**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**America's Promise Grants: Effective Community College-Workforce Development Board Partnerships**

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GRACE MCCALL: And welcome to "America's Promise Grants: Effective Community College-Workforce Development Board Partnerships." So without further ado I'd like to turn things over to our moderator for today, Gregory Scheib. Take it away, Greg.

GREGORY SCHEIB: Thanks, Grace. Appreciate that. Before we just get rolling, we're just going to do a quick poll. I know many of you are already putting your information into the chat. But if you could just give us a quick response to what role you play with your organization, it always helps us understand who we're talking to.

And I see – that's great. We've got a lot of our program directors and authorized reps and training providers. So thank you all for being here.

If I didn't say it already, I'm Greg Scheib. I'm the program lead for the America's Promise grant. And I'm just going to – I'm just here to say hi and then get out of the way.

We have a couple of great presenters for you today, and speakers. And we're going to be talking about partnerships between the workforce boards and our community college partners. And our two moderators, if you will, for today are going to be Jan Bray and Kelly Middleton Banks, both from the National Association of Workforce Boards.

We also have a great bunch of speakers that represent both the community college system and our workforce system.

So I'm not going to keep you there. Just going to go ahead and get us going. So Jan, if I could just go ahead and hand it over to you, just going.

JAN BRAY: Sure. Thanks, Greg. I appreciate it. And welcome, everyone. We're very glad you're here. This is a topic, the partnership between community colleges and workforce development boards, that has never been more important than it is today, given all that this country's going through – or globally what we're going through – with COVID-19, but the changing nature of the workplace, of industry, the jobs, the (content ?) of jobs.

I think that what the – one of the only ways we're going to be able to effectively address this issue is through the community colleges and the workforce boards working together, identifying it together, and building on each other's strengths.

So as Greg said, I'm Jan Bray. I'm with the National Association of Workforce Boards and serve as a coach for this grant. Let me turn it over for a moment to Kelly Middleton Banks. Kelly?

KELLY MIDDLETON BANKS: Thanks so much, Jan. Good afternoon, everyone. I'm really excited about today's conversation and looking forward to the questions that this conversation prompts.

Just want to quickly go over some of the objectives for today's discussion. We're hoping that this conversation today will give participants an opportunity to think about the partnership between community colleges and workforce development boards a little differently, and possibly learn something new or add a new perspective.

We're also hoping that the discussion today will inspire participants to consider strengthening the current partnership and cultivate partnerships that they may have not had chance to do as of yet.

And also we're hoping that this discussion will provide additional understanding on how you can leverage a partnership between community colleges and workforce development boards to not only meet the programming objectives under the America's Promise grant, but also as you move forward to continue to provide workforce development initiatives in your community in the near future.

So before we move into the discussion, we'd like to get a gauge of how your relationship – your current relationships are with your workforce development board or your local community college. And this will just give us an idea. And don't worry; you won't get calls from Greg. In (retrospect ?), if you haven't had a chance to prompt or create a relationship with your local community college or workforce development board, we're hoping that after this conversation you'll be in a better position to develop that relationship or hopefully sustain that relationship if you're already working with them.

And so we have some answers coming in. And it appears that some of our community colleges have established partnerships and some of our workforce development boards have established partnerships with their local community college. As well as some who are trying to work through those relationships and haven't had a chance to cultivate.

So now I'd like to turn it over to Jan Bray. She's going to walk us through introducing the grantee presenters, as well as the panel discussion. Jan?

MS. BRAY: Thanks, Kelly. And again, we're hoping that this becomes more of a dialogue. I know it's hard to do in this kind of format. We have some really experienced, knowledgeable presenters today who are going to share with you what they've done, how they've managed to make the partnership work.

But please feel free as they're talking, any questions you have, put them into the chat box. While we have time for questions at the end, we hope to address your questions throughout the webinar and not hold them all towards the end.

So let me start first, we have a partnership out of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Julie Parks, who's with the Grand Rapids Community College, and she is the America's Promise project leader. Grand Rapids has been doing a phenomenal job and part of that is because of their partnership with the West Michigan Works, which is the local workforce board. And we have Angie Barksdale, who is the chief operating officer for the board. I can tell you that Grand Rapids Community College recently got a recognition award from the local workforce board for the work they've been doing. So they really work very closely together.

And before I introduce the other two, let me – (inaudible) – Julie. Let me turn this over to Julie for a moment. Julie, if you can give us sort of a high-level overview of the grant. And at the same time, given all that we're going through now, if you can share with everyone what had to change or what have you done differently because of COVID-19?

JULIE PARKS: Thank you, Jan. Hello, everybody, from beautiful Grand Rapids, Michigan, where it's finally warm and just a beautiful rainy day here.

So we have the America's Promise Healthcare Pathways grant in Grand Rapids. Grand Rapids itself is the second biggest city in Michigan. And our Michigan Works partners are responsible for seven counties in the west side of the state of Michigan, so that's where we focused on here. We have strong employer relationships and three very large hospital systems, Spectrum Health, Trinity Health – or Mercy Health – and U of M Metro Health in our area, along with just a ton of senior care living areas.

So for COVID-19, because health care – I think we were very uniquely positioned that our hospital partners asked for our help as a part of this grant. And we've spent time over the past 10 weeks working with them to train their incumbents who work in environmental services and nutrition services, and helping them into careers such as nurse tech, pharmacy tech, and some clinical kind of areas to help out. And it was really great that we were positioned that way to do that and to help with that.

The other advantage is it helps another part of our grant where we're trying to help incumbents rise up and get more money, make a living wage, and get them on the career pathway within the hospital system. So we were very excited about that for COVID-19.

We were able to do remote programming with some of our programs. But there are a few programs that there was only so much we could do online, and then there became a part where we just have to pause until we can get back in person. And right now it looks like the third week of June we'll be able to start small groups training again.

It was very interesting that our certified nursing assistant, before they completely finished their program, were put to work because there was such a need at the long-term senior care centers.

So our grant has the big city of Grand Rapids, which is about 200,000 individuals; and very small rural areas with populations of 25 (thousand) that have long-term care homes there. So it's very diverse area. Big, big health care employers.

MS. BRAY: Thank you, Julie. Appreciate it. And I know you and Angie have a lot to share with everyone.

Our next group – partnership is from Indiana. We have Mellisa Leaming, who is the director of operations for the region four workforce board; and Cindy Randolph, who's executive director of Career Experiences Student Talent Connection. And they have a good partnership that's working together. So I'm actually going to ask Mellisa, if you could also give a broad overview of the grant that you have and what's changed because of COVID-19.

MELLISA LEAMING: Hey. Good afternoon, everyone. I would like to let you know that we are from west central Indiana and we cover a 12-county area. And we work with advanced manufacturing is our goal with those that are unemployed and also incumbent workers. And we spend a lot of time letting them learn their work ethic and soft skills, and then they get to go into the hands-on training.

And that's why I'm very glad today to have Cindy Randolph joining us from Ivy Tech. She's been very instrumental in many of our partnering efforts.

As far as COVID, because advanced manufacturing was kind of our bread and butter in this area, a lot of the manufacturing have shut down for a month to two months. And so we have had to pause on many of our training – much of our training because it does include a hands-on component. And therefore, we didn't have the ability to really – to do the training in an environment where people could be social distancing.

So we are working on coming up with a way to do that training in a modified format of using some virtual tools and also figuring out how to do the hands-on part. Our classes are probably going to be smaller in size. We're working on virtual enrollments in workshops. And also, a scheduling system so that – to our marketing and outreach for the APG customers, that they can just sign up and we can do some preliminary things with them over the phone.

MS. BRAY: All right. Good. So let's start out with some of our first questions. And actually, I'm going to throw this to both Mellisa and Cindy first. And then, you know, I'll get to Julie and Angie next.

But so how did the two of you – the community college and the workforce board – build consensus? How did you get the partnership started? And actually, these questions – (inaudible) – all related, but how did you get it started? How did you agree that we needed the partnership? And how did you build that?

MS. LEAMING: OK. I can start and then Cindy can jump right in there. I would say one is this started before the America's Promise grant. I think if we would just said, oh, we need this partnership, that would have been a little bit of a far reach. But this has been going on for years.

And really, it made sense that the goals for Ivy Tech and for the board is really about serving the employers in our area, and particularly again for this – in advanced manufacturing. So we really said this is a common goal that we can get our arms around. We are moving in the same direction and want to provide the training that the employers are requesting.

And we had an employer advisory board that told us what those skills that they would like to have for new jobseekers that are coming into the industry. And so through that – talking with the employers, that helped us bring it together.

And it was really the training, then there was the employers, the board, working together to come up with how we were moving forward.

Cindy?

CINDY RANDOLPH: Yeah. Thank you, Mellisa. I just want to echo what Mellisa said. It's always about the employer. They are the driver. They're telling us their needs. And so once we have determined whether that's a workforce board representative or an Ivy Tech workforce consultant who's identified this need, it's really about each of us coming together and really sharing the capability to serve those needs.

And so we've been very transparent in what we can or we cannot do, but yet what is it that we know will be for the good of the cause for the employer?

And I really want to give a shout-out to our workforce board. And Mellisa didn't pay me to say this, but they also organize what they call a grants committee. And so around that or in that committee – I mean, it does include employer partners. It includes educational partners, K-12 as well as postsecondary, our chambers. And we all are there to share who can help serve this need when we talk about talent and skill gap. (Pause.)

MS. PARKS: So this is Julie in Grand Rapids. And I think it's so similar and so interesting how Indiana and Michigan are similar in this regard. So we really have had a very long relationship. And it always hasn't been a perfect relationship. In fact, there were times when I would say we were competitive with each other and tried to – we just didn't have the kind of communication that we have today.

Really, in 2010 it started with the first Pathways out of Poverty grant; that's the first time that we ever worked in a way that was different than a contractor kind of relationship. Because we helped some of the contracts that West Michigan Works had. And then when they started to consolidate services, that's when the real change happened.

What would you say, Angie, about how we – from your viewpoint, how we decided to work closer together?

ANGIE BARKSDALE: I think a lot of it was a building over years. So for our workforce board area, it's four-and-a-half years ago we merged four workforce boards into one, covering a large region. So for a community college like Grand Rapids, whose essential hub was in one of those counties but also provided services in a variety of counties, it allowed us the ability to start to really align services and become more strategic as a region.

At the same time, we had recently – just previous to the merger, most of the workforce boards went to providing services directly. So as Julie alluded to, in many of the locations our community college partners, like Grand Rapids Community Colleges, were a subcontractor providing WIOA-type services or Wagner-Peyser services for us.

We now provide all of those services directly. So we've kind of consolidated it online into what I would say is our lane of career exploration, career coaching, labor market information, and preparing individuals for that job search.

So over time, we really evolved to a place where we've figured out what each other's strengths are. Our community colleges are our training providers and they are our core training providers for our region.

I will add that we have three community colleges that we partner with in our seven-county region. All of them are different in terms of their philosophy and needs because they service different communities. Grand Rapids is based – Grand Rapids Community College clearly is based in our urban core of our seven-county region. We have a community college that's in a very rural area and their service delivery models are different. So aligning that over time.

And I think the other key thing is communication. Like any relationship, whether it's a personal relationship or a work relationship, there's up and there's downs. But open communication and being willing to have hard conversations with each other and get along together. When the day is done, you make a decision and you move forward and that's the way we've decided. We've learned to weather some of those storms, so I think it's made the relationship stronger.

MS. BRAY: All right. Thank you. And – (inaudible) – to Julie and Angie. Sorry, I forgot my phone was on mute. I was asking a question. So thank you for just stepping up, Julie.

So let me follow-up with Julie and Angie, what you had said. We talk about success all the time, but where did you hit a potential barrier or roadblock, and how did you move around that to continue building the partnership?

MS. PARKS: Well, I think it came to a realization and a discussion about what do we do best? And how can we serve the employers and our region better? Because there was confusion on the part of the employers over who does what? Who can help me? There was confusion about the programs that the community college offered. They became, and they are today, a great feedback loop for everything we do at the community college. They have a different relationship with employers.

When WIOA passed in 2014 and their sector groups started, what I saw is a way to really expand what we do already with advisory committees in a bigger forum with more employers. And somebody who was a neutral body that could help and the ability that they have to provide LMI data for us, those are things that they can do and their expertise. I don't have to spend my funds on that. And it just made sense; it just was a more logical way to do things.

And the communication part and the developing relationships – and not just between Angie and Julie, but at every level, that we had to model this idea for new behavior to serve employers and have it be – I look at them as another arm, my right arm, out in the field. And hopefully they look at us that way. I think it works better.

MS. BRAY: Yeah. And that's a good point, building on what each of you really have the expertise in, rather than everybody trying to do – be everything and provide it all. So that's really good.

Mellisa and Cindy, what about you? Was there a roadblock or a barrier that you all recognized and managed to overcome as you were building the partnership?

MS. LEAMING: This is Mellisa. I would say one of the things – and I think Greg alluded to this earlier – is in the beginning, which has been several years ago, is all of us defined our right lane. And so making sure – because everybody wants to be helping and doing your best, but you can't be all leaders at the same time.

And so us learning, the board learning, and the community college learning, there are times when one of us needs to be the leader and the other one needs to be kind of the person that's assisting and helping. And so I think we had to go through some growing pains on that.

As well as I think another – I don't know about a roadblock, but we all change, we all morph, there are staffing issues that happen. And so sometimes you have to reset a little bit and realize that maybe you have to bring others up to speed to what the group has been working on, because there maybe is someone new, whether it's from the board or from the community college.

Although I will say, we've been very fortunate and lots of staff from the board have been hired by the community college. This has happened a couple of times. And that actually strengthens both of us.

MS. BRAY: Well, that's good to hear. Cindy, anything to add to that?

MS. RANDOLPH: Yeah. I think really, similarly to what everyone else has shared, that it really – I came in a little bit later. I wasn't there all of those many previous years. So I was one of those newbies. And to be welcomed into the fold by the workforce board and really brought up to speed was so beneficial.

And just recognizing that we are not the answer to everything. Again, I'll go back to that, right? And recognizing that others also have the solutions and that we work together as a group. And when I say "group," I mean the entire community, to really serve that the employer need is at that time.

MS. BRAY: All right. Great. So let's move into another section of issues and thinking. We looked at the whole area of programming and engagement. So Julie and Angie, so what types of programs do you work together on that you are (fluently ?) engaged in that really that partnership adds to quite a bit?

MS. PARKS: Well, I think there are so many. We work on a project together – (inaudible) – hiring, where both our workforce board and the college are very committed to inclusion and opportunity for all. Our president sits on the workforce board at the college – from the college.

And we – America's Promise, all the intake that West Michigan Works does. And the fact that this grant – the whole intake process – they were as much a co-grantee, a co-ownership of the project, because they designed all that. They used the systems they have. And that was intentional for the sustainability of this project once the money ends.

Go ahead, Angie, with the rest of the list. There's a big one. We do a lot together.

MS. BARKSDALE: (Inaudible) – we do a lot together. You know, we operate five different industry councils. The America's Promise grant clearly is focused on health care, but in every one of those industry councils which are the key in-demand industries for our region, the community college plays a key role in that.

So we have programs that are focused on all levels of technical needs, all different industries, everything from apprenticeship work to, as Julie mentioned – (inaudible) – hiring practices, as well as developing innovative career coaching models where the community college is working with us to help put some certification credentialing around the coaching models that our staff in our workforce centers or our American Job Centers are doing, but also our community-based organizations and our K-12 system. So trying to align that career coaching methodology so it's more regionally recognized.

So there's so many things. I think as that partnership evolved – as Julie and I talked about over the years how it's grown – it's now we – they are a key partner in almost every project we do. They're the key training provider. As Julie mentioned, we try to view ourselves as kind of the neutral convener of bringing the employers, the training organizations together.

I think the key thing – the key hurdle over the years – the other thing that workforce boards struggle with in terms of partnerships is people viewing us as more than just a checkbook, that we're just the organization that's going to pay for training and that's all we do. But there's so much more value that the workforce boards can bring to the partnership. And I think getting aligned around that has really strengthened.

And an outcome to that, I think, has shown in this America's Promise grant in the amount of leveraged dollars we've been able to provide to the health care industry. And that wasn't the intent of the project. The intent of the project was to open doors to underserved populations to get them into the health care industry and move them up career ladders.

But by creating a systematic approach that involved all of the key players in a no-wrong-door-entry type of system, the end result is more of our resources are being devoted to individuals because they're on a strong career pathway. And we operate not just WIOA but also our TANF programs, our Trade programs, as well as several other state-funded training grants.

And we've been able to expand our apprenticeship work in health care. We hold the standards for several DOL registered apprenticeships, a couple of them in health care specifically. So bringing all that together kind of shows the outcomes are much more successful when you bring it all together.

MS. PARKS: And we've won so many awards from each other, from state, from best practices, that that helps the leadership in our organizations to understand that what we're doing is valued. And it brings good attention to them.

MS. BRAY: Absolutely. I know. You guys have a strong partnership there, plus you reach out to other areas in the community, like the chamber, CBOs and all. So that contributes to what you're doing as well, which is terrific.

So let me ask Mellisa and Cindy the same question, basically. What programs are you engaged in and how is that – beyond the America's Promise grant? And how does that strengthen the partnership and the objective reaching goals of the workforce board and the community college?

MS. LEAMING: Cindy, do you want to start? Or you want me to?

MS. RANDOLPH: Yeah, no. I'm happy to, Mellisa. So as Mellisa mentioned earlier, our service area really is focused or centered around that industrial or manufacturing partnership. And so some of the things that we've done with some of those employer partners – certainly maintenance is definitely a high-demand, high-wage, and a high-need, as well as organizational leadership, machinist. We've also worked together on industrial maintenance apprenticeships as well, and also machine repair apprenticeship. We do a lot in that area.

And really, I guess, some of the goals – again, it just goes back to serving that employer need. And I know Mellisa probably has some more detail on each of those that she would like to share, but it's really just understanding and providing and making sure that we have the right people there to be the solution.

MS. LEAMING: Yeah. And I think from Grand Rapids we would echo a lot of what they have been working on also. I would say we are also located in some of our – what we have are Work One Centers. And Ivy Tech Community College are collocated in some of our counties. That's also one of the bonuses, I guess, in Indiana is that Ivy Tech does cover the entire state. So in our 12-county area, Ivy Tech has multiple facilities, so that is very helpful so that we can engage the entire region in all the different programs that are offered.

But I think things that we offer, again trying to keep somewhat within our lanes as we've talked about, is the work ethic, the soft skills, the assessment; the board does a lot of that for the individuals as they're coming into the system to make sure that they are ready for the training. And if they're not, helping them to get ready for the training; albeit, they may brush up on basic skills, they need supportive services, those types of things, so that they can then be successful.

And then of course assisting with the funding. But we do a lot of blending of funding also between Ivy Tech and the board of different – anyway, we want to try and make sure that we get as many people in the funnel as we can. So looking at all the different opportunities. But I think we do most of the same services that Grand Rapids was talking about, the different programs are pretty much the same.

MS. BRAY: All right. Great. So let's move into what I know a lot of the grantees who are participating in this webinar today are thinking about, which is sustainability. And before we go into that, just a reminder to everybody listening in on this webinar, please put in your questions as they come up. We'll take them as they come. We'd love to be able to address your issues in this webinar as well.

So I guess as we talk about sustainability and as you laid the framework of how you built the partnership and how you've overcome the issues – and some of this has already been addressed as you've talked about your partnership. But do you have in place – what kind of systems do you have in place to sustain your partnership? And I know you talked about all of you planning together. And as you talk about the sustainability issue, what ideas and tips can you share with those who are listening today about how do you sustain this partnership?

So I'm going to go back to Mellisa and Cindy first on this. What is the system you have in place to make sure this partnership continues on?

MS. LEAMING: This is Mellisa. One of the things is communication in a – so it's not necessarily the formal communication, but that we do have a lot of dialogue going between individuals. And we also do things that are kind of – we do job fairs together. That's not necessarily – that's just to get as many people in the door, meeting employers, doing things. But we do those things together. We do youth summits together.

So when we think about grants, it's like, how do we all come around the table to do – to write for this grant? How do we make it the strongest grant that we could put in for the region? So bringing everybody in and not just trying to work on it by ourselves without all of that additional input.

Another example is someone from Ivy Tech just this week said, hey, I think we have a possibility of – this company's getting ready to do some incumbent worker training and I'm going to get the details. Can you send me the information so I make sure that I know who could be eligible for these different types of funds? And that was an Ivy Tech person asking us. So it's that give and take.

And also being able to say sometimes, we can't do that. Or we're just not ready for that yet. And having that open dialogue.

MS. RANDOLPH: Yeah. And I would just add to that, that really we started then also going to employer meetings together so that we are coming as a united front, if you will, in that we can both answer your questions about those that you may have, MR. Employer, and how we can best serve you. And so that seemed to be an added value as well.

And again I think communication. You can't say it enough that communication just keeps the flow open and it keeps everyone in the loop. And again, I guess just right along with that, really transparency. To Mellisa's point, right? If we can't do something right, we're just saying, hey, you know what? I'm not the best person for this. Or, hey, by the way, have you thought about this?

One other thing that I might add that I think is – and I'm sure it's very similar in Grand Rapids as it is in Lafayette. But I think identify those in your community who have a vested interest in workforce development and they're willing to creatively think outside of the box on new ways to increase skill sets or serve an employer in their community.

MS. LEAMING: This is Mellisa. I just would kind of like to add on too, as I was sitting here thinking about this. Also when you talk about sustainability – and we really haven't talked about this – but is the monetary part of it.

And so as we know, sometimes the money doesn't flow or it does flow and it changes. And so when we're thinking about how do we work smarter by working together, we can make ourselves stronger and be good stewards of our funds by utilizing each other's strengths instead of duplicating.

MS. BRAY: Great point. Thank you for sharing.

MS. PARKS: This is Julie and I can't agree more with that. And that's really part of our sustainability plan is we are working to show people how successful we've been working together. We also have a lot of ideas of how we could be even better. And so we'll be active in looking for funding from foundations and other organizations because we do need money to do some of this work. It's just, there's so many good things that we could apply there.

But I have to preach for a minute to the community colleges, and I have to ask you to start to think differently about your relationships and about giving up control of some areas and buying into the sector strategy approach, with your workforce partner helping you do that. It's a different way to think, OK? But I can't tell you enough how much that helps you and how much it helps you utilize your funds better.

So when America's Promise is done, I've been able to attract dollars for dollars that I'll be able to put forward with my partners at West Michigan Works. We have a local foundation who's interested in will this work in a different sector? And so I just – we have to continually evaluate what we've been doing because we have to change, and especially now with what's going on in our community.

MS. BRAY: Great point.

MS. BARKSDALE: Yeah. I just add to Julie's comment was – is our focus is not only just on the hard dollars of training and tuition, though, either. It's about systematic change that we can build on and keep when the dollars go away. So how do we build something that's sustainable in terms of system connectivity and partnerships, and use some of these resources as seed money? And then as we show our successes, other dollars follow.

MS. BRAY: Great points, guys. I really appreciate it. It's now – we understand as we listen to your partnerships and how you work together why you're able to successfully implement the grants, not only America's Promise but others that you have, and meet the local workforce and economic needs of your community.

So if we – (inaudible) – move on to questions that everybody has – and again, a reminder to everyone who has put in those questions. We have some key takeaways we want to share with you from some other DOL work. And so Kelly, you want to share that information with everyone?

MS. MIDDLETON BANKS: Sure. Thanks, Jan. So in 2018, DOL released a report highlighting its community college and workforce development board partnerships that emerged from the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training grant, also known as TAACCCT. And that report showcased 8 community college-workforce development board partnerships in seven states.

And so we just wanted to bring to your attention a couple of key takeaways. And this document can be found on our WorkforceGPS.

But when we look at some of the key takeaways, and thinking about strategy and planning – and our presenters Julie, Angie, Mellisa, and Cindy, they really touched on all of these items over the course of their conversations. The importance to align the work that you're – with your partners, jointly and strategically engaging your core partners.

And Julie really drove this home with thinking differently about the relationship you have with your workforce development board. And considering – if you're a community college, considering approaching some of that work from a sector strategies perspective.

In addition to building leader-to-leader and staff-on-staff relationships, Julie and Mellisa, Cindy and Angie all touched on this. And you can tell in their ability to bounce back and forth over this conversation the types of relationships that they've built over time. As well as in some instances it may be helpful to have a written agreement for some of the work that you're looking to partner.

And when looking at funding, I think they all touched on specifically about the importance of sharing costs and developing grant proposals together. I know in the initial conversation, our Indiana presenters, Mellisa and Cindy, touched on having that grant committee that consisted of a variety of partners to help develop that work. As well as Angie talking about the importance of leveraging the dollars that are coming in both organizations to support your workforce development efforts. And as well as blending your funding and your resources.

It's just we recognize money is an issue. But there's so many things that could be done if working together as partners in this work.

In addition, some of the other key takeaways that were highlighted in the report, and our presenters have touched on, is develop systems and processes. Developing staff knowledge. And I know that there was some comments made about even though there's staff changes that have happened, that it's important to kind of reset and make sure that everyone understands the value and importance of these relationships and how best to leverage these partnerships.

One other item is co-enrolling students when possible. And another key takeaway that I think has been a theme throughout all of the discussion – and Mellisa and Cindy, Julie and Angie have all touched on – is how important communication is. In the early stages as you're building and developing these partnerships, as you begin to work through the programming, and as you begin to look to how to sustain these partnerships.

So continuing to build the communication line – keeping the lines of communication open, as well as that level of transparency that were mentioned early on, how that helps to build a level of trust between the organizations, which is extremely critical as you all begin to identify labor market needs in your community and help meet those workforce demands together to help improve the economic development in your local region.

So just a couple key takeaways that we wanted to touch on in respect to the report that was released in 2018 from DOL. And again, that is available on WorkforceGPS. But I believe all of our presenters have done an excellent job of really highlighting these and driving that point home.

So now we want to open up for questions. And please, if there are any questions that you have, please enter them in the chat.

Also, I know there may be some follow-up questions that we have in respect to some of the items that have been discussed. So Jan, if there are any other follow-up questions that you have, please feel free to engage the presenters. (Pause.)

OK. So again, those questions are available –

MS. BRAY: Sorry. Sorry, Kelly. I keep forgetting I'm on mute.

MS. MIDDLETON BANKS: That's OK. (Cross talk.)

MS. BRAY: Yeah. So quick – (inaudible) – really more for probably Julie and Cindy at this point. But we know there's sort of new thinking at community colleges. Not just because of COVID-19; I think that sort of moved things faster. It's virtual learning. It's how you do apprenticeship now, and especially as jobs in industry are evolving.

So could you give – let me start with Julie. Can you give some thinking – you thinking for the college, how is it looking differently about meeting the workforce training needs of the community?

MS. PARKS: Well, we've been – we're very interested in how we'll be able to continue on with apprenticeships. Because the model with West Michigan Works, where they hold the standard, has allowed smaller businesses to be able to have apprentices with a lot less concern on their part.

And so by the workforce board, by them holding the standard and then we are the training provider – the RTI – it's been a very effective way to, one, move people in lower social economic status into really good jobs where their education is all paid for.

And so we continue to promote the apprenticeship model. We have some concerns about if employers will continue to do that with a downturn in the economy.

We are doing so much online right now. We've always done things online, but I think we're working to get better and, honestly, shorter, more focused webinars, short-term trainings, as reasonable cost as we can possibly do for people.

Our challenge is that so many of our workforce programs involve hands-on learning. And so many of the people that we serve – 20,000 people we served just in the non-credit training area last year in workforce. So how do we help those individuals who may not have broadband access, who may not have anything other than their phone, how do we get them those skills in a different way?

And that's really our challenge right now. That's what we've been doing for the last 10 weeks in Michigan while we've been shut down. And I think that's how our summer will look. And maybe our fall will look that way also.

So the small group idea of you're going to learn – anything you do in a classroom you're going to do online and you're going to come in in a small group and do a very focused lab to get you ready to go.

We've done labs in a bag, where we have delivered bags of tools and materials to students so in Zoom sessions they can actually do some of the work. We're just having to find ways to be more creative.

MS. BRAY: All right. Well said. Thank you. Cindy, is there anything that you look at differently at Ivy Tech, or how you're doing the new thinking there?

MS. RANDOLPH: Yeah. So Ivy Tech has been providing online for several years. But to the earlier point, when we talk about labs – and we're very much hands-on training – that's a new way of thinking and how we're going to adjust to that. We do have, obviously, online simulations which mimic that industrial world, so to speak, or health care. But those certainly are not the end-all be-all and the hands-on is so valuable.

So again, we're working through that as well. We have said that summer classes will be delivered online and fall is still in discussion.

One of the other things that I would like to talk about during this whole COVID period, we've initiated – (inaudible). And this is an opportunity for employer partners and how we might support them as well with some free training. We're also offering 10,000 classes for folks to have an opportunity to – and we've partnered again – but to have opportunities to take a class free.

We also provide what we call an interdisciplinary workforce degree. And that's a shortened credential, whether it's a certificate or a technical certificate. So not quite the length of time as an associate's degree. But that's for an employer partner, for his incumbents to take a look at classes. And again, built around that industrial and manufacturing sector and select classes that are applicable to their work environment.

So those are just a few of the things that we're doing.

MS. BARKSDALE: Jan, this is Angie. Want to add to that real quickly and kind of reiterate or highlight how our partnership with our community college and training providers during this online transition. So a key example – I think, what was it, Julie? Two, three weeks ago we had a short meeting – it wasn't a short meeting; it was like two hours.

Just to sit down with our community college and say, what are you thinking? Where are you going? How can we start as a workforce board aligning our supports, our services, to support the online training and the new models that you're going to be putting out? What are you thinking fall is going to look like? So we can start preparing our systems and our deliveries to align and support each other in whatever this new platform may look like or be.

So there's a key example of how that ongoing collaboration and communication is strengthened. So it's not just America's Promise grant; it's whatever we're doing to support each other in that bigger picture goal of ensuring our employers have the talent they need. So it's ongoing communication around these new initiatives.

MS. BRAY: Absolutely. And that's a very good point to raise.

So one of the questions that was asked is how do grantees help (assure ?) the workforce boards and the community colleges can stick together in the next round of the America's Promise grant or in applying for future grants? What's the glue that's needed to keep these partnerships together?

So Mellisa, let me throw it to you first to answer this.

MS. LEAMING: Well, my suggestion two strong – what I think are strong things, is one is each partner needs to show the value they bring to that partnership. And through that, you will also, I believe – at least in our case, and I think in Grand Rapids absolutely from what they've been talking about – is what's the proven successes?

And so we can go into this with grant opportunities, whether it be local, state, federal funds, whatever grants that you would like to look at. And you will be able to show that you have the proven success that covers a large number of individuals, a large region, and you can say we each have our strengths. And just show that through the communication that you have had an impact in your area that has improved the employers' industry and/or the constituents of that area.

And I think if you can go in there saying, here's where we're at and here's what we've done – and, hey, community college, we've worked well together and we've proven that we're a solid team. I think that it looks smart for the community college and for the boards to continue that relationship.

If that hasn't happened, on the other hand, then you have to figure out why. Why haven't we been able to pull this off together? What is it that we need to work on together? And then you need to bring that proposal to whichever – whether it's the college or the board that's kind of like, I'm not sure we should work together. You need to discuss that to see if there's something that is either a misunderstanding or it's just two entirely different ways of looking at a particular grant and you may not be able to come to an agreement on it.

MS. BRAY: Good advice there. Thank you. Julie, can you answer that question?

MS. PARKS: Well, I think what the glue – what I think the glue is, is that we have to build the partnerships between the colleges and the workforce teams at all levels. We can't rely on the partnership to just be Julie and Angie in Grand Rapids. It has to be all the people that work for me, the people that work for Angie, that they're in constant communication with each other on all kinds of issues. And then that way, it doesn't matter what goes on because there's so many levels of partnership and thinking of each other.

Angie said it best I think last week when I was talking to her, that we used to have – there used to be rumors that we would hear about each other. And now if we hear something, one of us picks up the phone and has that conversation. We don't let anything fester. We talk about issues all the time. We regularly get together every quarter; we sit down face-to-face and talk about our plans and our goals. And regardless of grants, we do that. And I think that's the glue that makes it strong in west Michigan.

MS. BRAY: And I think – and all four of you have said this – (inaudible) – within this and I was – the last question, which we don't have time for, but I was going to ask but you've already basically addressed it. To those that are having trouble, whether it's community college can't get the board to step up, or the workforce board can't get the community college – (inaudible) – to them, the key theme that you all have talked about is communication. Regardless of what it is.

Whether the needs of the community, what can each bring to the table, when there are problems, all of your answers have always included the need for communication. Something that is basic and is simple but so few of us think about from time to time. So I think that key to everyone that's listening is looking at the communication and whether it helps you reach your goal.

So with that – and we're going to turn this back over to Greg. But I do want to thank Julie, Angie, Mellisa, and Cindy for – I mean, what you're doing is phenomenal, but also for sharing your story with the grantees – the America's Promise grantees. Very, very helpful. And I know that's a story that'll even go beyond this webinar. So I thank you for that.

And Greg, I'm going to turn it back over to you.

MR. SCHEIB: Thanks, Jan. And thanks, everybody, for the great conversation and everything. It was just great to hear about what's going on and how these collaborations are working.

Just needed just a couple of little last things to just touch on. Just a quick save the date. We are going to be doing a grantee check-in town hall kind of meeting on June 9th. A bit of a follow-up to the one we did last month. Not any real agenda, just to check in and share and – as a community – as an AP community to see where we're all at, how we're doing.

And obviously, you all know this already. This is our America's Promise contact information. And if you all have any questions or concerns for us – oh, that's really interesting – to reach out to us if we can help with anything.

And that's really about it. So thank you all very much for your participation today. And we're here if you need us. Thanks very much.

(END)