



# Strengthening Working Families Initiative

## October 2018 Peer Sharing Calls on Employer Engagement: Key Takeaways

The October 2018 Peer Sharing Calls on Employer Engagement provided an opportunity for Strengthening Working Families Initiative (SWFI) grantees to share their experiences on different aspects of employer engagement. TA coaches facilitated the small group calls, building on information presented during the October 2, 2018 [webinar](#) by subject matter expert Shayne Spaulding from the Urban Institute. This document provides key takeaways from the grantee peer sharing calls on:

- How grantees organize employer engagement within their grants
- Strategies for engaging employers
- Involving employers in SWFI job training and job placement

Slides from the calls follow the key takeaways.

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### How Grantees Organize Employer Engagement within their Grants

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Grantees on the calls discussed how they organize employer engagement within their programs:

- Having staff dedicated to employer engagement within the SWFI program allows grantees to efficiently and effectively manage their relationships with employers.
- Even when grantees do not have staff specifically dedicated to employer engagement, it is helpful to have staff work on endeavors that strengthen the grantee's relationship with employers. These include outreach, job fairs, and round tables with community partners, to name a few examples.

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### Strategies for Engaging Employers

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During the peer sharing calls, SWFI grantees discussed their strategies for fostering employer engagement. Following are key methods identified by grantees for effectively engaging with employers:

- Start by finding employers that are a good match for SWFI participants and the programs grantees offer. Better understanding the local labor market allows grantees to strategically plan partnerships with employers in industries that have a greater need for workers. This is especially important given current low unemployment rates and shifting industry needs. SWFI grantees can consult with partners from the workforce system or community colleges, who are often engaged in ongoing efforts to identify local labor market needs. Grantees can also use applications like [Reference USA](#) to research their local labor market. This program, available at some public libraries, provides industry profiles and searches for employers based on selected criteria including location and North American Industry Classification Systems (NAICS) codes.
- Grantees can map out their goals and those of local employers to identify overlaps; this process will help grantees identify specific employers to focus on when developing strategic partnerships.
- Job fairs, industry meetings, and other networking events can help grantees stay in touch with employer partners and make new employer contacts. These events also help grantees learn more about industry

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needs and connect participants to jobs. A key strategy for employer engagement is to seek to understand an employer's needs, or "pain points," and then show how the SWFI program can help the employer address its needs.

- Once a grantee establishes a strategic partnership with an employer, it is important to keep the employer engaged. Grantees minimize burden on employers through careful planning and regular communication, and work to address employers' evolving needs. Each employer is different, so it is important to recognize employers' preferred modes of communication and tailor grantee approaches accordingly. Many grantees agreed that using multiple modes of communication (email, phone, in person meetings, etc.) is effective for keeping employers engaged.
- Small and medium sized employers are often easier to engage. Although larger companies typically have more job openings, it can be more difficult to develop relationships with them. One grantee noted that larger companies are more likely to defer conversations to their legal department.
- Similarly, one grantee noted that working directly with employers is more effective than working with employment agencies.
- Trust is key to engaging employers. Employers need to know that the partnership is worth their time and that they are going to benefit from it. Grantees can build trust by explaining how the SWFI program can help the employer meet its stated needs. Consistently providing strong candidates who are reliable, hardworking, and persistent also builds trust.
- Grantees can develop strong candidates in part by establishing soft skills and fundamentals of work readiness among SWFI participants, and by ensuring that participants have a strong understanding of the technical terminology used in target industries. Completing substance use and other required screenings, before sending participant resumes to employers, also helps build trust and minimize employer burden.

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### **Involving Employers in SWFI Job Training and Job Placement**

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Some grantees indicated that, especially in IT and healthcare, employers have stringent hiring standards and require credentials or relevant work experience—even in a tight labor market. To ensure that SWFI training addresses employer and industry needs and provides the best opportunity for participants, grantees can engage employers to review and provide input on training curricula, necessary technical and soft skills, and required credentials. Involving employers in classroom training or in the development of work-based learning activities also builds stronger employer connections to the program, helps participants gain knowledge of industries and employers, and opens doors for program participants. Grantees offered insight into the ways that they involve employers in SWFI job training and job placement:

- Employer advisory committees and community industry round tables are excellent forums for gauging employer and industry needs; they can also inform SWFI training programs by highlighting industry standards for credentials and certificates. Workforce system or community college partners may already have sector-based advisory committees in place. Using existing efforts helps minimize employer burden.
- Grantees can also engage employers through externships and clinicals. These training opportunities serve as long job interviews and may result in direct job placement for SWFI participants; participants also receive invaluable training directly from the employer.
- On-the-job-training (OJT) and apprenticeships can also be effective, but can be more difficult to sell to employers. Employers in the healthcare industry, for example, may steer clear from OJTs because of the burden involved. Grantees can better convince employers to participate in OJTs by doing as much leg work as possible for them, including filling out paperwork and streamlining documentation.
- Grantees can also collaborate with employers on providing training to incumbent workers to move them further along a career pathway.



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- SWFI grantees can schedule recruiting meetings to introduce SWFI participants to employers in high-need industries. Some employers like this—it reduces their burden by providing a group of job candidates in one location. Grantees can also meet with employers at their facilities to learn more about their work environments and specific recruiting needs. Grantee staff can also bring resumes of qualified participants to regular meetings with employers, in the event they describe a hiring need.

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### Ongoing technical assistance on employer engagement

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Technical assistance resources are available to support SWFI grantees' employer engagement efforts:

- The Employer Engagement [blog post](#) on the SWFI Community of Practice (CoP) links to a host of resources for grantees.
- To continue the discussion from the peer sharing calls, ask questions, and learn from other grantees, the [discussion board](#) on the CoP is available and ready for discussion.

# **Employer Engagement**

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**H1-B SWFI Grantee Peer Sharing Call**

**October 23, 2018**

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SWFI TA Team

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# **Employer Engagement**

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**H1-B SWFI Grantee Peer Sharing Call**

**October 24, 2018**

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SWFI TA Team

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# **Employer Engagement**

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**H1-B SWFI Grantee Peer Sharing Call**

**October 25, 2018**

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SWFI TA Team

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# Agenda

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- **Welcome and Introductions**
- **Brainstorming on employer engagement**
- **Community of Practice (CoP) resources and discussion board**

# Welcome and Introductions

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- **Jess Harding**
- **The WorkPlace**
- **Moore Community House**
- **City of Phoenix**
- **OAI, Inc**
- **Community College of Aurora**



# Welcome and Introductions

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- Lily Roberts
- OIC of Broward dba OIC of South Florida
- Rochester Rehabilitation Center
- City of Long Beach Pacific Gateway Workforce Investment Net
- Vermont Technical College

# Welcome and Introductions

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- Elizabeth Brown
- Alachua Bradford Regional Workforce Board dba CareerSource
- Action for Boston Community Development, Inc.
- Total Action Against Poverty in the Roanoke Valley
- Memphis Bioworks Foundation

# Brainstorming on Employer Engagement

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- Does your SWFI grant have staff devoted to employer engagement?
- If so, how do they communicate with other SWFI program staff?
- If not, does your organization have an employer services unit that your grant team coordinates with?
  - How does this coordination work?
  - How much time/effort do your SWFI grant staff devote to employer engagement?

# Brainstorming on Employer Engagement

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- Is there a type of employer that is more accessible and willing to engage with your SWFI?
  - What makes that type of employer easier to engage with?

# Brainstorming on Employer Engagement

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- **Has it been challenging to get or keep employers engaged?**
  - **What strategies have you tried?**
  - **What strategies have been most successful?**

# Brainstorming on Employer Engagement

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- **Do you find that you speak the same language as employers?**
  - **What strategies have worked well for you in talking with employers?**
  - **What do you find challenging in talking with employers?**

# Brainstorming on Employer Engagement

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- **Have you worked with employers to help design your training programs?**
  - **What form did this collaboration take?**
  - **How well is it working?**

# Brainstorming on Employer Engagement

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- Have you developed agreements with employers to hire your participants?
  - If so, what is working and what is not working?



# Brainstorming on Employer Engagement

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- **Have your labor market conditions changed since you started your SWFI?**
  - How did you learn about these changes?
  - How are you working with employers to address these changes with your participants?

# Brainstorming on Employer Engagement

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- How bought-in are employers to the idea of career pathways?
- Have you been able to work with employers' workers (incumbent workers)?

# Brainstorming on Employer Engagement

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- What are some strategies you've used or plan to use to help sell OJTs and apprenticeships to employers?

# CoP Resources

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- [Employer engagement resources](#)
- [Employer engagement discussion board](#)
- [Apprenticeship resources](#)

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# Thank you!