



Lessons Learned From the TechHire Partnership

TechHire Case Study

March 2021

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	3
Executive Summary	4
Introduction to TechHire	12
Introduction to the Grantees	15
TechHire by the Numbers	21
Brief: Designing Impactful Coaching and Intensive Service Models	26
Brief: Short-Term and Accelerated Training Models	34
Brief: TechHire Intensive Career Pathway Training	43
Addressing Unprecedented Disruptions Across TechHire Grant Programs	53
Conclusion: TechHire Lessons Learned	59
Appendix	62

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About JFF

JFF, the lead Technical Assistance provider for the H-1B TechHire Partnership grant, is a national nonprofit that drives transformation in the American workforce and education systems. For more than 35 years, JFF has led the way in designing innovative and scalable solutions that create access to economic advancement for all. www.jff.org

About ICF

Since 1969, ICF has combined a passion for its work with deep industry expertise to provide evidence-based solutions, training, technical assistance, and tools for developing and implementing programs that promote poverty solutions and workforce innovations. We provide subject matter expertise and support to clients in the areas of workforce development, justice, welfare, responsible fatherhood, child welfare, housing, and education. www.icf.com

About Maher & Maher

Maher & Maher is a specialized change management and talent-development consulting firm focused on advancing the collaboration between workforce, education, and economic development. www.mahernet.com

Executive Summary

The H-1B TechHire Partnership grant program, supported by the U.S. Department of Labor, equipped participants to succeed in middle- and high-skill jobs in industries such as IT, health care, and advanced manufacturing. Grantees included public workforce organizations, community colleges, community and faith-based organizations, and business-related nonprofits. From 2016 to 2020, 39 TechHire grantees reached more than 18,000 participants with an emphasis on removing barriers to employment.

Each grantee offered a variety of training and work experiences related to preparing individuals for careers in the IT, health care, or advanced manufacturing industries. Many offered incumbent worker training, paid work experiences or internships, and, on-the-job training.

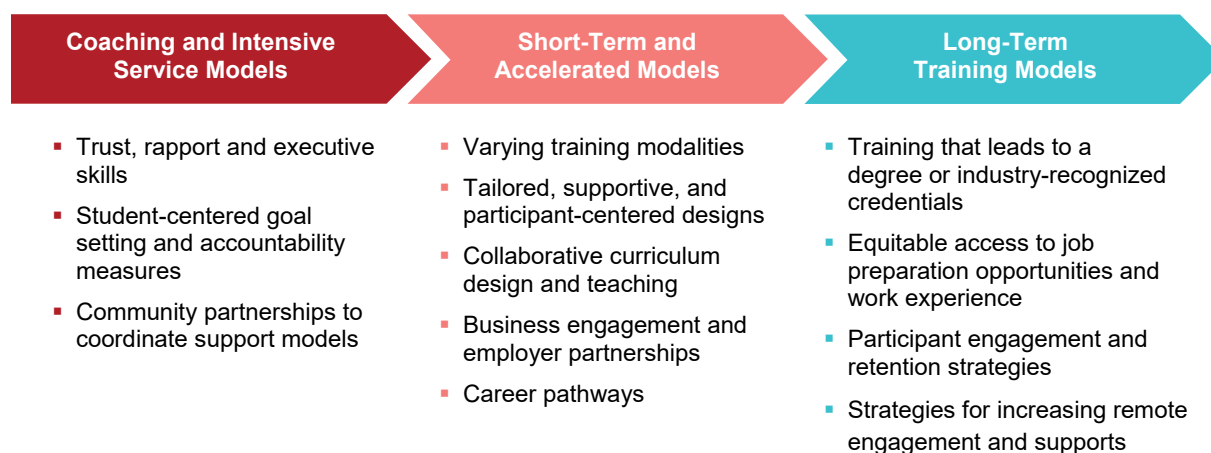
The lessons learned in this case study are intended to be shared with other U.S. Department of Labor TechHire grantees, workforce development programs and practitioners, and program designers and policymakers to enhance future training design and implementation. This case study was developed using findings and insights culled from external research, interviews with TechHire program managers, products that were previously developed, and lessons shared through grantee technical assistance events and activities.

This executive summary and accompanying TechHire case study highlight key strategies used and lessons learned during the TechHire Partnership grant program with respect to (1) coaching and intensive service models, (2) short-term and accelerated training models, and (3) long-term career pathway training models (*see Figure 1*).



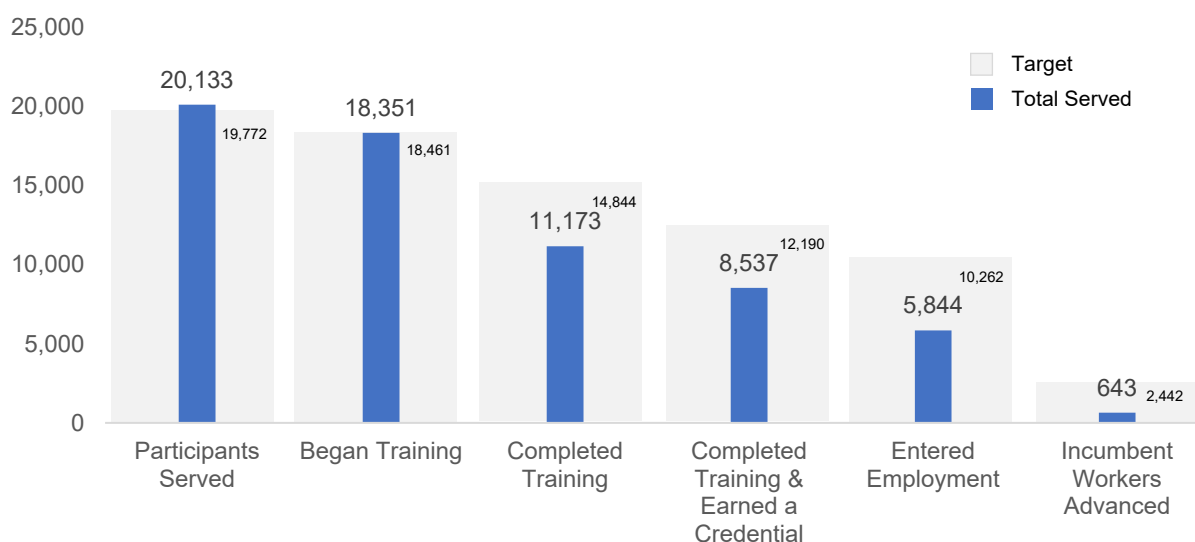
The TechHire Partnership grant program supported bold, multisector initiatives to empower and train American workers for technology skills in well-paying, high-growth jobs in industries such as IT, health care, and advanced manufacturing.

Figure 1: TechHire Training Models



The case study also includes key performance data that spans four years of the TechHire Partnership grant program (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Grantee Performance versus Target Benchmarks (Quarter Ending 6/30/2020)



Coaching and Intensive Service Models

Coaching and intensive service models offer supportive services, coaching, case management, and other student supports to help historically underrepresented populations gain access to and fully participate in education and training opportunities.

The following strategies were key to the success of TechHire grantees' coaching and intensive service models:

Learn more about specific TechHire grantee approaches and read grantee profiles in our Coaching and Intensive Service, Short-term Accelerated, and Long-term Training model briefs

Trust, Rapport, and Executive Skills

- Create a sense of connection, rapport, and collaboration between the support staff and students from the beginning of the program
- Help students develop, strengthen, and practice their executive skills (such as setting and achieving goals, initiating and completing tasks, staying focused, and planning)
- Show empathy, support mentoring, and celebrate student accomplishments

Student-Centered Goal Setting and Accountability Measures

- Set goals that are student-identified and student-centered to help build personal agency
- Create and share accountability measures with students to increase their sense of responsibility and achievement
- Encourage students to track their own progress

Community Partnerships to Coordinate Support Services

- Carve out time to build and sustain mutually beneficial partnerships
- Establish relationships with trusted partners to connect students with supports needed to overcome challenges to participation and, later, employment.
- Partner with community-based or public agency partners that provide cash assistance, affordable housing, child-care, and transportation

Short-Term and Accelerated Models

Short-term and accelerated models generally last five months or less and serve individuals who need short and intensive training to refresh or upgrade their skills and competencies.

Accelerated models typically include basic skills instruction and training for a specific occupation, credential, or industry. Work-based learning or employment opportunities are also key components of many accelerated models.

The following strategies were key to the success of TechHire grantees' short-term and accelerated models:

Varying Training Modalities

- Use teaching methodologies that are interactive and learner-centered, incorporating aspects of multiple-intelligence learning
- Include opportunities for students to practice skills through intensive, hands-on activities coupled with online applications or digital workplace simulations

Tailored, Supportive, and Participant-Centered Designs

- Offer participant-focused mentoring, coaching, and leadership development opportunities that promote advancement and youth development
- Implement robust student support services that address academic-related needs as well as systemic barriers, including transportation, child care, or food-related access

Collaborative Curriculum Design and Teaching

- Bring together institutions of higher education, nonprofit education and training providers, workforce development boards, employers, and business community members to build relevant accelerated training
- Consider adopting a team teaching approach, in which two instructors—one with expertise in adult learning and basic skills, and another with expertise in the targeted industry or occupation—share teaching responsibilities

Business Engagement and Employer Partnerships

- Engage employers to help design coursework to ensure that it is responsive to labor market needs and offers simulations of real-world work experiences
- Engage employers to offer internships and other work-based learning opportunities, or to participate in mock job-interview workshop

Pandemic Impacts on H-1B TechHire Grantees

March 2020 brought unprecedented changes to the TechHire Partnership grant program. Grantees transitioned rapidly to remote learning or had to curtail programming in the wake of social distancing protocols. Digital literacy and access issues increased, and communities faced widespread closures that negatively affected family dynamics and diminished many students' access to child care and adequate food and commodities. TechHire grantees had to find new ways to ensure student retention, credential attainment, and job placement. Grantees were able to adjust by:

- Ensuring digital access and support by identifying resources and referrals to provide access to computers and internet connectivity
- Adopting multiple virtual communication strategies and technologies
- Offering hybrid training involving both in-person and virtual classroom opportunities

Intensive Career Pathway Training Models

Career pathway training models include more intensive training that leads to a degree or industry-recognized credentials. They typically include work-based learning components, sequential course offerings, and robust student supports.

The following strategies were key to the success of TechHire grantees' long-term training models:

Training That Leads to a Degree or Industry-Recognized Credentials

- Offer flexible models that allow students to combine work and education while earning in-demand credentials
- Present students with multiple entry and exit points and the opportunity to learn at a pace that works for them

Learn more about specific TechHire grantee approaches and read grantee profiles on long-term training models in the **Intensive Career Pathways Training Model Brief** on page 50

- Include occupational skills instruction, career and job-readiness supports, and general student support to meet diverse student needs

Participant Engagement and Retention Strategies

- Offer career coaching when students have little or no experience in target industries
- Coordinate with employer partners to adopt practices that facilitate continued learning, like expanded tuition reimbursement and flexible scheduling

Strategies for Increasing Remote Engagement and Supports

- Include remote learning options to afford students flexibility and allow instructors to infuse new forms of technology into curricula
- Use social media, text messaging, or other virtual platforms to send reminders or post prerecorded video lessons and course content in addition to (or instead of) conducting live classes

Key Lessons Learned

Five key overarching lessons learned that span the three primary types of grantee program models emerged from the implementation of the TechHire grants.

- 1. Technology skills training and exposure.** The TechHire grant program provided participants with training in technology skills in a variety of H-1B industries. It also provided enhanced exposure to the tech sector through industry orientation, introduction to tech careers, and an understanding of sector norms to prepare participants for successful employment. This career awareness is particularly important for members of nontraditional labor pools, who are underrepresented in the sector.
- 2. Comprehensive supports.** In addition to the core training and work experience that they offer, TechHire grantees and their partners provided participants with comprehensive supports in a wide range of areas, such as assistance with transportation and child care, and access to mental health services. These supports were provided across the full range of training models and were critical for enabling participants to complete training.
- 3. Career pathways.** Career pathways have long been recognized as a leading approach for supporting workers' career advancement, and TechHire grantees demonstrated the benefits of a career pathway approach in their tech-focused programs. Intensive career pathway training models incorporate a variety of robust student supports and engage employers to help students persist in programs and advance in their careers.
- 4. Employer involvement.** Deep employer engagement is critical to the success of most workforce partnerships, including regional sector partnerships and career pathway

initiatives. Employer involvement was key to the success of the TechHire grant program, because grantees' partners played a wide range of roles, such as providing input on the skills and competencies needed for target occupations, participating in career-awareness activities, and providing work-based learning opportunities. A greater depth and breadth of such involvement ultimately led to better labor market outcomes for participants.

5. **Remote engagement and support for participants.** TechHire grantees successfully engaged students in a very challenging education and training environment, adapting to the pandemic to offer a range of remote training and participant engagement strategies. Grantees provided participants with both hybrid and completely remote training options, posted lessons and course content online as videos, and engaged students with text messages and through a variety of social media platforms. These strategies were critical for maintaining contact with students and helping them complete training and secure employment.

Implications for Regional Partnerships

The key lessons learned in those five areas—technology skills training and exposure, comprehensive supports, career pathways, employer involvement, and remote engagement and support for participants—have important implications for organizations that are considering developing tech-focused workforce partnerships similar to those in TechHire.

Based on these five lessons from the TechHire grants, key implications for future workforce partnerships include:

1. **Offering extensive technology-sector career awareness.** Workforce partnerships can incorporate robust career exploration and awareness services focused on the technology sector into their programs. These services can provide participants with background information on the sector and its pathways and occupations (e.g., job requirements, competencies, and wages), as well as workplace norms. Employers can play a critical role in these services, such as providing input on the sector's jobs and pathways, serving as guest speakers, sharing workplace expectations, and providing tours of their businesses. Engaging program alumni to serve as guest speakers can also help participants gain a stronger understanding of workplace expectations.
2. **Integrating comprehensive participant supports into programs.** Workforce partnerships can integrate extensive supports for participants into their programs. They should tailor these supports to the specific needs of the participants they serve and address the full range of obstacles that might hinder them from completing training and securing employment. This can include providing resources to address needs experienced by many participants, such as transportation and child care, in addition to meeting more specialized needs, such as referrals for mental health services and

access to the internet. Workforce partnerships can collaborate with community-based organizations and existing regional partners providing these services in their communities, leveraging their expertise and public resources.

3. **Adopting a career pathway approach for technology skills training.** Workforce partnerships can follow a career pathway approach to provide tech-focused training in their target sector. This includes providing training that supports established career pathway efforts, as well as using a career pathway approach when developing new training programs to help workers progress in their careers after initial job placement. Organizations can work with employers to identify the competencies that are needed for specific occupations in target sectors. They can then address gaps in current training programs to prepare workers for these competencies by enhancing training offerings, including boot camps and other entry-level training programs. Supplementing entry-level training with work-based learning such as internships can help participants gain work experience, a critical asset for securing employment in tech jobs.
4. **Securing employer involvement and leadership in programs.** Workforce partnerships should seek to increase employer engagement with and, ultimately, leadership of their tech-focused workforce programs. They can achieve this by identifying specific employers that will serve as champions for the program by advocating among their peers to encourage their participation. Workforce partnerships can also document and disseminate evidence showing the value of employers' involvement, including how it has helped employers address their specific hiring, training, and retention needs, and the return on investment for those that participate in the program.
5. **Institutionalizing remote training, placement, and engagement strategies.** As the pandemic continues, workforce partnerships can incorporate a range of remote engagement and placement strategies, such as using text messaging, social media platforms, and drive-through job fairs to maintain contact with participants. After the pandemic subsides, providers can continue to use those strategies and then incorporate those that prove particularly effective at engaging participants. These strategies could help providers bolster their efforts to help participants complete training and also support data collection on program outcomes.

Conclusion

TechHire Partnership grantees used three effective models to help unemployed and incumbent workers enhance their skills and progress in their tech careers: coaching and intensive service models, short-term and accelerated models, and long-term career pathway training models. Looking across these three models, there are overarching lessons learned in five key areas from the TechHire Partnership grant program: technology-sector skills training and exposure,

comprehensive supports, career pathways, employer involvement, and remote engagement and support for participants. These lessons learned have significant implications for organizations considering developing partnerships similar to TechHire grantees' in their own regions, as well as for funders and policymakers designing similar programs. Enhancing program design in each of these areas, such as strengthening participant supports and identifying employer champions to lead initiatives, can bolster the impact of regional partnerships by helping more participants complete training and advance in their careers.

Spanning 24 states across the country and serving thousands of participants, TechHire grantees provided multisector, in-demand education and training opportunities to individuals who faced barriers to employment and training access—helping to build a technologically savvy and ready workforce.

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