we've received approximately $25 million in competitively awarded grants. Some of them are to collaborative partnerships, and some have been awarded directly to our board. So you can see the list there of what we're managing, but in particular we've collaborated with two of our local community colleges on TAACCCT grants. And so I'm going to speak to you a little bit about those today.

The reasons for collaboration are very important to us and they're very, very deliberate. So the collaboration with both of these schools predated the applications and award of the TAACCCT grant. We view collaboration as key to our success at the workforce board. It helps those – our job seeker clients as well as our employers and grows the economy here in the region.

And so there's three key take-aways that I'm going to talk about. Initially, the relationship building – and again that's our deliberate strategy of inclusion and cooperation at the senior level between our workforce board president and CEO, and then the college president. They meet face-to-face; they're on a talking relationship – back and forth email, texting, cell phone. And then, we have the college president actually serve on our LWDB.

And so in this case, both of the community colleges that we have the TAACCCT grant with – they do serve on our board. That may be as unique – it just happened to work out in our case. There are four community colleges in our region, and we have good working relationships with all of them. But these two community college presidents happen to sit on our board.

Additionally, collaboration allows us a larger capacity, both from the community college side – but I'm speaking from the workforce side. We can help leverage our employer relationships, so these are the companies that we're working with every day – posting jobs, having hiring events, referring job seekers to. We can put them in better connection with the community colleges to hire the graduates. And then we also have a larger capacity that can extend to the community college related to our data collection, reporting and follow-up. And so, I'll talk a little bit more about how that worked into different administrations when I get to that point.

Additionally, we feel that collaboration helps everyone improve outcomes. It helps the college reach their goals, it helps their graduates find jobs, it helps our job seekers to find out a career pathway and enter training, and then it helps employers at the end of the day find a skilled workforce. So all in all, everyone benefits from our collaboration.

So specifically, I'm going to speak about the TAACCCT grant that was received by Butler Community College for an IT institute. It was a little over $2 million, and the point of the grant – through the grant they developed 27 credentials, six degrees and 21 certificates that you can see there. The outcomes are listed – 504 individuals enrolled, 109 in training and 340 entered employment.

The main point of our initial work with them came two years prior to the grant award through workforce – the Wichita Tech Alliance. It was an employer group formed out of the Wichita Chamber of Commerce that involved both us from the workforce system and Butler Community College from the education standpoint. So this group really came together and collaborated. That led to the grant award. These were the partners that supported the grant. They helped determine what degree programs were needed in this area. So really without that early work, the grant wouldn't have been awarded.

Additionally, this group came together after the grant was awarded to help set up the advisory board, and then the college and the workforce board really started working – mostly together – on the initial implementation. We were asked to offer some assistance to them on the initial file management process – helping them set up templates and forms for intake of students. They had expertise in doing that for their regular academic students, but they didn't have the expertise related to the federal grant management, and so that's what the workforce board brought to the table. And so that – it was beneficial.

One thing that did come up during the grant administration is that there was a change in leadership. Both the community college president retired – and she was a long standing – I think more than 20 plus years in her role. And so a new college president came on. There was also a leadership change in the project director for the grant and in the dean that managed the grant. So there was a little bit of chaos while all those changes were taking place.

And so then at that time, we at the workforce board were asked to step in and play a little bit larger role. And they entered into a formal contract with us for staffing services, and so then we assisted tracking the individuals, doing follow-up, collecting outcome data and the employment data. So those outcomes that you see there were what we collected, and the formal contract allowed us to fund two STE for the second half of the grant.

They also contracted with us for information related to engaging employers. Because we had good relationships with employers, we assisted them with some employer engagement events – an open house tour of the institute – so to get some of those employers out to actually see what they had built and developed – and then also to put on a cyber security form.

And so you can see we held last October a very large event. A number of partners came to the table with Workforce Alliance and Butler Community College. You can see them listed there. Also, some additional universities because articulation agreements had been developed. And there were four tracks to the day. It turned out to be a really great event.

We also put together Career Pathway. We had started in 2012 with a document similar to this, but it really evolved because of the partnership and the different credentials that had been developed under the grant. We really came into this posting labor market information with these – this is an active, live document on our website that has links to real-time jobs. It links back to the degree programs at each level, and also wages for this area of the state. So those were some outcomes that came about because of the relationships.

I've come to the end of the formal presentation that I have. But overall, I just want to reiterate that the relationships between the community college and the workforce board existed prior to the application and the award of the grant, but they were really strengthened by working together in administering the program.

And overall, we found it very beneficial, and they're continuing on and sustaining – like I mentioned – the Career Pathway. That's a document that we continue to update every quarter, and we work with the community college on that. They also continue to meet with our staff about new degree programs so that we can refer dislocated or trade impact workers to enroll in them, and as we continue to have individuals enroll in IT and data careers.

MS. MARTIN: All right. Thank you, Amanda. And I see we have one question. Can we see the live type line models she mentioned on the website? Where would they go to find that, Amanda?

MS. DUNCAN: They're actually on the Workforce Alliance website, and I will put the links out there. We've developed them in five pathways now, and I'll put this in the chat box. I'll give you the link.

MS. MARTIN: OK. Great. So would say, Amanda, that you developed – I think you told me – you told us that this Career Pathways one that you show is right here was developed because of the grant. And then did you develop the other four kind of as a spinoff of that?

MS. DUNCAN: Yes. They were developed through a larger regional strategic planning effort called the Blueprint for Regional Economic Growth, or BREG. But the data and IT initially was developed first in 2012. It looked a little bit different than this. It was rainbow colored based on the different pathways, and it was only interactive to the point that it described the actual occupation. It didn't have any labor market data or links back to education providers.

MS. MARTIN: Uh-huh. OK. Great. So sometimes I talk with TAACCCT about the ripple effect of the grant. You know, you do one – you said you were going to do this for the grant and you did that, and these other kinds of things are ripple effects that come out of that.

So we have a couple of other questions for you. One is does your state workforce development work fluidly with your community colleges and Department of Education? So looking there at how do you relate to your state workforce development – I believe is part of the question – and also the Department of Education.

MS. DUNCAN: Yes. I would say that in Kansas we are lucky to have a good system like that. One key component that might be unique to us is the Kansas Board of Regents, which manages the community technical college and universities, has a liaison position that works directly with the Kansas Department of Commerce, who handles the state workforce function.

And so that person is really key in being a communication point and working joint projects. And I would say we've had that position perhaps for 10 years. I could do a little bit of checking, but that position is – I think – key and I don't know if it's unique to Kansas – to our model. But it is something that's beneficial to the workforce system and I believe the community colleges.

MS. MARTIN: Thanks. All right. Thank you. We'll have time for more questions that would relate to Amanda and the other speakers toward the end, but right now we are going to move on to Missouri and start looking at the state level. So Mardy, can you tell us about partnerships at the state level in Missouri?

MARDY LEATHERS: Absolutely. So welcome and thanks for having me. Glad to talk about the exciting stuff that we have going on in Missouri, and Missouri's been really going through a lot of synergistic transformation over the last five to six years. And what I'm going to talk about today really put us in a position to do some of the key initiatives that we have going in front of us as we really look to take our state to the next level.

So it all started for us really with the TAACCCT grant program. And so the TAACCCT program really became the catalyst for Missouri to remove itself from the silos that have been created, and to really understand – how do we combine the three legs of workforce development – the employment, the training and the education to actually work together to be truly connected and not done in a vacuum or silos or in some sort of – pass the baton from one area to the next.

And so maybe it helps to start with a little context. But contextually, Missouri is a pretty economic diverse state. We're right in the middle of the United States. We're unique in that we have two major metropolitan areas on each side of the state with Saint Louis on the east and Kansas City on the west.

And then our rural and suburban populations kind of fill in between. We have two very large areas in southwest Missouri with Springfield and then Columbia, Missouri, which is the home of University of Missouri. Those areas are kind of unique in that they're located in kind of a geographically rural and isolated area. But yeah – we've seen a lot of great growth. We have a lot of great partnerships.

So Missouri's kind of divided in 14 different workforce regions. And so you can imagine getting 14 different local workforce development boards to come together is a challenge in and of itself. But then actually connecting everyone together and pulling and sharing resources, which has been an ultimate goal and outcome of this, has been interesting to watch. Inside that also, Missouri does not have a statewide system for our community colleges.

We actually have 13 independent community colleges, which are independent taxing districts that have – we have statewide coverage in that, as you see on the map. The colored areas cover the service regions.

But they're all independently – have independent boards of trustees, and so they have independent missions and objectives, and they don't always work in sync from the vantage point of any kind of statewide systemic approach. And then we also have on top of that – we have a – what we call a state technical institute, which is located right in the middle of Missouri. And it has a statewide mission, and it provides some of our career technical education. It's a post-secondary level.

So we have a few different layers throughout, and then on top of the 13 community colleges and the 14 workforce regions, we have 31 job centers throughout the state. So we think about each time there's different layer, it becomes a new challenge in ensuring quality of service, ensuring that communication of programming gets disseminated throughout, and there's a connection of really mission, vision and values that we hope to accomplish.

And so, Missouri was really a fragmented and isolated state for a long time, and then we – what we saw happened was the TAACCCT grant came along and we had a great opportunity to kind of look each other in the mirror and say – OK. How do we work together? So we received three out of four rounds of TAACCCT and with that, there was actually – it was driven by the community colleges.

But Governor Nixon – at the time when the community colleges approached the state and asked for assistance in this effort – Governor Nixon's administration had asked that they come together, and that they actually put together a unified effort to apply for these programs, and then work closely with the state technical institute and each of the workforce regions.

And so that's what happened, so the nudge was there. The opportunity was there, and the funding kind of greased the wheels and it brought everyone together to create a statewide MOU, which then created an opportunity for there to be some standards for how we will work together. How will we share resources and pull information?

We created statewide grants, an advisory committee for TAACCCT, which had key stake holders from education – both secondary and post-secondary. We had key members of the economic development sector, workforce development sector, and government sectors. So what it did was allowed really – us to design – kind of get everybody in the room and realize we're actually on the same team. And hey – some of the challenges that you have, I also have. And some of these frustrations that I have, you also have. And so together, we created some opportunities.

So that kind of began to reset the culture in Missouri and allowed for that leadership, allowed for program innovation – expansion. And there's been a lot of great spinoffs that have occurred as a result of the TAACCCT program, and of us kind of transcending those boundaries. Again, to remind everyone, in Missouri we do not have a system. We have 14 different workforce regions and 13 community colleges. So what we have now is a voluntary system in which people are working together, which is pretty unique and exciting.

So some outcomes that we have – on the ground level, one of the first things to roll out, which was really important, was the Financial Aid Desk Aid. So we were able to put in place – create documents, or a manual if you will – that is at all 31 of our job centers and within all of our workforce boards.

And really what it did was it created a document that highlighted the different opportunities for financial aid. So if an individual – a job seeker or someone who's looking for training opportunities – would come into a job center, then they would be able to – the counselors there would have full access to information that – about the different opportunities for financial aid and the processes of which they may apply and work through those things.

We were able to create a lot of labor market information that we were able to share across the state. And we had a good data shop with Missouri Economic Research & Information Center. But a lot at the end gets disseminated, and so you have all this great data, but no one really knew what it was or how to get a hold of it.

What we were able to also do is leverage some state resources and disseminate that data and make that data accessible. So we actually created Burning Glass Accounts as a result of these grants that all entities could access and get local data. And then we were able to also do some pretty cool macro level data reports.

And then some key programs that came out of it – we were able to leverage what is now almost a $6 billion expansion of registered apprenticeships across the state. We have invested in employer engagement teams that isn't supported by the state, and the community colleges that are housed at the job centers.

We've created a lot of soft skill and employability skills programs, and we put together a lot of kind of spinoff grants – some in the area of working with a wide range of things from TANF to registered apprenticeships to STEP and STEM and working with vocational rehabilitation. So a lot of neat things became a result of us coming together. It really was not – in Missouri we weren't structured that way. So it had to become organic, and we had to get through some culture.

And then today as we look forward, we're doing a lot of initiatives to kind of – now that we're all focused and have the same mission, we're trying to determine – how do we continue to refine and refocus and work together towards one common goal to really create a resilient labor market in Missouri based around those key legs of employment, training and education?

MS. MARTIN: All right. Thank you, Mardy. That's a lot.

MS. LEATHERS: We like to keep busy in Missouri.

MS. MARTIN: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Exactly. And you did keep busy over three rounds of those grants. So we do have a couple of questions, and I'm going to ask you in particular this one, although we might add this to the other ones later too. Are your – can you talk about how your governor at various different times – because there was different governors throughout the course of the grants that you had – but whether – what role the governor was in providing leadership and whether that was a helpful thing for you in Missouri.

MS. LEATHERS: Absolutely. So we've now exchanged three administrations throughout this process, and each of the three governors were very key in supporting this. They have each had in their agenda workforce development as a key priority of their strategic initiatives.

And of course, when we think about workforce development, to them what that meant was again aligning education, employment and workforce development together. And so we've been very fortunate to have that leadership at the top of our administration, supporting all the work we're doing in workforce development and keeping it at the forefront.

MS. MARTIN: OK. Thanks. And then there's a couple of questions that look specific to what you just said – like clarification. Somebody asked – is your soft skills training facilitated by you or a vendor?

MS. LEATHERS: So in some cases, it's our education partners that provide that. So in some cases it could be a current technical school. It might be a community college, and in some cases, we do have third-party vendors that come in. What's unique about that is we kind of have a workforce development network that we created, so all these vendors are pre-vetted. And so of course, anyone anytime can go out and procure their own vendor, but we kind of have a nice resource among each other where we can share even vendors and vendor information, so you know you're – that the quality of the programs that you may be procuring – have been tested around the state.

MS. MARTIN: OK. Thank you. And then a quick question. What is STEP and STEM?

MS. LEATHERS: Right. So STEM is when you – we have science, technology, engineering and mathematics – so a lot of STEM programs. And our STEP programs – those are really geared around focusing on science, technology, education and – oh the "P" is going to throw me here. Sorry. I'm looking to – science, technology and education programs is really what we're focusing on there – is in our education system – are we making sure that our programs are aligned with the jobs of tomorrow, so to speak.

So we're making sure that in all of our training and education programs – that we're preparing students either at the K to 12 level or the post-secondary level with a generalized skill sets in science, technology and – to prepare them for the increase in digital skills that are required in these jobs.

MS. MARTIN: OK. Great. Thank you. And I'm going to ask you one last question here. I know we have more questions than that – I'm going to save some of these for later, but one question is do you have an MOU that is standing beyond the TAACCCT grant? And I know the answer to that, but I'll let you give it.

MS. LEATHERS: Yes. Absolutely we do. We do. And we continue to actually increase the MOU as far as – we have new engagements really every day. And so we're partnering on really new projects all the time, and we have these ongoing MOUs, which are kind of the – if you will, they're kind of the hubs of relationships. But yet we're – as we focus on new projects – really we're using kind of that design or that model to further engage new relationships.

In Missouri real quick – we also have under WIOA – we have our four state agencies that cover the title programs. But then we also have 19 core partners. So again, we're constantly having to figure out ways to work together. And so this has really kind of created that model that we've been using across the state.

MS. MARTIN: All right. Thank you. I know there's other questions that we've gotten, and we will try to come back to some of those at the end. Keep those questions coming, but for right now I want to say thank you to Mardy for giving us that quick tour of Missouri.

And I want to turn to Tonya Wagner, who comes from La Crosse, Wisconsin to tell us – kind of taking a little bit of a different angle of things here in terms of partnerships and how things working in your particular area. Tonya?

MS. WAGNER: Great. Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here today. I'm excited to be on this call. So currently I'm the Dean of General Studies and Liberal Arts, and you might ask – what does the Dean of General Studies and Liberal Arts have anything to do with training in IT skills? And actually, my previous role was Assistant Dean of Business and Information Technology, so most of the work I did was under that office. And prior to that, I was our TAACCCT 3 grant manager. So it's been a great journey, and I have many perspectives on this.

If you could, progress the slide please. All right. Great.

So quickly, first, all the technical colleges in Wisconsin got together to do their grant applications for TAACCCT. We do have local control with a central body who we work with. So our – working together as a system really helped leverage all of the colleges' skills to come together to have a shared vision.

And the shared vision that we had is that we wanted to create a grant application that helped build information technology career pathways that looked at what local communities needed, but also had a lot of alignment in their approach. So there was a lot of similarity and sharing, but there were also differences based on the particular needs of the particular communities and our particular college districts.

So in the process of grant development, we continued to hear that it would be difficult to train the existing workforce for careers in IT – the folks were being underserved by our current economy – and that there was a skills gap that we were going to encounter in that many of the people who are unemployed or underemployed, or whose work had gone overseas didn't have the basic technology skills to even enter day one.

So they weren't ready or prepared to enter to the first day to a training program in information technology. So in addition to building career pathways in information technology that would range from one term to two years, we also looked as a system and as a consortium to build a basic information technology skills course that would help address that gap.

So we had this kind of huge vision of creating a moot or a massive online open course to give both everyone in the state of Wisconsin the opportunity to have an interactive, engaged and really modern experience with gaining some basic technology skills that they could do prior to entering their training program. So we worked together as a consortium, and we actually created a wonderful course. There is a link to that course in the chat box.

So the consortium of 16 schools got together; they created the basic computer skills course. The course ranges from things as simple as using a mouse or keyboard to word processing, document management software to basic security. So you could go everywhere from using a word processing document to storing documents to navigating for the complexities of using social media and how that plays out at work.

So it also has diagnostic tools where folks can see where they're at so that they can jump in any time. They can earn badges; they can repeat sections; they can track their progress. They can share their progress as well. And in that they – we could help equip people with very low technology skills to really grow, regardless if they entered information technology career pathway, or if they were entering or needing to upskill their – in order to enter any further employment. As we know, so many jobs require basic technology skills, regardless if those are IT skills or not.

So we came together and really – the limited computer literacy – we had sort of a thing. So again, it was the colleges who created this. We're talking about the partnerships. So the colleges said – we're not going to be able to train people because they don't have the basic skills that they need. So we've got to give them the basic skills.

Well then, the problem arises – well how are we going to find people who need basic skills training to prepare them to be able to work – either enter the workforce, or to enter a training program. And you know it's obvious in many of these large, federal grants – you're expected – or the expectation is that you're going to be working with your workforce partners. And it didn't even occur – right. This is so typical.

So each of our local technical colleges were implementing it on their own, so I think if we had a statewide view on – how do we view this partnership and how do we really get this training course into our workforce partners – we could have even been more effective.

But it was one of those things that happened after the fact. And I think this happens a lot, right? We look from our own lens, and the community college and the technical college lens in this instance was how do we provide the degree or the credential? And we didn't really think about how the work that we were doing could positively impact our workforce partners.

So if you could progress the slide, that would be great. OK. Thanks.

All right. So basically, we created this beautiful, wonderful course and then we started implementing it at our colleges. So at western, what we did is that we thought about where are the places that we tend to work to get the – you know, is it going to be in our welcome center, our adult basic education courses, maybe its our reentry program for students entering out of jail. We could get this course there.

And we're meeting with our workforce partners and we had originally written in the grant that our relationship with our workforce partners was going to be based on a recruitment model. So they would send us students, and then we would train them and send them back out into the workforce. They kept saying we don't really have people that we can send to you; we don't have people that we can send to you that we feel comfortable with entering technology training programs; we don't have a ton of people coming through our doors, and the people that we do have have really low skills. And we really don't see them going into IT.

And so, it seems so natural in retrospect. But in that instant, what I actually remember – sitting in the room with our workforce board, our director of our Department of Workforce Development, our lead at our job center. I remember sitting in the room and just asking – well, what do you – what would you need from us? Or what do you need to be able to do this? And they said, well you know what would be really great, if we had a way where we could train people in basic computer skills.

And we could do that before we send people to you, and we could gage some interest. And I said we've already created that. Why didn't we tell you that we created this? So it was one of those "Aha" moments of sitting and just asking what they needed instead of assuming that what they needed was just more opportunity to be able to send folks to us.

So – oh they're asking – I'll try to be a little bit – I'm trying to be as loud as I can in this instance. Unfortunately, I'm in a hotel room and the ambient noise is a little bit loud so I apologize if you can't hear me. I'll try and speak loudly.

So basically, what we had to do is that we really wanted to work on building trust between our relationship and the relationship that we had with our workforce partner through listening, and through listening to the things that they already needed. I'm not sure if this is the case in your instance – in your relationships with your local community college or with your local workforce board, but we had had some old damage, where we had spoken past each other.

We had forgotten to listen to what other people needed. And we really had not listened to what the values of the other organization had been. So we started in a new way when they realized that we had this awesome resource that could be so helpful for our workforce partner. We said – well, then how do we implement it? Do you want to own it? Do we want to own it? They – can your people just refer to an online website where people go in and take this?

And they said our folks were coming into our job center or who are coming through our workforce skill-building training, they don't have the skills to turn on a computer. And I think that was kind of an a-ha moment of realizing the real skills gap. And so we talked a lot about, well, if we have an online training program and you don't have people who have the basic skills to turn on a computer, how would they access our online training program?

And they said can't we just have a class? And I thought wow. That seems a little bit counterintuitive, and they were like – they said we have a computer lab right here at our job center and at our one-stop shop. Why don't you just hold classes? And I thought that's seems a little bit counterintuitive. We created all these videos and classes and self-based learning. Maybe there's another way that we could work together to kind of solve the same problem, but not having a formal class.

So actually, what we decided on was so inexpensive and efficient, it just was an amazing situation. So we actually decided to have some of our IT students work as interns at the job center, not to teach the course, but to help people navigate getting to the course, and to act as encouragement. So our IT students were gaining interpersonal and work skills by working with folks who were really needing some basic technology skills training. And the job center was benefiting, and workforce improvement training was benefiting because they had extra hands that didn't really cost them very much money at all.

So we trained – we had hundreds of participants who went through the online training course with the assistance of the interns at the job center. And then in order to sustain the program, we worked to train the front-line staff and train – on how to navigate the system so that then they were comfortable and could – they were comfortable with the technology and could then sustain it with no cost to the organization.

So part of what worked – sort of in the win-win strategy or what worked is we really were able to build trust. We were able to listen and hear what the other party needed. We were able to build our partnership on those shared values, and we were able to communicate in such a way that acknowledged that each organization had its own unique needs and its own unique perspective to be able to accomplish the same goals. So our college wins because it had more people enter its training program. The workforce center won because it was equipping more people with the skills that they needed to be able to enter the work world.

I think – if you could progress the slide. Oh I actually can bring – OK. Great.

So in our district, we trained over 250 participants during the grant period through our job center. The student inters were an amazing help. We were able to listen to what they needed and really create a single point of contact to aid in the communication to really act as a liaison. We continued to flex our approach to see what would work. And we were thinking about the long term of – not just how do we use the grant funds now, but how do we in the future continue to have an impact when the money ran out?

So you think about what would have happened if we hadn't partnered or listened or opened or extended our model beyond our own perspective – that we wouldn't have trained those 250 people with basic computer skills. And we wouldn't have created a system that was easy for our workforce partners to have a go-to place to train potential workers. So it really was a win-win situation, and we were so happy to be able to do that.

MS. MARTIN: Thank you, Tonya. And thank you for fitting us in in your hotel. I know you're offsite and you've been running around like crazy doing a lot of things. And thank you for fitting us in.

So that's a really interesting story of one specific piece of partnership that happened around a very specific thing. And it came from asking I think a really good question. Can you help me understand what you really need here? And I think that that question is probably a great partnership question for just about anything, although it may be one of those – be careful what you ask for, right – because it might take you to places that you didn't expect. So one of the things – we've got to – I'm going to ask you a quick question just about the digital learning course.

And I want to point out to everybody that in that links box, it says basic computer skills course. You can click on that and that will take you to the place on SkillsCommons where that whole curriculum is there and ready for you to load on your computers at your American job center. And get those interns from the IT department over there. I think that's actually a great idea. That's something that could be used widely I think.

But so there was a quick question about that – aside from having the skills to operate the computer, did the course cover how to effectively learn online? Is that part of what you – about what you're asking?

MS. WAGNER: Yes. That is a wonderful – right. So that's part of the genius of the online course is that it is very easy to navigate. But as you navigate it, you can add complexity to the way you're navigating. So yes. In the practice of doing the online course, you learned many of the skills. The great thing about using the interns is that their job was not only to say – hey. Here's how you turn on your computer.

Here's where you mouse was. But really to act as the coach, and that's where that soft skill or that employability skill development happens for the IT students. Right – because they were helping the students learn to navigate the course on their own. The students were going through it at their own pace. It wasn't like the interns sat up at the front of the classroom and said – here. Click here. Click here. They really went around the room and helped – as an IT professional would – diagnose and help them move through the course.

MS. MARTIN: Great. Thank you. So I just want to say that besides your helping your HAC there with that – using that course – we right now show that there have been 929 downloads of that curriculum from SkillsCommons.

And we talk to people about that as a good example all the time of the kind of stuff that you can get on SkillsCommons that came out of these TAACCCT grants. And it's not – this is not one that's like an AA degree or a certification in healthcare or something. It's a really basic piece that can be used in HAC. We've heard people – like you said – used it for reentry situations and things like that.

So somebody says, yeah, somebody made a comment that says, "The curriculum is amazing." I think they're talking about yours. "I checked the analytics and am wondering how it was able to be shared throughout the world."

So really the way it is able to be shared is because it's posted out there on SkillsCommons. SkillsCommons is a repository of that and 12,000 other things. And some of those things are like files of 65 – like on our last webinar that we had – it was about apprenticeship. If you go into the showcases on SkillsCommons and look at – in this case apprenticeship, there's an example of 65 documents in a package – the apprenticeship tool kit. So that can be one thing on there is 65 documents that help you set up an apprenticeship program if you want to. But I digress.

Let me get back to partnerships. And I'm going to go back to this question of if – and I'm going to ask this to all three of you, and then Erin is going to ask another question.

For those starting out in working with a workforce board or with a community college – whichever angle you're coming at from there – if somebody didn't have this kind of partnership that you've had, Amanda, from the beginning – not from the beginning but for so many years, or if somebody wasn't at the place that you're at, Mardy, in Missouri with some of those partnerships, or if somebody didn't have what you've got going on in Wisconsin, what would be a really good place to get the ball rolling?

And the question up here says in Missouri, but I'm asking for each of you in your areas. So who would like to address that question first?

MS. LEATHERS: So this is Mardy. I can just jump in. I think that really starting to build that local – that relationship with your workforce board – so if you are a community college now or current technical education provider, or if you are a workforce development board – no matter what your current seat is, it's all about partnering with those other agencies.

And so, there's public meetings, there's routine opportunities to collaborate, and it really kind of gets back to the whole networking game – finding ways to participate in meetings, finding ways to reach out and have that cup of coffee and engage in some conversations about – how do we work together? What types of synergies to we have? What are the challenges that we're both facing – maybe together or otherwise? Maybe there's some legacy information that you have to overcome.

Sometimes there's relationships that with prior personalities maybe strained things among agencies, and there's some repairing that has to occur. But really, it all starts with that conversation and then engaging in meetings. And I think quickly, everyone realizes there's an opportunity to come together because we all have the same mission and outcomes in mind.

MS. MARTIN: Great. Thank you. Amanda or Tonya, do you want to add anything to that?

MS. DUNCAN: Yes. This is Amanda. I would just add that it might just take a little bit of humility – echoing what Mardy said about either repairing relationships or – if a key staff person at either one of the agencies leaves, then the whole relationship falls apart. I mean, so it's kind of like building it up and building it new. But then also echoing – you just have to get down to simplicity of what do you actually need or want, and then just inquiring about what resources might already be there. So you either don't have to build something from scratch, or don't have to spend money on something that somebody else can offer you as a partner.

And one example I just want to share from our project is that initially, when the new project manager came on to the TAACCCT grant in the Wichita area, they tried to manage all the data in an excel spreadsheet. And so that was not adequate, and it was causing a lot of stress for the individual doing it. And then when he realized that we had a database that could manage that, he thought why haven't I been working with you sooner?

And so it was comical – a little bit. We were able to work it all out, but he didn't know what he didn't know. And he hadn't worked with workforce before. His predecessor did, and he didn't. And so it ended out very well because we had the resources, and then he could focus his expertise on the academic side.

MS. MARTIN: Thank you. Tonya, you want to add anything?

MS. WAGNER: Yeah. Definitely. Just building strong relationships starts at the space of shared values. And there's probably already people either on the workforce board or at the college who are already interacting. So I think doing a quick survey of your organization and finding out who is already interacting in those spaces, and doing digging – finding out where there might be already good work being done.

Often I think we operate in silos. I know in our college there was somebody in industry services who's heavily involved in our workforce board, but our academic areas weren't. Right? Or there might be somebody in career services, for example, who might be interacting, or our registrar's office who might be interacting – and finding out where those relationships already exist and finding a space to grow them is a great first place to start.

MS. MARTIN: Great. Thank you. Thank you. Erin, you want to take a question next?

MS. BERG: Sure. So one of the questions that came in and – I'll ask to all of the presenters is – can you highlight whether your governor provided leadership with their office? And if so, was that a helpful thing?

MS. MARTIN: We already – Mardy already addressed that, so I just wanted to go back and see if there was anything from Tonya or Amanda on that.

MS. DUNCAN: This is Amanda. I'll just note that it was a local application process here in Kansas. We did have the good fortune of having only one administration during the duration of our grant program, and there were some initiatives on the K-12 side that supported the program.

So concurrently to the TAACCCT grant, IT Academy was developed for high school students to earn dual credit. And so that was something that came out of an initiative from the governor. But really, the TAACCCT grant in Kansas operated independent of the governor, so it was a non-issue.

MS. MARTIN: OK. Thanks.

MS. WAGNER: In Wisconsin, it is – it was the same. Right? So we had legislative support, but it was really the 16 technical colleges who came together. We have a pretty strong presidents' association, even though we have local control. It was really the leaders of the technical colleges and that association that decided to come together to create the application.

MS. MARTIN: OK. Thank you. So we have just a couple of other little questions that we'll try to help people out with here. One is that somebody asks – are you using TABE and that kind of thing to assess readiness for pathway entry – or whatever kind of tool? That would go to Tonya.

MS. WAGNER: Yeah. Sure. So we – students who are coming in with non-traditional educational backgrounds from a GED perspective would take the TABE test. In this instance, we actually created a technology literacy assessment for students who are coming into IT career pathways in particular – not for all students. But we have thought about doing that. So we basically worked with a third-party provider and crafted some basic technology questions, and went through that and then provided that and then had incoming students take that assessment to really see where they're at.

Now that the – there is an assessment for technology literacy on the (bits ?) course. So that was created later – just after we were already enrolling students, so we did move to that process. It's not a – it's a diagnostic. It's not punitive, it's not a barrier to the pathway. It was really a – how ready are you to enter this pathway, and what sorts of things would you need to do to prepare yourself to enter the pathway? So more developmental.

MS. MARTIN: OK. So here's one last question, which is kind of going back to the community college alignment and that kind of thing. Do your community colleges offer programs that are aligned to industry standards, utilizing sequences of common courses, creating consistency between community college programs?

So not so much specifically a partnership kind of question, but more specific to the question about how you set up your community college program. So maybe Mardy and – I don't know. If somebody else wants to take that one on as well, although we're running out of time. OK?

MS. WAGNER: So in Wisconsin we have a centralized – this is Tonya Wagner. In Wisconsin we have a centralized curriculum management. So we have local control and people can create their own local programs, but we also do have a database through the Worldwide Instructional Design System, where we did upload all of our courses, both to the SkillsCommons website, but also to our statewide curriculum pool so that – all the way down to the learning plan. So from the higher level curriculum to the learning plans – were all shared across the state, and then also shared in SkillsCommons.

MS. MARTIN: Thanks. Mardy, did you have anything to add to that?

MS. LEATHERS: You know, not really. I mean, so we essentially have everything posted in real time at SkillsCommons. And whenever there's an opportunity, we have our industry advisory councils that each of the colleges have based on the different programs. And any time there's any major changes or there's an opportunity to share some of those best practices, that does come up in the quarterly meetings that the different disciplinarians have across the state.

And so if there's an opportunity to change curriculum, it happens pretty quick. And so, if you're changing curriculum – not going to get deep into accreditation stuff here – that's my old hat working with colleges – but there is – it's harder when you're building something new and you're going through an accreditation process. For some of that curriculum, really it can be – happen real quick because you're not changing the infrastructure. You're really just maybe changing the content.

MS. MARTIN: All right. Thank you. Thank you. Well, we have a few more questions but we have run out of time. So I'm posting an e-mail address there on the – I think everybody will see it. Anyway, taaccct@col.gov. You can send any additional questions to that e-mail address if you wish to.

Right now, I just want to give a really big thanks to Amanda and to Mardy and to Tonya for taking the time to share with us about your partnerships and how you made them work in your local areas because these are complex things to do and difficult – not easy to overcome things like changes of personnel and all of that. And just – like sometimes it just requires sitting down and asking the simple questions, and sometimes it's complex questions.

So anyway, this is a little sample of what partnerships can be. Check out the Powerhouse Partnerships document to find some more of those. Definitely check out the resources on skillscommons.org and stay tuned. We'll send out the invites for if we do – as we plan to continue this series next fall.

So thank you so much for joining us today, and have a good afternoon.

(END)