



## SWFI Bright Ideas: Adjusting Operations in a Public Health Emergency

This brief describes Bright Ideas that Strengthening Working Families Initiative (SWFI) grantees have been using to deliver program and system services during the current public health emergency. Earlier Bright Ideas briefs, listed at the end of this document, explore practices between June 2016 and December 2019. In addition, Promising Practices briefs discuss grantees' approaches to child care and sustainability.

These briefs are designed to encourage peer grantees to share their innovative approaches with each other. If you would like any additional information about a grantee's approach, please feel free to contact the grantee directly, or through your TA coach. Any questions regarding allowable use of grant funds or changes to your project's strategies should be directed to your Federal Project Officer (FPO).

Grantee	Program Practices: Recruiting and Engaging Participants
City of Phoenix	City of Phoenix continued in person operations during the public health emergency, with navigators working on site in job centers on a rotating basis and enrolling some participants, including WIOA referrals. Early on, they adjusted in-person operations to reduce the risk of infection, following CDC, state, and city guidelines. Employees wear personal protective equipment (PPE) provided by the city. They limit the number of people entering, ask screening questions before entry, and meet in larger conference rooms that are sanitized after use. The program moved most of its paperwork and vouchers online and set up a physical drop box for any necessary hardcopies. Class sizes were reduced and course completion timelines delayed given participant concerns. The City of Phoenix SWFI program was featured on a local news segment to promote their 100 percent online IT program with a local college, featuring employers who hire directly from the program.
Moore Community House	Moore Community House SWFI staff took SWFI program graduates wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) to job fairs and other events to help recruit new participants.



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### Grantee Program Practices: Recruiting and Engaging Participants

OAI Inc.	OAI Inc. found that health care employers have been hiring at higher hourly rates due to the increased risk of working in health care, but SWFI participants have expressed concerns about these risks. In response, OAI Inc. SWFI staff have coached participants to take breaks from school and work through safe physical and outdoor activities. OAI has engaged new and current participants by phone, email, and Facebook, using Salesforce to maintain up-to-date contact information. OAI used financial incentives from local foundations to survey participants about their immediate needs. Surveys are loaded into Salesforce; this centralized system helps the grantee develop and track plans to support participants.
Rochester Rehabilitation Center	Rochester Rehabilitation Center coordinated with the local unemployment insurance (UI) department to include information about the SWFI program in the resource packet that is provided to individuals who apply for UI.

### Grantee Training and Education: Online training

Community College of Aurora (CCA)	CCA transitioned to online learning except for advanced manufacturing training which was initially put on hold and then conducted following social distancing guidelines. Because the SWFI program is located at a community college, training programs followed rules and regulations set by the college. Staff brainstormed ways to reconfigure classes to allow for social distancing. Staff also engaged participants to help address their concerns about the risks associated with working in the health care sector; some participants talked about potentially switching industries.
Memphis Bioworks Foundation	Memphis Bioworks Foundation's training partners all transitioned to online learning; they worked on how to provide clinicals so participants could complete state licensing exams once the state re-opened testing. SWFI participants were experiencing anxiety about a range of issues. They were concerned about online clinicals taking longer than in-person clinicals, and about how prepared they would be to take their licensing exams. More broadly, participants were worried about partners losing jobs and the health of family members. To help address these issues, Memphis engaged with participants more extensively than before, through coordinators at each training partner. Coordinators called and texted participants to provide emotional support, mentoring, and tutoring. The coordinators helped put remote learning in context for participants, describing how it applies to the workplace.



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Grantee	Training and Education: Online training
Moore Community House	<p>Moore Community House evaluated its training offerings during the first weeks of the public health emergency and decided to move training online. To support online learning, the grantee offered loaner devices to participants who did not have access to internet-enabled laptops or tablets. In-person course requirements were delayed until it was safe to meet in person. Grantee staff reported that participants require more hands-on monitoring and attendance is less consistent than with in-person classes. In response, Moore Community House offers flexible schedules to help participants juggle training and childcare; online documents are used to log hours and a secure signature software is used for paperwork. Staff frequently email and text participants about weekly assignments. Moore Community House also started a closed Facebook group that includes SWFI alumni and current participants; alumni who are in high-wage jobs can help motivate current participants to finish.</p>
Total Action Against Poverty (TAP) in the Roanoke Valley Inc.	<p>TAP's SWFI participants who were already enrolled in training outside of TAP, including welding students, transitioned to online training. TAP career mentors reach out to help participants navigate the new online environment and balance training with at-home childcare. Many participants have finished training but are concerned about the significant time gap between their training and credentialing exams (which have generally been postponed). Participants focused on healthcare who are looking for employment are also concerned about the safety of working in that field. TAP has partnered with a local rehab facility that hired some CNA trainees to finish their clinicals on the job.</p>
Vermont Technical College	<p>Vermont Technical College shifted most of its SWFI training online, except for welding. As a rural state, Vermont Technical College has faced limited access to WiFi and laptops for participants. The grantee reached out to assess SWFI participants' needs and provided assistance with technology where possible, including using SWFI funds to purchase refurbished laptops for participants. The grantee also increased its engagement with instructors and participants, particularly participants who are struggling, and has been mindful to provide open and honest communications about the challenges of the pandemic and changing economy. Some classes already had online offerings so these were able to scale up rapidly when stay-at-home restrictions were implemented. The college's IT staff worked with instructors to create Zoom trainings where online classes did not exist before. This shift to online learning has allowed the grantee to conduct outreach across the state in a greater capacity than was possible before the public health emergency. As Vermont Technical College resumes in person classes, class sizes are limited to ensure social distancing, and vital signs are taken when students arrive at class.</p>



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Grantee	Training and Education: Online training
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The WorkPlace	The Workplace shifted to online training. In order to prepare for this transition, the grantee sent out surveys to assess participants' capabilities for online training and provided tablets to participants identified as most in need. The WorkPlace offers online classes using Blackboard; they offer a tutorial before the training begins so that participants can become more comfortable with this platform. The grantee also posted a resource guide to its website and is working to identify and promote resources in the community. The WorkPlace shifted to virtual job clubs to support participants and help connect them to employers.
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Grantee	Child care
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Action for Boston Community Development, Inc. (ABCD)	ABCD has been working with training providers to manage expectations for participants as they balance training and child care at home while child care providers are closed in Massachusetts. Staff are also working closely with participants to provide them with public health information to reduce fear and anxiety among participants, especially those in the health care industry.
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## How did the TA team identify Bright Ideas?

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We used the following information from grantees to identify Bright Ideas:

- **Reviewing grantees' quarterly reports.** Every quarter, the SWFI TA team reviews grantees' reports to document practices that grantees identify as promising.
- **Regular contact between grantees and Technical Assistance (TA) coaches, DSI, and FPOs.** The TA team regularly records and categorizes new approaches, changes to existing strategies, creative partnerships, and other elements of program design that are identified through contact with grantees.

To help grantees identify practices that are relevant to them, we sort Bright Ideas into specific topics and then subtopics (see Table 1). We use the following topics where applicable:

- **Sustainability and integration of child care and workforce systems**, which relates to how grantees are preparing to sustain their program and make lasting changes to child care and workforce systems in their communities.
- **Child care**, which relates to how SWFI grantees are meeting the child care needs of their participants, such as helping parents access child care subsidies.
- **Employment activities**, which relate to activities aimed at helping SWFI participants enter and maintain employment, such as partnering with employers.
- **Program design**, which relates to how SWFI grantees are designing their programs and service delivery to meet SWFI participants' needs, such as building regular communication across programs.
- **Program practices** and approach, which relates to how SWFI grantees are implementing their program, such as how they are conducting outreach and recruitment.
- **Training and education**, which relates to the training and educational services grantees offer SWFI participants, such as how they are developing career pathways to middle- and high-skilled employment.

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## Do these ideas work?

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Bright Ideas briefs provide grantees with a range of new strategies and elements of program design that are being used by other grantees. However, these features have not always been linked with positive outputs or outcomes (or with any outputs or outcomes if the approaches are new).

More detailed Promising Practices briefs, released separately and less often, explore practices that have been linked with positive outcomes. Please keep reporting your Bright Ideas, along with any outcomes, so that these can support peer sharing and other TA for you and your peer grantees! Please note that Bright Ideas briefs provide only a snapshot of the work grantees are doing, and not all grantees will be highlighted in any given brief.



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## Prior Bright Ideas and Promising Practices

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- SWFI Bright Ideas: October 2019 to December 2019. Available at: [https://h1bswfi.workforcegps.org/resources/2020/03/18/15/57/SWFI\\_Bright\\_Ideas\\_Brief\\_-\\_October\\_2019\\_-\\_December\\_2019](https://h1bswfi.workforcegps.org/resources/2020/03/18/15/57/SWFI_Bright_Ideas_Brief_-_October_2019_-_December_2019)
- SWFI Bright Ideas: August 2019 to September 2019. Available at: [https://h1bswfi.workforcegps.org/resources/2020/01/15/19/18/SWFI\\_Bright\\_Ideas\\_Brief\\_-\\_August\\_2019\\_-\\_September\\_2019](https://h1bswfi.workforcegps.org/resources/2020/01/15/19/18/SWFI_Bright_Ideas_Brief_-_August_2019_-_September_2019)
- SWFI Bright Ideas: February 2019 to July 2019. Available at: [https://h1bswfi.workforcegps.org/resources/2019/10/31/20/37/SWFI\\_Bright\\_Ideas\\_Brief\\_-\\_February\\_2019\\_-\\_July\\_2019](https://h1bswfi.workforcegps.org/resources/2019/10/31/20/37/SWFI_Bright_Ideas_Brief_-_February_2019_-_July_2019)
- SWFI Sustainability Promising Practices Brief. Available at: [https://h1bswfi.workforcegps.org/resources/2019/07/08/11/32/SWFI\\_Promising\\_Practices-Child\\_Care\\_and\\_Workforce\\_System\\_Integration\\_and\\_Program\\_Sustainability](https://h1bswfi.workforcegps.org/resources/2019/07/08/11/32/SWFI_Promising_Practices-Child_Care_and_Workforce_System_Integration_and_Program_Sustainability)
- SWFI Bright Ideas: October 2018 to January 2019. Available at: <https://h1bswfi.workforcegps.org/resources/2019/04/22/16/00/SWFI-Bright-Ideas-Brief-October-2018-January-2019>
- SWFI Bright Ideas: July 2018 to September 2018. Available at: [https://h1bswfi.workforcegps.org/resources/2018/11/16/20/09/SWFI\\_Bright\\_Ideas\\_Brief\\_-\\_July-September-2018](https://h1bswfi.workforcegps.org/resources/2018/11/16/20/09/SWFI_Bright_Ideas_Brief_-_July-September-2018)
- SWFI Bright Ideas: May 2018 to June 2018. Available at: <https://h1bswfi.workforcegps.org/resources/2018/08/17/16/09/SWFI-Bright-Ideas-Brief-June-2018>
- SWFI Bright Ideas: January 2018 to April 2018. Available at: [https://h1bswfi.workforcegps.org/resources/2018/05/25/17/04/SWFI\\_April\\_Bright\\_Ideas\\_Brief](https://h1bswfi.workforcegps.org/resources/2018/05/25/17/04/SWFI_April_Bright_Ideas_Brief)
- SWFI Bright Ideas: April 2017 to December 2017. Available at: <https://h1bswfi.workforcegps.org/resources/2018/02/15/16/24/Bright-Ideas-Tip-Sheet>
- SWFI Child Care Promising Practices Brief. Available at: <https://h1bswfi.workforcegps.org/resources/2017/12/07/14/17/Child-Care-Promising-Practices-Brief>
- SWFI Bright Ideas: June 2016 to March 2017. Available at: [https://h1bswfi.workforcegps.org/resources/2017/10/03/12/27/July\\_Bright\\_Ideas\\_Brief](https://h1bswfi.workforcegps.org/resources/2017/10/03/12/27/July_Bright_Ideas_Brief)