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WELCOME TO THE TOAST TO TECHHIRE

As the grants were coming to a close after four years of pivotal work and accomplishments, DOL and the TechHire technical assistance (TA) team (made up of Maher & Maher, ICF, and Jobs for the Future) hosted a virtual Toast to TechHire event on December 8 and 9, 2020, to celebrate and showcase the exemplary effort and impact of all the grantees. This brief summarizes the key takeaways from the Toast to TechHire event, including benefits to participants, employers, and the greater community college and workforce system; lessons learned; and feedback and stories that can help funders and the general public understand the impact of the TechHire program “beyond the numbers.”

Robin Fernkas, Deputy Administrator in the Office of Workforce Investment for DOL, kicked off the event by welcoming grantees and reflecting on the context and impact of the grants. When TechHire first launched in 2016, America’s economy was resurging from the recession and the IT training pipeline was dramatically under producing the number of workers the industry needed. Deputy Administrator Fernkas thanked the grantees for their work and highlighted the many partnerships grantees developed with large national employers like IBM, Boeing, Walmart, Cisco, and Xerox as evidence of their successful business engagement and job placement efforts. She also applauded the work of the TA team for the suite of technical assistance offerings provided to grantees over the last four years, including one-on-one coaching calls, peer consultancies, peer learning group calls, webinars, large multi-day virtual institutes, on-site visits, and convening in Washington DC—all of which supported grantee learning, agility, and success.

Staff from ICF reviewed the high-level outcomes reported through June 30, 2020. While some participants are still only part-way through their training and placement, and reported outcomes lag actual outcomes, the cumulative reported outcomes nonetheless provide a high-level snapshot of the grants’ impact. Over the initial grant period, the 39 TechHire grantees reported the following outcomes:

- ▶ 20,113 total participants served
- ▶ 11,173 completed training
- ▶ 8,537 completed training and earned a credential
- ▶ 3,784 entered training-related employment

Of the 20,113 participants served:

- ▶ 72 percent are youth (17-29)
- ▶ 53 percent are unemployed
- ▶ 45 percent are classified as low income
- ▶ 7 percent are justice-involved

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- ▶ 7 percent have a disability

TECHHIRE LESSONS LEARNED

The Toast to TechHire event highlighted several elements that helped look “beyond the numbers.” In brief presentations scattered throughout the two days, grantees showcased their work in four areas: Biggest Lessons Learned, Fruitful Employer Partnerships, Biggest Program Pivots, and Key Innovations. Grantees also shared presentations highlighting participant success stories.

Biggest Lessons Learned

Four grantees—Pellissippi State College in Tennessee, Miami-Dade College in Florida, Jobs for the Future in Boston, and LaGuardia Community College in New York—made short presentations on the biggest lessons they learned throughout the project. These included:

- ▶ The importance of the career readiness coordinator working in concert with the college’s Career Service Office, counseling services, internship coordinator, and Business and Community Service Office
- ▶ The use of budget and programmatic modifications to make changes that occur due to internal or external circumstances once the grant is underway
- ▶ Constant and consistent communication with internal and external partners and Federal Project Officers
- ▶ Leveraging differences in culture and strength to maximize partnership effectiveness
- ▶ Scaffolding IT training and post-completion support (work-based learning opportunities, workshops, bootcamps, interview practice) to make graduates job ready

One common lesson appeared in all four presentations – the value of intensive wraparound student support services. Within each TechHire program, student support services included case management, career readiness, retention strategies, and job placement assistance. The grant staff and/or partner organizations all provided intensive support and communicated frequently with learners to ensure their success.

Fruitful Employer Partnerships

Successful workforce development projects depend on engagement and involvement from the employers. Alignment between the employers’ talent needs and the recruitment, training, and supports provided is the key to ensuring positive outcomes for participating students. Building mutually valuable partnerships takes hard work, but many of the TechHire grantees have done so with great results.

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TechHire grantees established relationships with employer partners across a wide range of industries and sectors. During the Toast to TechHire event, three grantees described particularly effective partnerships with employers in three different industry sectors.

[Mount Wachusett Community College \(MWCC\) and Catania Oil \(Advanced Manufacturing\)](#)

MWCC and Catania Oil had limited connections before the TechHire grant. Now, the college has a relationship with the Human Resource and Operations Management team, which has led to an incumbent worker training program for automation/robotics. As an additional positive benefit of the relationship developed through TechHire, Catani Oil is looking to expand their registered apprenticeship programs with MWCC.

[Goodwill Industries International and Nationwide Children’s Hospital \(IT in Health Care\)](#)

Goodwill Industries’ relationship with Nationwide Children’s Hospital in Columbus, Ohio started with a basic engagement with the hospital IT Director that has, in time, expanded. Goodwill was able to meet the hospital’s need for employees with CompTIA’s A+ Certification; later the hospital’s needs changed to also require Network+ and Security+. Goodwill pivoted to add these new and stackable credentials into their curriculum, thus deepening the relationship with the hospital and creating better, higher paying opportunities for participants. Internships increased from 2 weeks to 12 months and, upon conclusion of the internship, several TechHire participants were hired full time with annual earnings of over \$58,000 plus benefits.

[Full Employment Council \(FEC\) and Small Start-Up Companies \(IT\)](#)

FEC’s business engagement process included over 200 hours of convening and listening to the business community about their workforce needs. After the listening tours were over, the intel gathered allowed FEC to make informed decisions on how to approach the IT workforce gap. Among other things, the intel showed FEC that—when it came to hiring—small start-up companies could not compete with other companies. They came up with a creative strategy to help solve this issue—an innovative “Shark Tank” style interview process. The “Shark Tank” process is a speed dating interview session hosted with tech start-up employers to select students for training and employment opportunities. Students are in control and, in some cases, cause a “feeding frenzy,” with students getting multiple job offers with salaries in the \$60,000 range.

BIGGEST PROGRAM PIVOTS

Two grantee presenters, Seattle Central College (SCC) and Daytona State College (DSC), faced unique challenges that required significant pivots to ensure the success of their grants.

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SCC's main partner departed from the Seattle area, so the college had to search for a new partner. This struggle turned out to be beneficial to their program, as the college went from one main partner to five new partnerships. SCC was able to build relationships with YearUp, Ada Developers Academy, Seattle Education Access, Unloop - Breaking the Prison Cycle, and the Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle. These new partnerships enabled SCC to recruit and train new populations of students and provided a wider range of supportive services specific to these populations. For example, the partnership with Year Up opened a door to help train youth and young adults with barriers to education and computer technology. YearUp even moved their offices onto SCC's campus to make it easier for students to learn and train. "Pivotal" success!

DSC's plan was to offer site-based training in a cohort model. However, they soon started to have trouble with participant retention and completion. DSC uncovered that the majority of their students were employed, making attending classes every day a struggle. Other issues cropped up that were specific to the populations that DSC was attempting to serve: individuals experiencing homelessness, visually impaired, English language learners. These participants faced challenges like housing instability, childcare, access to broadband/wifi, and laptops to name a few. DSC provided on-campus housing and access to the campus library to assist participants during the life of the grant. DSC pivoted to move to an online, flexible scheduling format to let students login to learn when and where they could to help participants achieve better work/life balance. A silver lining of this pivot was that DSC was already offering online courses when the pandemic started, so the impact of shifting to 100% online/virtual training was minimal.

KEY INNOVATIONS

In the last grantee presentation session of the Toast to TechHire, four grantees (MechaWA - North Seattle College and Shoreline Community College, MoStart - State Tech College of Missouri, Atlanta Technical College, and Clackamas Community College) shared some of their more innovative strategies.

As the four presented their innovations, some similarities stood out. MoStart and Clackamas Community College redesigned how they deliver their hands-on training programs. MoStart began offering hands-on training via mobile labs and Clackamas Community College offered socially distanced labs with an online/virtual education component. Students responded positively, so both programs plan to continue to operate using these innovative delivery mechanisms post-pandemic.

MechaWA and Atlanta Technical College adopted innovative student supports. MechaWA's five college partners' navigators collaborated to assist students in the creative career pathways MechaWA created. All of the MechaWA programs are built on stackable credentials, which allows students to exit their pathway into employment at various points. However, the

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creativity comes from the program infrastructure and college partnerships. MechaWA students can move from one college to the next due to a unique articulation agreement allowing the colleges to utilize each other's space and programs. The staff at MechaWA's new Center for Workforce Innovations (funded by private businesses like Delta Airlines, AT&T, and Home Depot) including Achievement Facilitators and Employment Engagement Specialists offer support throughout the life of a student's learning journey that helps them persist toward graduation and job placement. With direct input and investment from corporate and community partners, ATC is able to sustain the key elements of TechHire after the end of the grant.

AHA MOMENTS

The TA team engaged grantees in two highly interactive collaborative sessions, Most Impactful Realizations (Biggest "Aha! Moments) and *Sustainability Planning*. The team used a virtual collaboration tool called MURAL, which engaged grantees in a shared, virtual whiteboard that allowed them to post ideas and then visually explore and organize the groups' ideas.

During the Aha! Moments session, the facilitator posed four questions to the attendees:

During the grant what "Aha! Moments" or realizations did you have about:

1. Yourself
2. Your Team
3. Your Participants
4. The Workforce Development Field in general

Participants posted their responses, then used stars to create a "heat map" for items that resonated with them within the four charts. The image below gives a sense of what the process looked like for participants. The document is available online [here](#).

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AHA! MOMENTS

Use the sticky notes below to your reflections on "Aha! Moments" or realizations related to what you learned about Yourself, Your Team, Your Participants, and the Workforce Development Field in general.

Yourself

Your Team

Your Participants

The Field

The Aha! moments that received the most stars (resonated with the most people) were as follows:

- ▶ Realizations related to yourself
 - ▶ Problem solving is fun
 - ▶ Federal Project Officers (FPOs) can be wonderful partners and support
 - ▶ It takes constant effort and recalibration to manage these programs
- ▶ Realizations related to your team
 - ▶ Tenacity
 - ▶ Communication is key
 - ▶ Hire creative people

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- ▶ Realizations related to your participants
 - ▶ Meet them where they are
 - ▶ Growth mindset
 - ▶ They need consistent support to ensure completion
- ▶ Realizations related to the workforce development field
 - ▶ Strong employer engagement
 - ▶ Short term training can be great for salaries
 - ▶ Diversification of industries hiring for your skillset

PART 4: SUSTAINABILITY PLANNING

In this session, using a similar MURAL approach to gather input, attendees were asked: *What strategies have you already put in place to sustain specific elements of your project?* Attendees then organized sustainability strategies into common themes, and voted to indicate areas they want to know more about. The image below shows what the process looked like for attendees.

Group Discussion: Sustainability Planning

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Let's get started

STEP 1
Start out solo.
Silently brainstorming ideas and add them to a colored sticky - be sure to include your name and organization!

STEP 2
Find themes and commonalities.
Move your ideas into the "group sharing space" within the template and silently read through them all. Help sort and group them by thematic topics or similarities.

STEP 3
Vote and discuss.
Use Dot Voting to select the ideas that you'd like to hear more about from your peers.

- What element of the project do you seek to sustain?
- How will this strategy make it sustainable?
- Who else will you need to engage?

*What strategies have you **already** put in place to sustain **specific** elements of your project?*

SOLO BRAINSTORM

GROUP SHARING SPACE

Vote
Use All dots out to place your vote

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Top themes that arose were:

- ▶ Employer Partnerships
 - ▶ Continue to sync with Workforce Boards
 - ▶ Grow employer-based soft skill workshops and work-based learning
 - ▶ Expand and continue IT Employer Advisory Board
- ▶ Training delivery
 - ▶ Continue to use online modality (more flexibility and can reach rural students)
 - ▶ Reach across state and regional boundaries to partner
 - ▶ IT career pathway development including entry-level digital literacy training
- ▶ Policies and Procedures
 - ▶ Articulation agreements between colleges and universities
 - ▶ Developing MOUs with partners
 - ▶ Creating guiding policies/procedures for future federal grants

Both of the MURAL events yielded thought-provoking ideas and dialogue in a visual and collaborative format. Each MURAL board can be found on the [WorkforceGPS TechHire Community of Practice](#).

PART 5: TECHHIRE PODCAST AND VIDEO SERIES

The grantee presentations showed the positive impact of the TechHire Partnership grants on the grantee organizations' capacity to help fill the IT talent gap. The TA Team took a few minutes during the event to preview two exciting new resources in the works that will highlight the grants' impact from the perspectives of the employers and participants.

Participant Voices Podcast Series

In this innovative technical assistance product, the TA team interviewed five participants from five different TechHire programs (UAW-LECT, California; Wake Technical College, North Carolina; State Technical College of Missouri; Everett Community College, Washington; Goodwill Industries, Virginia) to create a series of podcasts. The interviews gave participants the chance to share their insights on the qualities and characteristics of a strong training program and gave training providers and funders the chance to learn from their experiences related to recruitment and enrollment, education and training, support services, and technology in the workplace. At the Toast to TechHire event, several grantees shared that their students were excited to be part of the podcast series.

To view our Participant Voices podcast series, please [click here](#).

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Employer Testimonial Videos

The TA team conducted six interviews with employer partners from two sectors (advanced manufacturing and IT) to showcase the benefits of TechHire from the employer's perspective. Grantees (LaGuardia Community College and Suffolk County Community College, New York; Miami-Dade College; Florida, Goodwill Columbus and Flying High, Ohio; Forward Careers, Wisconsin) connected the TA team to employers who were interested in sharing the impact of their TechHire partnerships. During the Toast to TechHire event, the TA team shared a clip from each video as a preview.

To view our Employer Testimonial videos, please [click here](#).

SUMMARY

The Toast to TechHire event showcased the innovations, key take-aways, and impacts of the TechHire for employers and job seekers. The opportunity to reflect on successes and lessons learned will help DOL continue to make effective and sustainable investments that create opportunities for all Americans and grow the talent American businesses need to succeed.