**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**From Training to Working: Strategies to Support Participant Employment**

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LAURA CASERTANO: I'm going to introduce your moderator, Megan Baird. She's the H1-B grants program manager for the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. Megan, take it away.

MEGAN BAIRD: Thanks, Laura. Hi, everyone. Welcome to the H1-B TechHire webinar, From Training to Working: Strategies to Support Employment Placement for TechHire Partnerships. As we continue through your grant, you're all at or just past the mid-point of your TechHire grant. This webinar is going to focus on one of the key performance measures of your grant -- which is entered employment -- and specifically how strategic partnerships and program design refinement can help you enhance and support your participant placement strategies.

Today, we are going to hear from three grantees that are doing great work around cultivating partnerships and implementing strategies focused on connecting TechHire participants to jobs that pay well and they're regional H-1B industries. So to get started and so we can have a sense of how you all think you are doing, let's do a quick poll -- totally confidential. We just want to know where you think you are. It'll help us today in our presentation.

Compared to your project's plan, how many of your total TechHire participants are now employed? You can choose the best answer that reflects where you are now in regards to your actual employment versus your total plan goal. Again, we can't see what you're selecting. It just helps give us a sense of where you are. It looks like we've got quite a few people that are a little behind our plan goals. Some folks also are pretty close to plan, maybe some folks that aren't sure right now. If you're not sure how to answer this polling question, it's definitely a good thing to be looking at after today's webinar.

We're at the mid-point grant, so if you've not yet reached your target numbers overall or even your Year 3 benchmarks, you still have time. And that's the purpose of today's webinar is to really help those people that feel like they're a little bit far behind, pretty close, or way behind have an action plan to see how you can improve those numbers before the end of your grant.

It's important for you to begin focusing on this area of performance now in order to make sure you are able to meet your goals by the end of the grant, and focusing on it now helps identify core correction practices that can really improve your strategies in helping place your participants into jobs. Great.

OK. Again, I am Megan Baird. I will be moderating today's webinar. And I am joined by Ingrid Schonfield, a consultant with Maher & Maher TechHire coaching team. Many of you may know her as your TechHire coach. She will be facilitating today's webinar. So I will turn things over to Ingrid to kick us off.

INGRID SCHONFIELD: Great. Thank you so much, Megan. It's always great to be with you. And thanks for everyone who's able to join us today. I'm so happy to be with you. And I see that about 30 of the 39 grantees are able to join us today. And as Megan mentioned, it makes a lot of sense that you're here because this is a really relevant topic right now since we're more than half way through the TechHire period of performance. And we all need to get focused in on how do we move our participants through the training, through certification, into getting a new job or getting a better job?

So we have a really robust discussion planned today. And I want to remind you: We cannot have a discussion unless you participate. So please do use that chat box. I'll be lobbing out some questions for you to reflect and respond to as we go. And we'll have lots of opportunities for that sort of thing as we go along. And I especially want to thank folks who are experiencing the polar vortex right now for joining us. One of our presenters is in a really cold part of the country. And she made it, so I'm glad she did. And you should be here too, so great.

Let us move on and let me introduce our fantastic speakers today. So speak of the polar vortex -- we have Cindy Anderson who's with us today from Employ Milwaukee, which is a local board in the State of Wisconsin. And she survived the vortex and is here despite the -50 degrees that she's experiencing in her town right now. We also have the extremely talented Tori Strickland, who's coming from Montgomery County Maryland, so a little bit less freezing -- more like 24 degrees. So thank you, so much, Tori, for joining us.

We also have -- and I'm sorry, we have a quick change to the line-up today -- Ray Barbosa, from Jobs for the Future, who is part of the TechHire program, is filling in for his colleague who unfortunately had some travel issues and was not able to join us. And Ray will be presenting JFF's fantastic service provider managers in New York City, Sarah Wessel and Macia Batista. So again, as we go through, we'll have presentations that are fairly short by your peers and lots of opportunities for Qs & As and reflection.

And we also really want to hear from you: What do you think you're doing well? What do you want to share with your colleagues? So speaking of which, let's have a little bit of a chat about that now. So before we launch in our content, let's just take a moment for, calling it more of a chat question really. There's such a wealth of experience and knowledge in our virtual room with all of you today. I want to give you a moment to highlight what's one thing that you would like to learn? And what's one thing you'd like to share with your peers? So just take a moment, reflect, and please use the chat function to type in just one or two things.

I can hear the thinking happening around the country. And, my fabulous presenters, you can feel free to use the chat as well. Right, Mark. Good point to try to best connect participants once training is completed. And if you have any more specifics about if there's particular things that you're struggling with, please feel free to enter those in the chat as well. Yep, Rose. You're right. Job development -- again, if there's anything in particular, it's kind of a broad topic -- any specifics that are getting in your way, that'd be great to know. Great. Tonya: How do grantees overcome participants with zero technical literacy or IT experience?

I think that our folks in New York City might be able to speak to that a bit. OK. Good question, Craig. How do you verify employment? Great. Thanks, Barack (sp), placement strategies and utilization internships. That's a really great topic to always cover, right? How do you get that work-based experience? Brianna, Good point too, trying to make sure you're staying connected with your participants post training to get that employment data. I think your peers are going to present in a minute. We'll be able to speak to that, because I think that's a really key part too. You can't just let go of your participants once they're through your training program.

Great, John. Thank you. I love it. I think that Cindy in Wisconsin will be able to speak to that question about how you overcome companies' need, desire, or perhaps habit to only hire four-year degree graduates. Yes. Yep. And India echoes that. Well done. Great. Well, please continue to put into the chat anything that you're curious about, that you want to hear about, any questions you have as we go. Thank you so much for sharing, folks. It's really helpful to see what's of interest to you now.

So let me take a quick walk through our objectives today. I think the main thing is we want to introduce several specific strategies that your peers have put in place to ensure strong employment outcomes. And all the presenters are going to just give some brief comments for a few minutes, actually talk about the structure of their grant and the focus area of their grant, the structure of their organization. And the key questions that I've asked them to speak to briefly just so we have some apples and apples comparison are one, what do you they wish they knew what the grant started that they've since learned about how to support participants' transition from training to employment.

I also asked them to speak to what are the top factors that they think are contributing to their strong performance, so for example, partnerships with industry or with your local board or your college is business engagement strategy, etc. So what we're looking for here is what is the secret sauce? If any of you are old enough to remember the old McDonald's campaign, there was something about a secret sauce -- that's what we're looking for. And of course, we all might have variation on that secret sauce, but let's hear from them.

And for those of you who like structure, here's agenda. I think the thing I wanted to point out here is that Megan knows and maybe you know already, but just a handful of employer engagement webinars already in this project. But I think that what makes this webinar a little bit different and more exciting is that we're going to get more deeply into the nuts and bolts of what's working and not working with real life peers, with real life grantees. So just to warn you: At the end of our time together, I'll be asking you to share a word or phrase that summarizes your experience of the presenter's information today, and also to share one or two approaches that you think you're going to try bringing into your own program.

Great. So with that, let us move to our friend from the frozen tundra, Cindy Anderson. Cindy is the project manager for TechHire, as I mentioned. She's in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and works for the local board there. And I have made us her bumper sticker something that she's told me in the past: Don't take any knowledge base for granted. Well, with that, Cindy, will you take it away?

CINDY ANDERSON: Hello, everybody. Yes. Don't take anything for granted. And I think about things like when I was asked to think of what do I wish I knew now? Taking for granted that employers really want participants from varied training backgrounds, we had to find out some reality with that.

Anyway, so my role, as Ingrid said, is manager. I manage TechHire. I manage America's Promise. And I manage the American Apprenticeship Initiative DOL grant for Employ Milwaukee, which is a workforce development board. And as a board, I think I have other resources that we can kind of tap into such as WIOA and staff like our business services team, and so some of my secret sauces and strategies do revolve around them.

And for us, with TechHire, we focus solely on IT occupation. And we do that two ways: We do that by cohort training, and then we have the kind of what the FOA calls level 1 and 3 or tiers 1 and 3. So those are folks who come to us who may not want the particular boot camp training, because the boot camp training is solely for service desk technician right now.

So we were supposed to talk a little bit about our project performance. And we're not totally there. We had a first year of the grant -- I joined the organization only about 14 months ago. So we kind of had a rough start. It was our first year with an awful provider for training and other things. So I definitely came in and was feeling the pain and really had to turn things around quickly and quite drastically given our not to good start. Plus, what usually happens with those things is a lot of your money goes with that not good start, too. So it's a little bit of a challenge.

I think what my secret sauce is for us was immediately to put partnerships and connections in place. So we, of course, immediately had to have a new training partner. And we went out bid. We actually have our local technical college provide with 12 credits in an accelerated boot camp style at a building that is being -- I was going to use the word "leased" -- to us. But that's not the word I want. But we kind of hosted there for free. We shared the building that the housing authority, the technical college, ADE lives in. And also, the church across the street helps provide services and supports staffing the front door.

So that's really kind of a nice little partnership where our students then don't matriculate on campus -- they come down to our building. And the cohorts go through 16-week, 12-credit certificate program. But they get to do it in their own camaraderie. And then they have the support. So definitely getting a trainer that was good and reputable and provided a credential at the end was really key to having something that was marketable to employers at the end.

The other factor of our secret sauce is connecting with our IT business advisory council. As a workforce board, we're tasked with meeting employer needs. So we have business services team members who manage individual groups of employers who meet occasionally and consult with us.

So they were consulted on the trainer. They were consulted on curriculum. They are participating in coming into cohort participant training and doing mock interviews and providing feedback. And part of what's really nice about that is in the IT world, they use a lot of contract companies or consulting companies. And so the people who had volunteered mainly to do the mock interviews are these companies

So if they see somebody, they're going to snap them up for a job. And if not, they definitely have the knowledge and will challenge our students during the mock interview to find things such as, give me an example of a problem you solved, which is kind of difficult from a classroom-based situation. But they're doing it in a way not to be mean or critical, but to get them to understand: What are the things that those employers are going to challenge them on in an interview?

And then the other secret sauce for us was to combat the lack of experience. And so we work with a group -- Ingrid, could you flash to that picture. I thought this might help give a description. So you can see in all those boxes in the bubble wrap -- this is a company called Digital Bridge. They refurbish computers. So we have large corporate headquarters in Milwaukee. And they have enough money that every two or three years they can totally swap out all their really super-nice computers. This organization -- now, the gentleman on the right, he runs it -- he brings our students in. You can see some of those folks on the left.

And they actually get to do the taking apart, the reloading, clearing memory, making sure all the pieces and parts of everything in that bubble wrap in those boxes is together because his company refurbishes. Then folks who are low-income or folks that they connect with -- they do a lot of work in Africa -- can purchase computers. And then they say, well, I would like Word on that or I'd like Adobe. And then Digital Bridge then reloads things to these refurbished computers, packages them up, and sells them very reasonably to low-income individuals.

And the reason that this has been so successful is for folks in the service desk industry, they're going to be asked to understand how these things work together, how they might do these things. It may not be all their duties. Some service desk technicians may be in a call center totally. But it is a way that they can get some hands-on experience. And then we have them put that on their resume. So the relationship with Digital Bridge, I think has been really key for our folks.

And you may not know that these companies exist. Since we've been working with them, we found another company in Milwaukee that also does it. So it's a pretty widespread practice in, I would say, probably medium-size town that you might have a company, and if you're doing service desk, it'd be a way to get some good hands-on experience. I think the other thing is working with internships more. And OJT grants provide the ability for us to use OJT money, WIOA dollars. If you co-enroll, you can also do on-the-job training.

So we're working on connecting our students to more opportunities through internship. And we also connect to that because the technical college that is our partner, they have their own lite[?] version of job service where all technical college students can post for jobs. But all employers who want technical college students can post and advertise for jobs also. And we use that, and we use our business services team to help find potential internship spots for our students, because that segues into what do I wish I knew when the grant started?

We see lots of opening for jobs. And then you approach an employer and you're talking about your participants and they're like, well, yeah. We're not going to hire you because we need people that have experience. But how do you get experience if nobody will hire you? Well, that's not my problem. So I think there are a lot of companies out there who are looking to poach people who have experience. Some with that kind of answer are just not willing to put in the investment. I have noticed a definite trend upwards in our hiring patterns for graduates since we've gotten Digital Bridge. And the students who have done internships also have seen an increase.

So really, really trying to push OJTs. And we can also do paid work experience for folks, because that barrier that employers put up, it's a double message that they're giving people. They want people with experience, but how do you get experience if nobody will hire them? So that's one of the things that I think I wished I knew a little bit more about the secret minds[?] of employers. And another one of our secret sauces is with the initiation of the American Apprenticeship Initiative, which is spreading heavily into IT, we're able to piggyback a little bit on some of those emerging fields.

For example, we have a service desk technician apprenticeship that was just recently completed and launched. And so we referred our TechHire graduate to the employers who were looking for that service desk apprenticeship, because although apprentices, they say that they're entry level, they still really appreciated the fact that they had those 12 credits under their belt and had some idea about, like ticketing systems and phone systems and compTIA type function of the service desk support person. So that's been another good connection for us.

I'm going to also take this moment -- I saw some questions that I can answer about how do we verify employment? We do allow self-attestation of participants. That is allowable according to the grant and reporting requirement. But also because we have some of these relationships, when we go in if we're working on placement with folks we can talk to employers. But also as a workforce board, we purchase a service called the work number. And the work number runs Social Security through a system and will pop back information about jobs in case we've kind of lost track of participants. But it does verify.

I think that's probably one of the advantages of being a board because we go out and buy that service because we have many programs where we're looking for that verification. But we pretty much rely on self-attestation and just kind of our understanding of wages and salaries in the community. Let's see.

MS. SCHONFIELD: That's good. Do you want to pause there? This is great. We can pause there. And then maybe we could answer a couple of the questions. Let me just check. I just got another note here.

Well, first of all, I want to check in John, India, and Jillian. They all asked a similar question -- how do you overcome the perception a lot of especially IT companies have that you have to have the four-year degree and perhaps be a certain way, shall we say, have a certain look? So I think you were speaking to that a bit earlier about getting your work-based learning happening with your Digital Bridge connection. Any other comments about that? Or John and India and Jillian, let us know if you feel like you had got enough on that from Cindy.

MS. ANDERSON: I think that four-year degree is really a barrier. And some have come down over time to the two-year degree, but it is still there. And the interesting thing about that is they don't even care what the four-year degree is in. They just want the four-year degree sometimes.

So I think that gives you a window into some of the corporate rules that a company may have. And sometimes it's just continuing to work with companies and explaining -- if you sit down and say, well what are the essential functions and what level do you need? And sometimes they're able to admit, oh, I guess we don't need that, because you keep talking and if you can talk a little bit of their language.

And others are corporations and they're never going to change, or the change to non-four-degree requirement would be very, very slow because it would be bogged down in corporate bureaucracy. But I think that's really why it's important to try to find things like a Digital Bridge or employer who will take interns. And it's okay.

We have employers that we do serial internships with because that's just as valuable a resource as possibly having that person hire somebody. Sometimes employers don't mind being the revolving door because it benefits them in the short run. But they just have more of a philanthropic desire to assist folks. But more and more I think it's key. And I think more and more we're going to be spending money of our training budget on OJT dollars.

MS. SCHONFIELD: Great. Well, Cindy, that's a good pausing place. This is great. I just want to reaffirm, Mark was wondering if you are affiliated with a local workforce board. Yes. She is. And thanks Jillian. I'm glad that was helpful. I hate to pause you, Cindy. Just like all of your colleagues, you're such a wealth of knowledge and experience. So hopefully, we'll have some time, we'll find some time and come back to you, because I know there's even more that you could speak to, as probably your peers could, about existing sector partnerships that help really fill out the continuum of work-based learning of internship to pre-apprenticeship, OJT, and full registered apprenticeship. So I'll put that in the back of my mind.

But let us move on to our fantastic representative all things college. We're going to move on to Tori Strickland. And Tori, would you take it away, please? I think like Cindy, so many different answers to the questions. Give us your thumbnail sketch of what's going on with Montgomery College. What's your secret sauce?

TORI STRICKLAND: Sure. I actually am old enough to remember the McDonald's commercials about the secret sauce. So I absolutely chuckled when you mentioned that earlier, Ingrid. So secret sauce for Montgomery College -- basically, just a quick overview -- we do IT occupational skills training for limited English proficient individuals and in other folks with barriers to employment. The goal for our limited English proficiency folks is to ensure that we are increasing the marketability of them as we place them in front of employers.

We provide not only the IT occupational skills training, but we provide them with English language training as well, or English language education as well. So we're in our third program year just shy of meeting our goal. I think that our secret sauce, so to speak, is -- there are a couple of different components that contribute to our success: Number one is our outreach intake process; number two, our instructors and support staff; and number three, our program design.

Specifically, as it pertains to our outreach and intake process, it's a pretty comprehensive process. It's the info sessions sort of kick everything off. And info sessions are required. And in those info sessions, information is shared around the schedule, expectations, the application process. And we also talk about some entry labor market data just to get people a baseline understanding around what they can expect, especially as it pertains to entry-level IT employment, so there are no surprises on the back end. Our intake process is pretty comprehensive, as I said.

There are a couple of layers to it to include some pre-assessment work just so that we can better understand if that person is going to be a good fit for our program or if we need to refer them on to another program either inside or outside of the college. In terms of our instructors and support staff, we have IT professionals. So we have practitioners, but we also have practitioners who happen to be pretty well versed in adult learning theory. So they've actually taught, so it's not as if it's a practitioner coming right off the street, getting in front of a class, and talking at a class. They actually understand the principles behind teaching and instruction. So I think that's really important.

And then we have support staff to assist students or participants along every phase of the process. This becomes particularly important when we are talking about establishing that rapport so that post program completion participants feel like they have someone they can talk to, and they are inclined more to respond to you because you've built that rapport with them. So when you're attempting to reach out to them to follow up on employment and that kind of thing, having a support staff member with them in every stage of the process sort of creating that rapport, I think, turns in that post program outreach.

And then number three, program design -- I think that for our participants in particular, because we have a group of folks who are English language learners, using the I-best[?] model, so having the English language instruction overlapping with the actual IT occupational skills training, having those subjects overlap is a really critical component to our success. And then also having our crew navigators in place to provide support along the way, and then also having two job development and opportunities specialists in place to be able to go into the classroom before students complete, to start to build the rapport to better understand the landscape.

Employment for students is really important. And also, I think in terms of program design specifically for our A+ program, we have started to do testing in a way that allows for us to better manage the testing process, and then also help students to be more successful in their certification testing. So the 901 exam, for example, is taken at almost the midpoint of the class. And then the 902 exam is taken once class completes. So it gives our instructors and support staff an opportunity to circle back with students if they don't pass a 901 exam to help them prepare to retake it.

And then at the conclusion of all of our courses, we offer study sessions and the ability for them to access a second voucher for them to retake their exams. So that would be the third component of our secret sauce. In terms of the things I wish I had known prior to starting the program that I'm now aware of, I wish I had known about the ever evolving IT certification landscape. The employer needs and IT change very rapidly. And then an additional thing I wish I had known was the difficulty with providing IT training in English language learning in such a short time frame.

So again, we have a very specific population. I'm not sure how many other folks have English language learners. However, teaching or enhancing the English language skill set along with introducing in some cases the IT occupational skills training can be a very difficult endeavor. And even with that course being six months, that still often isn't enough time to see a significant enough increase in the English language acquisitions to be able to properly place individuals.

Really quickly, there were three questions that were put in the chat that I wanted to touch base on. Verifying employment was similar to what Cindy said. We rely on self-attestation for individuals. We also cold call students. We use the retake vouchers as a way to engage with students.

Future certification opportunities is a way to engage students to get them to report back to us. So for example, if a student got an A+ cert and they want to move on to Network+, we will entice them with a, hey. Perhaps we can help you with that Network+ certification. What's going on with you? Come in and talk to us. So that's sort of a carrot we'll dangle in front of them.

But self-attestation has been the most successful thing for us. We have a form that we have students sign off on in the very beginning. And that's usually been pretty easy for us to obtain, or a student sending us an email. The other thing I wanted to touch on was the certificate versus the degrees and hiring with employers. So I think at this stage in the process for us really shifting gears and focusing more heavily on leveraging employer relationships becomes really essential.

So what we found is, again, having now two job developers, the ability to get in front of more employers and build more intimate relationships with employers in order to sell just that -- to sell the program, to sell the students, and to sell the certifications that the students are getting to really give the employers buy-in with our program and with the college overall, which is really key.

So for example, they offer the opportunities for being AJAS faculty members, that kind of thing, having those kinds of conversations with employers, creating a two-way street. They feel like they're getting something from us other than the possibility of hiring someone who they perceive may not work out has been beneficial in opening a few more doors for us in terms of selling our students to employers. So that might be something that folks want to consider, those intimate relationships with employers, dangling some carrots in front of employers, focusing from inside the employers has been far more successful for us as well.

And then the third thing was engagement post training completion that someone mentioned. The best thing that we've found has been the lure of folks wanting to pursue additional certifications or even additional course work here at Montgomery College.

So reaching out to individuals to kind of say, hey, we have A+ cert. Do you want to do Network+? Well, if you want to do Network+, let's talk. Perhaps we could help cover the cost of that certification, that kind of thing, having that conversation with them. Any other kinds of study sessions for certifications, any sort of other campus activities that we know might be beneficial to the students, we use that as a lure as well.

MS. SCHONFIELD: Tori, that was a lot. Thank you so much. This is Ingrid again. It's so fascinating, because I think what Cindy was really pointing to was just a lot about partnerships. She put in lots of partnerships, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, data, partnerships, the business, the business advisory council. And so it sounds like from your world view, of course there's also partnerships, but it sounds like there's a lot about program design and how are you designing your program so that you are really connected with the participants so you can develop rapport to get them supported, get through the program.

And post program, they want to come back and talk with you. And it's along the lines of designing programs looking at how you redesign your training strategy a few times, I think, to make sure there's lots of support for students, like you said, to take those exams and change when in the time frame of your training those exams are taken so that more assistance can be provided so they can be more likely to be successful and pass the exams. It's so fascinating.

I'm wondering, folks in the virtual room, if you guys have any questions for Tori. And also, I know that we have at least one fellow college grantee on the line, if anyone would like to weigh in and share their suggestions for success, especially if you're an educational institution that's a TechHire grantee. I'm thinking about somebody I know who's in North Carolina. Perhaps, Ms. Mira? So any questions or comments for Tori?

And while we're waiting for folks to weigh in, Tori, I'm wondering if your program's been working with -- and this is Rose's question -- working with staffing consulting firms versus businesses directly. If you've noticed any differences and how to reach out and connect with those different kinds of businesses.

MS. STRICKLAND: Yeah. So this has been very beneficial for our -- and I think someone asked this question actually -- for folks who have little to no IT experience, and especially with the added potential barrier of English being a second or third language. The staffing consulting firms have been -- they've played a critical role in giving folks their first position, their first set of experiences so that they can start to build out their resume.

What's fascinating about this is that the IT landscape is very much -- and I think someone mentioned this -- the IT landscape is very much filled with contractors and staffing firms. This is how many of the entry to mid-level positions are actually filled in a lot of organizations, especially larger organizations who simply don't have the interest, quite frankly, in taking the time to fill a help desk 1 position, for example.

So we have actually been in communication with our FPO about this whole backing firm situation, just basically to formalize the relationship, because we're finding such success with being able to access staffing firms for our entry level folks. I hope that makes sense. We're trying to essentially say, hey, when we looked at this IT landscape, perhaps we didn't know this before, but now that we're seeing what's happening for our folks in particular, the staffing firms are the ones who are the bridge to our folks getting experience. This should be able to count. We should be able to formalize this relationship. But that's actually an ongoing conversation we're having with our FPO now.

MS. SCHONFIELD: Very interesting. That's so fascinating Tori. And also your colleague, Mira, who's at Wake Tech, notes that one thing that she's been doing too along those lines in terms of trying to connect with business and employers is hosting an employer round table to kind of get perspective on what potential employers are looking for, types of credentials, as well as a type of soft skills training that's needed.

And I'm guessing that Mira -- I think I actually know that Mira has revised her program design so that there's some soft skills training incorporated. And I think Cindy has too with Employ Milwaukee. So interesting. This is such a great topic.

Let me see if there's any more questions coming in. Yep. Thanks Emily. Emily's weighing in and mentioning that lots of folks who are entering the IT field using the staffing firms -- going through staffing firms to get employment is really a key thing. Great.

MS. STRICKLAND: And it looks like Mark -- I don't know if Mark's question is -- Mark Thomas, if that question is for me. But if so, we actually do -- just to answer really quickly -- Works with Montgomery is our local workforce board. And we do have a partnership with them. They essentially are helping us with building our work-based learning program. Additionally, they do some light case management. And they are actually going to be hosting employer events for us.

So one of their key deliverables is to identify -- we have a specified number of IT employers that they have to identify per month that they have to report on to us. And they also have an obligation to host a total of, I think, six career events for us, for our participants. So if that question was directed at me, that's our relationship with our local workforce board.

MS. SCHONFIELD: Perfect. Great. Thank you so much. And Cindy, I think I heard you from the frozen tundra trying to get a word in. And then we need to move to JFF, but go ahead. Get a word in, Cindy.

MS. ANDERSON: I was just going to really quickly about this staffing -- we work more with what I would call contractor consulting, which I think is carefully a little different than the others whereby many of those people work on the job with the company for like a minimum of six months. And then the company has the option to bring them on, or the consulting company keeps them in their "stable." But those employees who are with the contract companies, the ones we worked with, they actually are eligible for health insurance and benefits and the actual contract company.

So I do think there are levels and degrees of staffing and things. We've never been worried that it wasn't like an acceptable hire just because some of the relationships we've had were in choosing the ones that we work with. I don't know if that's helpful, but I just thought I'd throw that in there.

MS. SCHONFIELD: Thank you so much, Cindy. And thank you, Tori. Let us -- I know I'm a little bit lagging on our time here. So let's zoom over to our friends at Jobs for the Future. Ray, would you kick us off. Give us a little bit of context about JFF.

RAYMOND BARBOSA: Yeah. Absolutely. So hi, all. Ray Barbosa here. JFF is a national nonprofit organization. And we have pretty deep expertise in education workforce development. We're so lucky to be the managing partner on this project with Per Scholas and General Assembly. So we do a program out of New York and D.C. And I'm actually really happy to say that as of our last reporting cycle -- the new one that's coming up -- we're actually exceeding our goals for employment in second quarter after exit. So that's super great.

And Per Scholas and General Assembly are definitely the chefs of our secret sauce here. We are great at identifying the needs of participants and employers and designing strategies around that. So rather than kind of talk about that, I'll tee up our two representatives today.

So first, we'll have Sarah Wessel. Sarah's, the senior director employer partners and career services for Newark and New York for Per Scholas. And Macia Batista, manager of outcomes and career coaching the General Assembly, and she leads the local career department of career coaches. And they do a lot of great work in improving offerings and delivering improvements to the program. So without further ado, I will hand it off to them.

SARAH CONTE WESSEL: Great. Thank you so much, Ray. And hi, everyone. Thanks so much for joining this webinar this afternoon. This is Sarah Wessel, and I'm on the Per Scholas team. I work very closely with Macia and the team at General Assembly. I'm going to kind of dive right in to what the pieces of our secret sauce, what they're made of.

And I think really what it comes down to is one, the time that we took at the beginning of this partnership to really develop the relationship and make sure that we were well aligned as two separate organizations to provide the service to our students and the students that we serve, and really just understanding the inner workings and the cultures of each organization, and making sure that those were aligned before we dove in. I think what else has been really important to the success of the program and the success of our students has to do with how we adapt to the training throughout. We notice that something isn't working well, that we're making the change and constantly in iteration so that our students are getting the best support possible.

So the way the program works between Per Scholas and General Assembly is that Per Scholas is all of the recruitment, the onboarding, and the admissions portion in partnership with General Assembly. So General Assembly is a part of that last ground interview that all applicants have to go through before they're enrolled. Once students are enrolled, they stay at Per Scholas for six weeks where we really build the community amongst the class. And they get a deep dive into the hard web development technical skills before they get to General Assembly.

During the six weeks -- we call that the transition week -- that time is really spent on ensuring that the student is ready for success once they get to General Assembly, because once they get to General Assembly, it's like lightning fast to see the really intense, and it could really wear students down. So we make sure that they have everything that they need to be successful once they matriculate to General Assembly. We also bring them on tours our employer partners so they can get some interaction with some of our employers before they embark.

We do have meet and greet between the class that's going to be matriculating to General Assembly and the class that's currently in session there. And that's really where I think a lot of the support starts to happen amongst the class and starts building a network of students and alumni support that will follow them not only throughout their time at General Assembly, but also throughout their career, which we see has been really successful.

And then once they're on site at General Assembly, we're ensuring that Per Scholas staff are still on site every few weeks, that we saw their presence and the students' coursework there. But they still feel supported by not only the General Assembly staff and they did an incredible job at getting the students prepared, but making sure that students also feel supported by Per Scholas and the staff here, that we're not just handing them off and leaving them, but that there's a continuum of support throughout their time through the whole program. So with that, I'm going to top it off to Macia to talk a little bit about the coaching career services at General Assembly.

MACIA BATISTA: Awesome. Thanks, Sarah. Hello, everyone. I'm Macia Batista. I manage here the outcomes and career coaching function here at GA, New York. I want to talk about two things -- so first, the work that we do with our participants on the career coaching side. And then I'll dive into a little bit about the employer demand and those relationships that Sarah and I worked to build. So on the career coaching side, both of our teams, we have dedicated staff working with students to help them build a personal brand. So from really figuring out how they break into this now field, all of our folks are coming from a nontraditional background. They have limited experience.

So how do they develop that elevator pitch and everything in between from where's the main building to kind of navigating those uncomfortable conversations in a networking situation? Our coaches are working with students from the moment that they step foot into that experience at Per Scholas until the moment that they find an offer. And so there's a lot of accountability, a lot of requirements that we hold to students on our end. And if there are any questions around that, I'm happy to answer those. I want to be mindful of time here.

And then on the employer side, this is where we see the most opportunity. Part of the work that we do is really just deepening relationships with employers. Our strategy is really to identify who are the key talent leaders and specifically around TNI and fostering those relationships with those managers, really taking time to have conversations around what the technical achievements are of our graduates and sharing their stories, because I think the thing that resonates the most with our employers is the reason as to why they decided to make this career transition.

And we try to have those honest conversations around eliminating the bias that happens, because we all know in a hiring process, and really taking a chance on our graduates because we know they have the skills and the grit and that ambition. And Sarah and I really serve as the liaison to help them get that application process. How do we have each of our leaders just really give our graduates a chance to assess them on their technical knowledge beyond just an application which maybe shows a limited experience? I want to pause here to see if there are any questions and let my colleague here, Sarah, kind of talk a little bit more about kind of the mentorship and building an alumni network.

MS. WESSEL: Yeah. And just to add to the employer piece and also to answer the question before around getting around bachelor's degrees. One of the things that I have seen and my team have had some success with here in New York is having the conversation with the employer. Typically, the employers are requiring bachelor's degrees. There's large corporations that just have this requirement across the board. But what I found to be really helpful is having conversations with the tech director, so not HR, not corporate social responsibility.

Diversity inclusions can sometimes be a really great supporter of this work, but really finding the champion within the tech department and getting their buy-in and then working with them to create a program specifically for our graduates who may come from nontraditional educational background, so working on programs like specific internship programs for our graduates or apprenticeship like on-the-job training programs for our graduates.

And once you find that champion within an organization, within a tech team, the rest kind of falls into place. They're able to get the buy-in from the needed parties in HR, in corporate social responsibility to move the project forward. But if they know that they have the lines open to hire folks and they want to dedicate those lines to a Per Scholas General Assembly co-bridge graduate and to build out that specific program for our graduate, that's really where my team is seeing a lot of success in having those conversations about how can we move our graduates into your organization and be able to bypass the requirement needed for a bachelor's degree?

And then I think lastly -- and then we have a minute left -- really encouraging our students and alumni to lean on each other and to be mentors for each other have been really special. We just had a graduation a few weeks ago for our 10th cohort and that we've graduated, and we had graduates from all the way from our first cohort through our 9th cohort who attended that graduation, because we really emphasize building a network of support around our alumni and in really helping each other out.

And I think that's really important not just for their career growth, but also for them to keep each other motivated, because it is a really tough market. It's really competitive. But as much as students can rely on one another and motivate each other, we've seen a lot of success in that. And it's 4:00 so, I will stop and tend to back off.

MS. SCHONFIELD: I am so sorry that I did not manage the time better. You guys have so much important stuff to say. And this is such a rich topic. But thank you for joining us. I think what we can do is we can offer to get some more -- just connect your peers with you maybe going forward, because the reason why I wanted Sarah and Macia to join us is they really have such a great amount of support for the participants throughout the life span, throughout their tenure that they even have, as Sarah was mentioning, this mentor group that voluntarily comes together to support the next generation, the next cohort.

Thank you so much, Ray, Sarah, and Macia. I'm a little bit over time, so let me see if you have a moment, folks, please enter a word or phrase that springs to mind as you reflect on today's presentations. And it could also be something that you might apply to your own project. And while you're doing that, Megan, would you walk us through a couple things for folks to be aware of going forward?

MS. BAIRD: Sure. We did want to highlight a couple of upcoming events on our TA calendar before we close today's event. And one that's coming up soon on February 21st is a data-driven decision making webinar, "How to Use Tools to Review and Manage Performance." You should have received that invite. If you have not, please let us know. This is a great opportunity to hear from your peers, as well as the national office, in how we look at how you are doing in regard to meeting your performance outcomes, as well as to see some tools you could be using if you don't already have tools to really assess your performance, whether it might be areas that need improvement or areas that you're exceeding.

So definitely, we look forward to seeing you all on that webinar. And just as a reminder, if you have any questions about any TA or TA events, please reach out to your technical assistance TechHire coach. And just a reminder what the TechHire email address is. If you have not used it before, it's on your screen: techhire@dol.gov.

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