TechHire Peer Learning Group Call
Navigating the Pandemic Part 1:
Transitioning to Online Learning

Due to the disruption of COVID-19 to TechHire grantee operations, the technical assistance team implemented a series of Peer Learnings Group calls focused on "Navigating the Pandemic" to help meet the needs of grantees. In April 2020, the first of three TechHire PLG calls was scheduled to highlight strategies on how grantees are transitioning their programs from face-to-face instruction and coaching to online learning, and discuss how grantees could implement those ideas in their grants.

GRANTEE POLL RESPONSES

The call kicked off with a poll of grantee program types, needs, and challenges. Poll results indicated a majority of the grantees have successfully transitioned to online learning. In an open-ended question about their biggest challenge during the COVID-19 disruption, two themes surfaced: participants' access to technology and job placement post-completion.

MONTGOMERY COLLEGE

Almost every element of Montgomery College's program has changed due to the current COVID-19 pandemic. Program staff have had to improvise ways to communicate with participants and each other, deliver supportive services, deliver content and curriculum, and manage the program. Program changes and adaptations are listed below. The grantee has also agreed to share their recently developed templates and plans with call attendees.

Objectives of the PLG Call

- Share strategies and tools that featured grantees have used to successfully transition to online learning.

- Share strategies for keeping participants engaged and maintaining communication with grantees.

- Provide a forum for grantees to ask questions and get advice from peers on transitioning to online learning.

New Participant Communication Strategy:

Program staff are now using Remind (text message-based software), Facebook, email, and Schoology to communicate with participants. Students may not have a laptop/computer, but they do have a mobile phone. With the use of Remind and Facebook, the program staff can send updates directly to their phone via text or messenger versus depending on email.

Supportive Service Delivery Changes:
Program staff have revised individual student plans, issued vouchers for remote certification testing, moved to virtual office hours, and are hosting Zoom orientations/training for participants, including virtual interview preparation.

Content Delivery Changes:
Instructors are now delivering course content virtually via Zoom, Schoology Learning Management System, and Facebook Live. Schoology is a mobile-friendly LMS, which the TechHire program is using to deliver instruction. Even though Montgomery College uses Blackboard, TechHire chose to use Schoology to help better engage with students and ensure constant contact (Blackboard was experiencing outages during peak times). With Zoom having technical issues as well, the TechHire program experimented with delivering instruction via Facebook Live.

Service Delivery Changes:
Job-placement staff are now hosting virtual resume workshops, virtual recruitment workshops/virtual meetups, and online program orientation and intake. The project team is working to develop virtual strategies for engaging local businesses.

Programmatic Oversight Changes:
Montgomery College's program director has increased the frequency of meetings with instructors to ensure that they feel supported and have a forum to work through challenges. The program director has also scheduled daily morning briefings, weekly senior leadership meetings on COVID-19-related changes to the college, and staff check-ins to track progress on deliverables.

WAKE TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Because Wake Technical Community College had the necessary infrastructure in place, their TechHire program was able to continue offering training with no interruption. Wake Tech pivoted to using Microsoft Teams and used the platform to conduct the synchronous classes. Like Montgomery College, Wake Tech is offering student support services virtually and will likely continue to do so until the end of the grant.

Although Wake Tech is approaching the end of their grant period, the college has committed to paying for the tuition/training for enrolled participants until they complete training. Their local workforce development boards stepped up during this crisis to help students with supportive services, including providing computers and broadband access for participants.

In their transition, they have had to overcome many challenges, but highlighted these things to consider:

- Student access to computers
- Student access to Wi-Fi
- Policy to overcome closed testing centers

- Enhanced communication with students

- Lack of employment opportunities for students completing

- Providing more online resources for students to help them with academic and student supports