**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

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**A Coordinated & Collaborative Partnership**

**Strong Partnership Business Engagement**

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LAURA CASERTANO: All right. Welcome everyone to today's webinar. My name is Laura Casertano and I will be here if you need anything technically speaking. Hopefully you won't need to hear too much from me, but if you do have any technical questions or concerns, just go ahead and let me know in that chat box on the bottom left-hand corner of the screen. That chat box is also where we'd like you to introduce yourself now.

Even if you did so for the earlier session, please introduce yourself again for this session; let us know who's joining us. That chat box is also going to be where you ask your questions, make your comments, and we will get to as many of those questions as we can. You'll notice in that file share window on the bottom right-hand corner of the screen, we have the copy of this session's PowerPoint as well as the previous session, so you can download at any point during this webinar.

Also, just a reminder, you're going to find a copy of the transcript as well as the recording and these PowerPoints on workforce GPS in about two business days. And so one last thing from me before we get things started, I just want to remind everyone about the feedback survey that's going to be emailed to you at the end of today.

It's completely anonymous and we will use the results to make these webinars more useful to you in the future, so please don't forget to fill those surveys out. You'll get one emailed to you at the end of today and then you'll get another one a month from now. So please don't forget to fill those out.

With that I'm going to move us right into today's session. Again, if you haven't done so already please introduce yourself in that chat on the bottom right-hand corner of the screen. If you joined a little bit late please don't forget to introduce yourself. I want to welcome everyone to today's "Strong Partnership Business Engagement."

And I'm going to turn things over to your moderator today, Jeff Ryan. He's a business engagement specialist, U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. Jeff, take it away.

JEFF RYAN: Thank you, Laura. And thanks to everybody for participating today. It looks like we got a pretty good crowd, so hopefully we can give you an enjoyable presentation. We have two fantastic presenters for you today.

First up is Cameron Cassidy, who's the manager of service delivery for Workforce Snohomish, which is a workforce development board in Washington State, who's responsible for a wide array of activities, programs, and initiatives.

Most importantly for today's context, Cameron is one of the primary creators of the business engagement approach that the county has been using, which aligns a number of strategic partners across government, education, workforce and other community-based organizations, which is to identify business needs and deliver solutions that best address those needs, and he will give you some more detail about that as we go along.

Just one other note about Snohomish and why we wanted them to be represented today is they were recognized as one of the nine most innovative state and local workforce area of business engagement projects. Earlier this year ETA hosted what we call a business services integration cohort and Cameron's team was one of the nine participants on that.

Just one additional note for Cameron's experience; he's been with workforce in Snohomish for about seven years and he's mainly been in a business facing job development role for a lot of that time. He was also previously an HR manager in the healthcare industry and did some executive recruiting, so his demand side viewpoint is really important, and we'll talk more about why that's important on this presentation momentarily.

Our second presenter is Melissa Freigang who's the vice president for social innovation and workforce initiatives at a company called LSI, which is a consulting firm that offers a whole range of various consulting support including assistance in meeting talent needs of businesses. Melissa also brings an employer perspective to this panel, focusing on job creation and workforce development from that demand perspective rather than a more human services perspective.

One of the really interesting things that she'll talk about is some research that she brings to this discussion with results from about 400 employers taking some in-depth surveys to talk about the concept of skilled workforce. She's been implementing LSI's proven employability skills training methodology for 15 years, serving underrepresented and nontraditional populations. And finally, Melissa has an undergraduate from University of Utah in human development and a master's in organizational leadership to compliment the – (inaudible).

One real quick note about a panelist who's name you don't see on the slide but you may see on your agenda, we had a third presenter who had hoped to participate but was unable, Teresa Tanelli (ph), who represents MGM National Harbor. She was sad to say she couldn't participate, but does want us to let you know that MGM does remain a committed partner the SCSEP program. So it'll just be the three of today instead. OK.

So today we want to talk a little bit about the critical nature of effectively engaging with businesses, why it's so important, what it can look like, how we can do it better, all of those kind of things. We're going to talk about business engagement from a demand perspective.

We're not going to talk about it from a supply side perspective, so this may be a bit of a different focus than we normally talk, so we're hoping to kind of present this information from a different viewpoint than maybe you've heard in the past. So we're going to do that by talking about some of the broader principals of business engagement and we're going to talk about some of the opportunities that you as SCSEP really have to participate in business engagement activities in your areas.

Just one quick note, we've set this up to be sort of a conversation rather than a series of presentations, so we will be jumping back and forth, asking each other questions, answering those questions as we go, but we really want to make sure that you all are engaged, so we'll have a couple polls throughout but also if you have questions, you have comments, please enter them into the chat. We've broken up the discussion into three sections, each of which will have a brief period of time for Q&A at the end. So don't hesitate if something comes to mind as we're going along, put it in the chat box and we'll get to it.

OK. Can I forward this – (inaudible). Perfect. So we're going to start by talking about what talent and employability look like from the perspective on business, but first we want to do a quick poll and find out what you think about these concepts. OK. So there should be a poll popping up on your screen now.

The poll question is, we know that employers are saying they have a demand for skilled labor. What do you think is the most important skill that they are looking for when they talk about skilled labor? What's the number one thing that businesses talk about? And it looks like a lot – all right. So we've got a good amount of answers, everybody's – (inaudible) – on technical skills or soft skills, that's good.

All right. We got a couple for life skills. Excellent. OK. So they're still coming in. We'll give you another second or two here to put in an answer and then we'll move on.

All right, I think we're good. So Melissa, as you can see a lot of folks have chosen soft skills. I think that'll lead right into what you wanted to share with the panel.

MELISSA FREIGANG: Yes. Thank you. So this is Melissa Freigang and, yeah, my reaction to this is that we have a very sophisticated set of participants on this webinar and that's fantastic. So what – (inaudible) – show certainly validates what everybody has indicated there. And so it was a bit of a trick question, right, because all of those things are what employers are looking for. We asked for a priority and that's exactly what we found. Had the opportunity to do a lean business canvass methodology interviewing 400 employers.

What we did is we wanted to see when employers were saying we have a demand for skilled workers – "right-skilled," what does that really, really mean. And we know that they're saying we want soft skills, but we wanted to – (inaudible) – that even deeper and have a really good picture so that then we could help meet the demand, right, for the workforce.

So when you stepped in to the employer's shoes and what they indicated through this survey was that they wanted employability skills. So employability skills are three-prong. And by the way, we define them. So we're looking at number one, education and training, and when you think of the way an employer hires, we hire for resume, we hire for what's on the black and white, but we fire for soft skills.

And so we're trying to turn that on its head a little bit and say, well what if we prepare everybody in terms of employability skills. So number one certainly is, if you have experience and education and technical skills, those are very valid and, of course, if people have those employers are saying, yes, we want to hire those individuals.

But then soft skills is where we really started to peel the onion down. So in terms of soft skills, we actually think of soft skills as two different components. They're the same skill set but you can see them in the work environment, which we typically call soft skills or professional skills, and then we can see them in the home environment.

So if you take an idea around problem solving, right, problem solving can be demonstrated in the family environment or it could be on the top floor. If you think of showing up on time, which is a pretty typical soft skill that people can get fired for pretty readily.

When you think of that people can know to show up on time and we can give them lectures or seminars that say, hey, show up on time, but we need to teach the skill of, look, if it's winter, you need to factor in 15 more minutes and then you have to get your children out the door. And what happens if they're sick and they can't go to the daycare because they're contagious, you have a back-up.

So those are the skill sets that even though it doesn't seem like you would call that problem solving, that's a skill set that you still have to teach everyone so that they can demonstrate the behavior that employers are looking for and that's the employability skills. So to round that out, it's education, technical skills, soft skills, what they want to see, behaviors on the job, and then the life skills, which are soft skills just applied in a different setting.

So if you look at the next slide what we did is we really, again, went down into those soft skills and said, OK, CEOs, OK front-line supervisors, what is it that you're really looking for. And these were really the six components that were all inclusive.

And the graph is really – it doesn't really matter the number of line (ph), right, but you can see that the way the lean – (inaudible) – business – (inaudible) – methodology works it says classify these skills – and we do qualitative, it was about 90 minutes per interview of qualitative and the way we code that qualitative data is really around if it's something that you have to have, is it something that would be it would be OK if they had it and then the other, the third one is we don't care about that skill at all. So you can see the trends here.

Learning agility was the highest. Can they come in to a work place and can they learn what they need to know and do it in the XY Company way? The communication piece, right, that – can you communicate with others, can you speak well, can you write an email well and not use text languages? Can you represent the company well?

The emotional intelligence piece, that's really the piece that can you get along with others. Like can you read their body language? Can you be a good teammate, both from an external standpoint, right, can you be on a team and can you actually exhibit behaviors that people want to be around you, right? And then can you recognize when maybe you're not demonstrating those skills and then adapt and change.

Problem solving is pretty self-explanatory that's having the ability to look to at a problem and then solve it. That includes taking initiative. That includes asking when you need to ask. And a lot of manufacturing environments, for example, a lot of times or software development you have employees that don't want to admit that they don't know. And so they'll sit on a problem for three days when if they would have asked their supervisor could have said, oh, yeah, we encountered that problem, here's how we solved it. So those are the types of skills we're looking at.

Execution skills are really very specifically that, can they do the job that needs to be done and pay attention to detail, right, not leave off a signature. This is the safety component as well that a lot of technical occupations require. And then the motivated. Now this is an interesting one because of a lot of people say, well, motivation's not a skill. Motivation is an intrinsic value. But you can behaviorize (sic) motivation.

So for example, you can teach someone, hey, when you walk in the door and you see the garbage that's full, empty it, right, that's initiative. So you can talk about behavior and motivation and what it looks like and then teach that skill. So we kept it motivation even though it's a little bit – it doesn't really resonate hugely, but when you explain it like that and you know what the behaviors look like, then you can train that skill to be motivated and that's a really critical piece.

Then you go to the next slide. What I wanted to do is just really, really quickly show you just a deeper dive of what the types of questions we asked to this particular cohort. And you can see the must have, nice to have, and don't cares. But really around the learning agility you can see – recognizing when there's a learning gap in your own learning gap and then how do you take the initiative to go find out what the answer is.

So a lot of times when we're doing even generational work around this learning agility piece – you know you'll hear millennials are always on their phone. Well, when they're in a meeting maybe they're Google searching, right, to find an answer right then and there, whereas an older worker may wait until the end of the meeting and then go find out the answer to that information. So there's skills sets that you can imagine that can be taught right away that maybe they haven't been exposed to. So that's just a deep dive with that.

So I think it's really important really when you step into the shoes of an employer, you know what are they looking at for skilled workers. Lastly, the – let me go back – yeah, go to that flow chart on the next slide. So when we started interviewing some employers did not have a demand for skilled workers. They were reporting that they no longer had a workforce problem. And what we found through this survey and this lean canvas methodology was when they hired for the person first and they hired for the soft skills first, they can teach the non-technical skills.

So really they had just tweaked the hiring process and the hiring – (inaudible) – so rather than necessarily going directly to an educational institution and taking all the graduates, what they would do is go find people, interview them really more from that human-centered employability skills perspective, and then once they were onboarded, they would use other resources from an employer standpoint like – (inaudible) – to send them back to those educational institutions to learn the technical skills because the institutions do do a fantastic job of teaching those technical skills, but what they did is they hired them in the XYZ Company way and then they found ways to do their own workforce development within that company and those were the best practices from the employers that no longer had a workforce issue.

So to sum this up, I mean essentially what we're talking about doing is have an understanding that if you're providing training to the older workers, right, your population, and you want to provide employability training, if you can break it down, and we'll talk a little bit more about understand what the customer needs in terms of the employer, but put yourself in the shoes of the employer in this regard and understand that there are skill sets that the older workers have and just need to be translated, right, showing up on time and operating out of integrity and having some leadership skills because they have life experiences. So that's the huge piece of that.

MR. RYAN: Great. Thank you. Cameron, I wanted to see if you have any thoughts related to what Melissa was talking about particularly from your perspective at a workforce area trying to figure out how to connect to the employers to actually start to have these conversations. Is there anything that you guys do in particular, any ways you think about the role of the business in connecting to the workforce system and how you can kind of provide the best outcomes for them?

CAMERON CASSIDY: Absolutely. Thank you, Jeff. And Melissa, I've seen this research now a couple of times as we've been talking about this but it's fantastic every time I see it, so thank you for sharing that.

I can say that this echoes precisely what we've been hearing on a local level with businesses. Over the past couple of years, Workforce Snohomish has been putting on a sector of round tables, we're really focused on nine target industry sectors but bring businesses together to learn from them and talk about their priorities, what they're seeing and what their needs are.

And this continues to come up with the employability skills, the soft skills. They're difficult to train on, but the technical skills, as you said, are things that they can build into training. And so even though some of these sector industry round tables always kind of ended up turning into a millennial bashing, which was a little rough, but we got a lot of information out of that and realized we really need to build that into all of our services delivery models.

Now, what I wanted to bring up real quick, though, is on the other side of that of how we work with businesses additionally and how we engage with them, is what we learned from that as well is that these employability skills and soft skills are sometimes a two-way street.

And so what we started building into our business solutions and our business services is how to talk with businesses on working with diverse populations and knowing that sometimes employability skills and soft skills are just a problem with lack of leadership training or communication problems from the direct supervisor or partners.

So it's working with the businesses to work with different types of population. So it's essentially teaching employability and soft skills to current workers at businesses through our business engagement that we found to be a successful thing to throw in there.

MR. RYAN: Great, thank you. So the next point I wanted to get to was just to see and I don't see any questions coming in, but if you do have any questions that's the – this is the sort of one-third break in the presentation, so if anything that Melissa or Cameron said makes you have questions or comments or concerns, go ahead and submit them and we will try to answer them at the next break since we don't have any at the moment. Oh, hang on a sec. Let me – before I jump ahead let me – I don't know if I can answer this but maybe a SCSEP person would have to answer this for me.

Female 1: Yes. The question is, "Will the SCSEP regs permit us to train our folks in employability skills as a part of the training wafer?" It is expected that you all have this training as an inherent part of your service delivery models and with that you all can have it done at the host agency where the host agency trains with soft skills such as the things that were just discussed, or as a regular part of your program in as much as throughout the services that you provide.

The ATSS is something separate from – because it's around skill training as opposed to the soft skills or the skills that you were just discussing. So I think if you all make it a part of your service delivery model in including that outside of the community service assignment, you can look for those assignments that have strong guidance there or people who can help train the participant in those specific areas.

MR. RYAN: Great. Thank you. That was helpful. For the questioner, hopefully that answers your question. If not, don't hesitate to type in another question and we'll get to it as we go. OK. So we're going to jump ahead then.

So we started off talking at a fairly narrow level about what the business means when they talk about skilled workforce, but we also need to talk about how do you get to the point of actually having those conversations with businesses. We want to talk about how do you build trust and long-term relationships so that our participants across this program and across all workforce programs are able to find good, stable jobs.

So let's kind of take a little more global view here. We'll pull back and kind of talk about business engagement from a higher level. But just before we do that, I want to do another quick poll. Let me see if I can get this thing to actually work. Here we go. Hang on. OK.

So the poll said the primary purpose of business engagement is to get job seekers hired. This is a nice easy true and false. And there should be a window, there it is. Let me know what you think the primary purpose of business engagement. It's pretty – relatively even. I mean, there's only two choices so I guess that's not terribly surprising but – great. We'll give you guys another couple seconds here. If it starts slowing down, we'll move forward. It looks like we're at a good point.

So it looks like a little more than half of you are saying that is true, that the primary purpose of business engagement is to get job seekers hired, a little under half of you think that is not true. So we will reveal the true answer here. Can you get that poll data for me? We can – there we go. So the real answer to that question is, by our definition, is false in the way we wrote the question.

Business engagement is a concept that we want to talk about is – it's a comprehensive, value added set of strategies, activities and partnerships, and it's designed to really promote economic prosperity through meeting the needs of business by delivering them solutions to their needs that deliver value. We will talk a lot about those concepts going forward.

But we like to say that the purpose of business engagement programs is to promote long-term economic stability, competitiveness, and growth. Part of that, all of our individual programs, SCSEP being one of a number of workforce programs, but there's also a number of economic development programs, education programs, all of which are part of business engagement. That's why we talk about this from a more global perspective and not about placements per se in this context, but we'll get to what all of this means as we go forward.

OK. So all right, so this one we wanted to start by talking about how you achieve that goal of economic prosperity. It's a big, ambitious kind of goal. It's not something easily achieved. And it's certainly not something you can do on your own.

So what we've developed is some kind of overarching principals that we want to talk about that, no matter how your business engagement approach is designed, these principals need to be part of how you conceptualize and how you carry out all of your activities. Business engagement is very contextual. It's built based on your local or state needs, but it has to include some of these principals in order to truly be transformative.

So the first one we'll talk about is called one team, one goal. As we talked about a little bit on the slide before, economic prosperity is the true goal of business engagement when you look at it from a broad perspective including workforce and other government programs.

All of us, each of our individual programs, no matter how small, have a role to play, an important role to play no matter where we sit in that structure, no matter what we do in that strategy, we are all critical partners. But what we might have to do is take a step back from our immediate programmatic goals and look at how we fit in this broader strategic approach to ensure a broad success from which all of us can benefit.

So we like to say that business engagement's not a zero-sum game. We all do better when we do this together. And I think a great example of how this one team, one goal concept can be carried out is what Snohomish County is doing with their business services approach. And so Cameron I was hoping maybe you could talk a little bit about your consortium and how it came to be and how you think it achieved this one team, one goal approach.

MR. CASSIDY: Absolutely. Thank you, Jeff. So I want to start out, I just want to give a little quick, you could call it a story. Many of you who have worked in business engagement might have seen something similar or a similar story to tell, but a few years ago in Snohomish County our workforce system put on a very unsuccessful job fair. We didn't have enough jobseekers and there weren't enough employers. It was a ghost town.

And so we sat down with our entire American Job Center business team and sat down to debrief and figure out, OK, what happened here? You know, is it the economy? What caused this to be such an unsuccessful event? And as we're chatting about it, what we realized is, during that day there were actually two other job fairs. Our county had put one on and one of the local community colleges had put one on and neither of those were successful either.

And so what we realized right then and there caused a huge change in our thinking for business engagement. And we realized we're all in it for the same goal and we need to work together because we're hurting each other when we compete. So because we had all put that on and not communicated and coordinated, none of our job fairs were successful and that hurt all of our jobseekers and our participants.

So what we ended up doing is starting to convene and just kind of chat about getting together a shared calendar and that lead into what we have now, which was actually turning ourselves into what we call business solutions consortium. Right now we have 14 organizations involved, we have a shared calendar of events.

We have shared training for staff who are new coming into these business engagement roles with the organizations, and we work together and try to have the same message when we're going out and talking to businesses so that we're all on the same page, coordinated and bringing solutions to businesses together.

And so one kind of example of how this works, just to show one of the many examples of why this is important, is that it means in our consortium let's say a community college business solutions representative is out speaking to a business and they're working on setting up incumbent worker training through their school.

Through talking with to the business, they may realize that, hey, the business is also interested in starting an internship program, but they've never done it before, they're not really sure what to do or who to contact. That business solutions representative, through working with the consortium and sharing in all of our resources, is going to know that Workforce Snohomish puts on biannual internship trainings for businesses to help them start down on a pathway of creating an internship program.

So they're going to connect them directly to Workforce Snohomish and get them exactly what they need while they're setting up the incumbent worker training that they originally came in there for. And so that's just one of the examples of how taking a partnership heavy approach and working together is a huge asset to how we approach and work with businesses. When we work in silos, we can alienate the business and that affects all of our participants. So it's extremely important that we work together.

MR. RYAN: Great. Thank you, Cameron. All right. So one team, one goal is really critical. The next one we call know your customer and understand their needs. As workforce system, as workforce programs and as sort of government generally, we often have a pretty high bar when it comes to working with the business community, with employers. The perceptions of government are often fairly negative, and one slip up can often either ruin or prevent a relationship from forming.

And so we need to start from the very beginning with demonstrating that we have credibility when it comes to working with that business. We do that by using words. In a way, our words matter. One of the things I often tell people is, if you say employer versus business, if you say employer, you're almost assigning a role to that organization that their job is to hire people as opposed to the fact that if they are a business, their job is to operate their business.

And one of the things they might need is a skilled workforce. We can deliver that to them, but we don't put the onus on them, we carry the burden to deliver what they need. We think of them as our customer and we deliver that solution as they need. And so then you build this credibility that you understand their business, you understand what they need and they're more willing to talk to you at that point.

MS. FREIGANG: Yes, I think this is a really interesting principal. Again, putting yourself in the shoes of the employer. When you think about what the – (inaudible) – what – (inaudible) – and you're standing in the shoes of the employer, you know they're looking at things like recruitment, but they're also looking at things like retention.

And if you can understand the employer and what they're specific needs are, you can then make sure that you're not just going to them saying I have 10 people that can come to work for you today, you can understand that they may need two administrative assistant but their administrative assistants needs to have X number of hours or these numbers of shifts or someone in this – hire them at intern opportunity and then move them up to their workforce development.

I talked a little bit about it when I was talking employability skills. If you also can understand what is available with all of the partners that you work with in the community, then you can also have a word of mouth and provide employers other strategies, not just that come at them from a workforce standpoint of hire my people. You can engage them in conversations or discussions, resources, connecting them to some of the educational institutions and that sort of thing.

So I think, Cameron, you talked about a consortium, I would imagine that practice is pretty important in that environment as well. What are your thoughts on this?

MR. CASSIDY: Absolutely. I mean, I just hundred percent echo what you were saying. It's especially important on knowing the customer when you're working with a partnership heavy approach and working together as a consortium. Getting to know deeply the customer, and when I say customer I'm talking about business because I consider business every bit as important of a customer as any of our participants, because they're absolutely necessary in that full goal.

But knowing the customer and understanding their needs is so big. It's not just about bringing resumes to the business. It's not just about providing them somebody who may fit their job opening. It's about getting a deep understanding and learning their needs and addressing them through the lens of this vast variety of solutions and resources throughout the entire partnership approach, because then you're creating a strong bond and a relationship with the business.

And you're making it so they're going to want to continue to come to you and they're going to want to work with you and your participants. And through that, you will get more connections for your participants with those customers.

MS. FREIGANG: Yes, and Cameron this is Melissa one more time. I think, again, that – (inaudible) – if we can engage employers in this way and understand what their needs are, what that ultimately yields is the retention of these employees. So it's not just a short term. It really is a longer-term engagement, not only for that employee also for that employer, but for you as a partner with that particular employer.

And when that happens, they then talk to other employers because they have suppliers and distributors and that word of mouth is going to lend itself to other employer engagements.

MR. RYAN: Yeah. And Cameron mentioned something about the businesses wanting to work with you again. And I might even take it a step further. When we fully realize this business engagement model, you can essentially see where you can make it so that a business not only wants to work with you, they almost can't imagine doing business without you as a partner because everything you do brings them value, it brings them solutions.

And so the third – (inaudible) – that deliver value built relationships is really this idea that we are trying to build long-term relationships, we're not trying to do a one-time hire this person, we're moving on. We're talking about long-term solutions across a number of possible needs.

And you will hear us throughout this presentation use the term solutions. I often compare it or contrast it to the concept of services. Services are a sort of transactional one-time thing, they're menu driven. If you walked into a business and say I can do X, Y and Z for you and they don't need X, Y or Z at that moment, then you’ve wasted that opportunity.

If you're able to say to them what is it that we can do for you, what are your needs, how can we solve your problems that allow you to do what you need to do, that's a totally different conversation. And so business engagement has to be a long-term project. It has to be based on this concept of delivering solutions that are valuable, that the business says this brought us something we didn't have, it changed our bottom line, it allowed us to do something differently.

And if you make a promise you keep that promise, you do what you promised. You maybe even over promise, over deliver on your promise because, as I mentioned earlier, we have a very, very – I don't know if it's a low bar or a high bar, but it's a bar that if we don't hit it, we are – the entire structure of the business engagement process can fail with a particular business based on one negative interaction. So you represent everybody that's a part of that team every time you talk to a business.

And so Melissa from a perspective of that business, like does this impact you when you're – what the sort of thing you want to hear from someone who's representing this partnership or what makes a good entre to, what do you react positively to?

MS. FREIGANG: Well, I think it's really important and you said – (inaudible) – for that in terms of employer versus business, and I would even say viewing the employer as a partner. So when you can engage the employer as a partner, even in the training opportunities for the – (inaudible) – the population that you're serving, I think that it has to be done very authentically.

So when I engage with an employer, another employer, and view it from an employer's standpoint, what they want is the good, the bad, and the ugly. They want all the information so they can make an informed decision.

And when you can do that – for example let's say someone who has a DUI on their record, and they have to go to a court appearance, rather than trying to place them in a job and then having that person miss work three days in a particular week, if you can front end that and really say, hey, I have this really great worker, they have the best experience, they bring this to the table, but they're going to need to go to court these three days, can we organize that. And that's the piece that really hits that retention piece.

It's the teaching the good communications skills because now you're a role modeling between the employer and the individual that's in that position how do you communicate this effectively and when you do that, you're building trust, not only with the employer from an employer engagement standpoint, you're building trust between the employee that you're hopefully placing there and they're wanting that, so it's a win, win, win for everybody.

So now you've engaged in all of these conversations and you removed some of these barriers but taught skills in that same way. So that's how I would – (inaudible) – like that, employers want to know what they're getting so that they know better how then to be a partner to engage back into the partnership.

MR. RYAN: Great. And so I mean a lot of what we're talking still is this concept of solutions. And Cameron, I think you've got some ideas about how you address the solutions approach in your consortium across the county which relation to how are you out reaching to business, how are you dealing with your performance metrics and things like that that maybe you could talk about for a minute.

MR. CASSIDY: Yeah, absolutely, thank you. And I love this conversation around solutions because it takes me back a couple years to when we made a huge change in our approach. And one of the simplest, easiest things we did to change our mindset was switching our name from business services to business solutions.

And it was just that small change that completely changed our mindset to how we approach businesses. So a solutions-based approach means you're in it for the business as a customer, not just a potential job for your participants. So if you approach a business with the mindset of just getting your participants hired, you're going to come across as just another recruiting service, a sales person, and it's going to be very hard to engage with that business.

But if you come in looking at what their needs are and looking to holistically fill their needs with all of the resources and possible solutions that you have, you're building a relationship, a long-term trust-based relationship.

And this can be difficult because there are metrics and there are goals for all partners considered. But one of the things that we do in Snohomish County and one of the things that we build all of our services on, both the business solutions and on our services to participants, is we take a step back and say forget the metrics, forget the grant program goals and take a look and say what is the best thing we can do to make this business as successful as possible. What is the best thing that we can do?

And then we're going to do that, and we believe and trust that the metrics and goals are going to follow. If we serve them the way we think is best to make them successful. And so this again like I said goes for serving participants as well, but that's a mantra we've been using for a long time and it's proven to be extremely successful in changing our mindset to this approach.

MR. RYAN: Great. Thank you. So the last of these principles that we wanted to share sort of takes parts from all the others, but it's the idea of knowing your story and be able to tell it compellingly. So this is like, you know sometimes you think of like an elevator pitch or a way to really encapsulate what you do and how you deliver value and then how you share to potential new customers, but since we are also in the workforce system in this conversation, we have funders, we have elected officials, we have other stakeholders that we answer to.

All of those need to see our successes. And when we can tell this great story about, rather than this program did these things, this program did these things, this program did these things, when we talk about our whole system delivering a set of solutions that increase employment or increased wages or across a region or a county, those are really, really powerful. And whatever we do we need to be sure that we are still talking about this as a value proposition. It's what do we bring to the table that's so valuable.

And so Melissa, when you as a – when you're outreaching to new customers from your perspective, what sort of data do you use? What kind of story do you tell? What kind of information do you use to get new business to sign up with – (inaudible)?

MS. FREIGANG: Right. So I think we talked about knowing what the customer needs. So you can approach them with the language that they understand, I really approach them with first just a more higher level conversation around here's what we can provide for you. They want to hear it very efficiently and effectively. They don't want to hear necessarily the full story about Johnny or Susie. They don't necessarily want to hear that.

If you engage them in that first, this is what I can do for you and the language in which they talk, then they'll want to hear about Susie at that point. So it's that first, really that initial to – (inaudible) – if you will, to have them efficiently and effectively so that you can get to that point where they say, OK, well, maybe I can partner, right, and maybe they aren't going to help me.

The other piece of this is that just understanding if you have employer relationships already and you know how they've been – (inaudible) – solution in terms of resources or other services or other partners that another employer might bring to the table. I'll give you an example, Custom Fit. So Custom Fit dollars are typically are at all the community colleges or technical colleges. So when you engage this employer, you can bring that resource to them. You can, again, say hire them. Maybe they're not – they don't have their Welder I certificate but they have some welding experience. Hire them in a pre-welding occupation for less wages and then train them in the way that you want to train them.

So be onboarded, right, and you have a supervisor that gets along with them and then help them access the technical colleges – (inaudible) – enroll their participants and help access maybe – (inaudible) – dollars or training dollars from the workforce system or – there's lots of ways to help that particular participant pay for that certification, but on top of that then the employer, if they're hiring them and they're onboarded with that employer, that employer can also access Custom Fit dollars through that same technical college where that individual may be receiving that training.

So if you can do that through the resources and the services and you can give them that, even if they're in that particular situation they may not be hiring somebody today, you're still delivering resources and services to them that are really, really important.

MR. RYAN: Right. Thank you. Cameron, how about in your consortium approach when you're looking at a number of different partners, is there a mechanism you use to do this story telling? Is there a way you share what you do? And that kind of is consistent across that entire partnership?

MR. CASSIDY: Yes, absolutely. And thank you Melissa, couldn't agree more with what you just talked about, and I know for a consortium and a partnership-based approach what's incredibly important about telling your story is understanding your asset resources and also your limitations.

You know Jeff talked earlier about fulfilling your promises and really living up to the solutions you're able to do. You need to also understand your limitations and not over promise something that you can't deliver. And ways that we do that is through a lot of asset mapping and we use our asset mapping to build – (inaudible) – of assets and build that into training of all of our partners that are involved so we're all on the same page and approaching businesses and engaging with them together.

So additionally, what we do is we keep – and many of you probably do this as well is valuable on a lot of different ways, but we keep success stories. So when we provide a good solution for a business, we like to tell that story. And that goes into our marketing, it goes into our outreach and it goes into our kind of pitch in working with businesses as we're getting them to engage with us.

MR. RYAN: Great. Thank you. All right, so, we're going to move into a quick brief period of questions and answers if anybody has questions, we've got a couple here to answer to start. So while we're answering these, if you all have any others that you want to submit, please do so.

So the first one I'm going to start, I think, Melissa can probably take this first, but Cameron I also want to see if there's a relationship to how you approach the consortium with this one. But how do you feel about partnerships with staffing agencies or local job coaches?

MS. FREIGANG: Yeah, so I think this is a really interesting question. And I think that viewing (ph) staffing agencies and local job coaches are another partner in this. So in this environment you do not want to be seen as a competitor. You don't want to be seen as a – (inaudible) – to them. You want to be seen as value add.

And so when we engage with staffing companies, if you know the employer, a lot of employers utilize staffing companies for all their onboarding, right, they do the background checks and all of that. So when you're doing that if you think of yourself as almost a win-win for that staffing agency too, so it's – for me, I think that the staffing agencies and local job coaches are essentially a part of that partnership package with the employer.

And so I say, absolutely, go for it and absolutely align what you're doing with them and take that team approach, because having two people helping that participant become employable and have that job is better the more. So I would just say make sure that you keep it in that partnership perspective, absolutely.

MR. RYAN: And it allows everybody to focus on what they are expert on.

MS. FREIGANG: Right.

MR. RYAN: You don't have to do everything if you have a broader partnership. You can deliver a part of a solution that creates an entire solution across that partnership. Cameron, do you have anything you want to add about staffing agencies in your contact or should we move on?

MR. CASSIDY: Oh, yeah. I can very quickly throw in that we believe as well that staffing agencies can be a huge partner. In fact, one of our American Job Centers is – and there may be others out there, but one of the few that I know of that we actually have a staffing agency in the – (inaudible).

We put out a competitive request for proposal for an agency to take up an office in our center because we believe it's wonderful to have actual jobs in our center. And so our business solutions team works in partners with them and also all of the staffing agencies in the area because they are a great partner and they're a huge asset and used a lot by businesses in Snohomish County.

MS. FREIGANG: Right. And I would just add the staffing companies, a lot of times they have resources that you wouldn't otherwise have. So if you have someone, let's say, that has a background and they're doing voluntary structuring so that an employer will feel comfortable hiring them, a lot of times they'll pay for that, or there may be leadership classes or customer service classes that you can access and utilize. So I think the more you can partner and leverage and integrate all of the resources the better.

MR. RYAN: Great. So we have basically two more questions here. We actually have three but two of them are essentially the same. So I'm going to do Melissa first and then this last one will be for Cameron. Although, Cameron, this second one may be for you as well. But how does businesses feel about the concept of on-the-job experience in your experience?

MS. FREIGANG: I think employers love them. So in my experience that's the easiest way to get the hook or get in the door, because if you have someone who demonstrates these employability skills, as soon as they meet these individuals and you start developing that relationship, right, rather than being transactional where you place somebody in a job and then you're gone, right, it really creates that relational piece where they can get the job experience, the employer gets a chance to see them. Again, go access the resources.

For example, in the state of Utah we do work-based learning experiences for students coming out of the local educational agencies. In the state of Utah, they're covered under liability, right, so there may be other resources, again, to go look – to help that employer, they may have some concerns about liability issues.

For the most part they don't, and they love being able to see for a short time and not be obligated to hire that person, because that takes a lot of expenses. It's not very effective and efficient to hire and then fire 10 people to only keep one in a retention model. So if they can do the work experiences, they get a chance to see them and usually the results go up to about 6 in 10 where they can retain the individual.

MR. RYAN: OK, thank you. Cameron, we got a couple questions here and if you could provide a little more context on what asset mapping is and how you do it and anything else of pertinence that you want to mention about asset mapping.

MR. CASSIDY: Yes, of course. Real quick before I get into that, I just want to add something to the on-the-job training. The feedback that we've gotten and that I think is helpful to take into account is, any time working with businesses is that knowing that they work at a different pace then nonprofit and government, and trying to take the government and nonprofit as far out of the contract, the language, and the verbiage and how you set it up, as possible to make it as easy as possible for them is the feedback we've got.

And so just moving on to the questions about asset mapping, thank you, it's a great question. I don't think I have enough time to fully get into that because I can talk about that for an hour, but really what we did is we have a partnership-based approach. As I mentioned, we have at least 14 different agencies and that might be different.

Now it changes almost every month it seems like we're finding somebody recently, but asset mapping is what we did is sit down and say, OK, we have all these partners, we have all these agencies, and everybody has different types of funding, different types of resources that they can tap into. And so we looked at everything from the community colleges, figuring out what their graduation cycles are and from what types of education, so we kind of know our assets in terms of that supply.

We looked at what agencies are able to do incumbent worker training for businesses, what agencies have funding that can do on-the-job training or work experiences or do stipends for internships, support services; what ones have better attachments to apprenticeships.

Basically, we just went through and said, what are all the possible things we can tap into and then let's map those and put those together and start training each other on them so we can all go in there and be on the same page and provide that resource. Like I mentioned earlier in the story about a community college being able to refer a business to the internship training, that wouldn't have been able to be done without having done some asset mapping and knowing what we all can provide.

MR. RYAN: Great. Thank you. For the folks who have asked those questions, let us know if that was enough information or if you want Cameron to go into a little more detail at the end of the presentation. All right. So let's move forward here.

Now that we've talked about these kind of principals and the concepts of business engagement, let's try to look a little bit about how this can look in reality. Maybe taking a look at the sort of model that Cameron has developed into his consortium or how other things that you do can play into a successful business engagement approach, and then specifically what you all can do and how you can really be a part of that in your areas.

So let's, as usual, start with a quick poll. We just want to know, and we're somewhat intentionally vague here, but is your SCSEP program part of the business engagement efforts in your area? Yes, we're active partners, somewhat we participate occasionally, no, we're not actively engaged. And I put an unsure, so if you aren't even sure if one exists in your area or anything else, let us know that too.

So we just want to kind of get a sense for how you feel your level of engagement is. OK. Looks like most of you are engaged at least somewhat and a lot of you are saying you're pretty actively partnering. That's really, really great to see. A lot of times when we talk with programs about business engagement there's not a lot of connection to a broader system so it's really, really encouraging to see how many of you are – feel that you're actively or somewhat actively engaged in that process. OK. I think we're good. Johnathan, you want to drop that poll and we will jump forward. OK.

So here is a brilliant graphic that I made. You can tell between this one and the next one you'll see that one was made by me and one was not. But what we're talking about here is sort of a everybody is on their own approach to business engagement. So you have a business that gets bombarded from a whole bunch of different programs across government, whether it's workforce, economic development, education, all sorts of other entities are all vying for the time and attention of a business. What we say this causes is engagement fatigue. That causes frustration in basically the best-case scenario. The worst-case scenario is complete disengagement and saying we're not going to be partner – we're not going to play any of these games, we're just done with you.

Too many programs are engaging with businesses on their own. Essentially that means that they are expecting something from that business. If I'm reaching out from my program, that means I want you to take my people or use my resources to do my program. And as a whole, that becomes really negative. It doesn't treat the business as a customer; it treats the business as having an obligation to us. It focuses on the goals of individual programs rather than the success of the overall business engagement strategy, and it doesn't focus on the success of that business, it focuses on the success of the program.

So this is essentially a lose-lose proposition. Businesses are much less likely to get their needs met and our programmatic goals are much less likely to be met. Cameron talked a lot earlier about how they believe everybody benefits when there's success in the business engagement model when businesses are able to grow, and this model here has a detrimental effect on that possible outcome.

MS. FREIGANG: And you can imagine a lot of resources of energy and money and time, right, this is sort of the black hole of job development where you might reach out three different times and never get a phone call back. Or you might call but you have three months before you can engage in a meeting to even present your 15-minute story, right, to the employer. So that's not efficient or effective for anyone, it really is a downer in terms of those who are trying to engage in job development.

MR. RYAN: Great. Thank you. All right. So let's look at maybe a different approach. Because that model is so chaotic, it doesn't promote partnership, it doesn't promote shared success. It doesn't promote a customer centric vision when we're talking about the customer being the business. How can we build or design a better system? I'm going to warn you this graphic is a little bit busy maybe.

There's a lot going on here, but I think it represents a fairly succinct idea when we get down to the heart of it. What this model is is a fully realized integrated aligned consortium of business engagement approach. It essentially has a structure in which a business engagement strategy and all those partners, like the ones Cameron talked about, have a set of assets that they all understand, that they now how they work, that they know where they are, they know how you can access them.

What they do is they have an input of a bunch of different possible needs from businesses that they connect with and they connect those businesses through a number of different ways, whether it's direct outreach, whether it's at meetings, whether it's following a layoff, whatever might be the cause of a connection to a business whoever is representing that consortium, that team, that strategy, is able to deliver a full set of possible solutions.

What we do with that is then we create customized solutions that actually address the needs of the business therefore allowing the business to be successful without us bombarding that business repeatedly with our individual programmatic needs. So what you would see is a SCSEP program grantee or a state response coordinator or an economic development office, all of those are contained without that blue bubble in the middle. They're all the partners that essentially filter the needs coming in from business and create an output that meets that need.

And as we've talked about, the more you create value and deliver solutions that are customized to those needs, the more likely that business is to continue to want to engage with you, to want to work with you. Over time you build trust, you build credibility. They're going to look to you for all sorts of things. And I always think that if a business calls you as a SCSEP grantee and said, you know what, I'm not necessarily calling you for workers right now, I'm calling you because we need process improvement.

And I know last time I talked to you, you solved the program that I had. So I'm hoping you can do that again. And you say, you know what, that's not my thing but I know exactly who I can connect you with and we make that connection. That business then does better. Now you've delivered a value, it didn't even cost you a penny. You didn't have to do anything but they're looking to you as a solutions provider, that's really, really, really valuable.

So essentially what we're talking about here is this idea of limiting the number of interactions our system, our other partners have to have with an individual business but maximizing the return on those interactions. We don't want the burden to fall on the business; we want the burden to be on us. Again, this is all about solutions; it's all about long-term relationships and delivering value. As we talk about as value is delivered, relationships build, your program and all programs will ultimately benefit from that relationship as we look at it in aggregate.

Cameron, I wanted to see, you know we talked also about this idea that one of the negatives of going to a business and saying my program has these people who you could hire is, what if that business isn't hiring today, what happens to that relation? What happens then? Where do you go? Is there a better approach then to have that sort of programmatic centric view because of the – it's almost like a needle in a haystack hitting that employer at that point when they need those people and the people that they need are the people that you have? Is there anything that you want to talk about in that context about how things operate in Snohomish?

MR. CASSIDY: Yes, absolutely. So we try to maximize any connection with a business into bringing something of value, whether it's you engaging them to be part of a workforce development round table and things along those lines, or engaging them to be a part of surveys that bring forth how we're better preparing the employability as Melissa was talking about.

But really at the end of the day, if we continue to bring solutions, even if it's not specifically getting one of our participants hired, when they're ready to hire, they're going to call us, and then that makes it so much easier for us.

So like you said, we're not searching for a needle in a haystack calling on random companies hoping that they're hiring or scouring through the hiring pages and things along those lines. They're going to be coming to us and that's the goal, by providing these types of services and solutions they will be much more engaged and built up with that relationship.

MS. FREIGANG: Yeah. I think that that's a really good point. And just one little note on this particular slide. If you can imagine from an employer perspective, they have all of this stuff going on and to have these great solutions from all of the other agencies up in the upper right-hand corner, remember where we sit. We fit in the skilled workers, right, you can see it highlighted in the blue at the top of what employers are dealing with and what the issues are.

So you don't have to be a panacea for that employer. You don't have to be the silver bullet. But if you can be a – (inaudible) – for an employer, that's a really important place to be. So I just wanted to note that this part of this slide – I think the importance of this slide is to recognize what an employer goes through and there's different types of things that they're thinking of and where we fit in each.

MR. RYAN: Great. Thank you. All right. So as we start to wrap up here, we want to talk a little bit about both the responsibility and opportunity that you all have as part of a workforce system member, as part of a business engagement strategy.

I think you had some sessions earlier in this conference about the connections to the broader workforce system, what your role is in that system broadly, but essentially what we want to say is you are part of that system. You literally pay into that system.

So if you feel that you're not part of a business engagement approach that's going on in that area, you should demand a seat at the table. I would also say and Cameron, I think, will talk a little bit about this, but there's also – it's incumbent upon the workforce board, in Cameron's case, or in some cases it's a statewide model where the business engagement operation sits to make sure that our partnerships include the full possible range of solutions that a business could need and the skilled workers that you bring are a critical part of that broadly.

And so there is a responsibility on both sides. On your side to make sure that your voice is heard at the table, that your resources are part of that game, but also that the business engagement approach has made sure to include your resources with that.

So Cameron, do you want to sort of talk a little bit about that responsibility and opportunity from your perspective? Like what you guys have done to try to build towards that as you've done your business engagement approach?

MR. CASSIDY: Of course. So there's many different ways that SCSEP can get involved with the business engagement, the business solutions.

Just to give an example of something that's beyond just even being a major part of the business solutions team is, in Snohomish County one of the things that we did is worked with SCSEP and other organizations to put on an older worker town hall. The goal of this was to better connect with older workers, to businesses, get ideas of what their needs are, figure out the misconceptions businesses may have in hiring them, pinpointing some low hanging – (inaudible) – on technical and soft skill training and employability, but also figuring out what resources are out there and available for this population.

And so what we did then is that information was then circled back to our business solutions consortium and, as I had mentioned earlier at the very beginning on the employability skills how that's a two-way street in training businesses, we were able to take that and as we're having conversations with businesses provide them opportunities to learn how to better work with that population, how to better hire them and have them fit in in the workforce, which then in turn helped them want to – (inaudible).

So that's just one of the many ways to engage. And admittedly the Snohomish County Business Solutions Consortium does need to do a better job reaching out in general and working with SCSEP, but that's one of the many ways we can all get involved. And so we're really excited to take this step and really move on to a better connection and partnership with his program.

MR. RYAN: Great. Thank you. And I just want to – the last two points on this slide I think are important. There are way more businesses out there than you can reach on your own. But there are also a ton of businesses out there who probably aren't the right ones for you to be targeting.

And when you are part of a system like Cameron has or like a number of states have, you can maximize your value by ensuring that you have a set of solutions that are part of a set of opportunities for a particular business that can be delivered at a time and at a company that make the most sense.

That allows you to focus on the things you do well, developing your client to meet the needs of the business, let the consortium, let the system be your marketing. Let it be your outreach. Let it do the heavy lifting on building those relationships and you become a solution and not having to do this whole thing yourself. There's so much more value when we all work together to achieve this kind of a goal.

So really briefly, we have a couple minutes left. We wanted to just give you our final thoughts. So we'll start with Melissa. What final thoughts do you have?

MS. FREIGANG: Yeah, I think to wrap it all up that the practice of this engagement once you get good at that, right, then you can really – I would just encourage everybody to not just think of business engagement as businesses, right, there are lots of other opportunities like school districts where you can work out – sort of create these jobs around teacher – (inaudible) – and leading in the classroom, the afterschool program mentoring and, right, the transit authorities.

They're looking for lots of really good employees and they pay really great wages to be a bus driver. So I would just encourage everybody to think creatively and not sort of have these – would have to go to this employer or that employer and really think of everyone as that partner, especially as you engage in a workforce system. There will be many other opportunities from that engagement piece that when you're starting to do this – (inaudible) – practice regularly and the authentic relationship.

MR. RYAN: Great. Thanks. Cameron, real quick, do you have any final thoughts maybe on solutions or anything else you want to talk about?

MR. CASSIDY: I'll keep it as short as possible and say, get involved, if not already with your local American Job Center – (inaudible) – as engagement. Get involved. You're a huge asset and a huge role in the workforce development process.

MR. RYAN: Great. Thank you so much, Cameron. Thank you, Melissa. I know we have potentially a time for questions, but we are a little bit over time, so there's only one question here and I'm not sure what it means about a link – somebody's looking for an online link to soft skills training. I'm not sure – if you could be a little more specific about what you mean by that. I don't remember any of us talking about a link to soft skills training on line. And so if you could be a little more specific that might be helpful, we can try to figure out what link you must be referencing.

MS. FREIGANG: And I'm happy to, and I'm sure you and Cameron as well, not to speak for you, but we're happy to answer any questions offline at any time.

MS. : Can you – this is (inaudible). That was during the first session, it's "Skills To Pay Bills."

MR. RYAN: Oh. So somebody from the –

MS. : The first one.

MR. RYAN: – team can share that –

MS. : We will share that information with you later.

MR. RYAN: OK. Perfect. We apologize for taking four extra minutes. Here's our contact info if you want to reach any of us, we will all be happy to chat. As you can tell, we love to talk about this stuff. We had to really shorten our ideas; we would have been talking all day because this is probably our favorite topic on the planet to talk about, speaking for myself at least.

So we thank you for your time. Thank you to our panelists. Thank you for your questions. Enjoy the rest of your conference and have a great day.

MS. CASERTANO: All right. Great. I just want to thank the presenters. I'm going to ask the participants to remain logged on in the room for just a moment to provide us with some feedback. On the bottom of that quarter of the screen the feedback window where you can let us know what you thought of today's presentation. And please stay tuned for our next session, ready in 10 minutes.

(END)