**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**Introduction to Technical Assistance for H1-B SWFI Grantees**

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LAURA CASERTANO: Again, I want to welcome everyone to today's webinar, and I'm going to turn things over to your moderator today, Monica Evans, who's a workforce analyst for the Employment and Training Administration. Monica?

MONICA EVANS: Thanks, Laura. Good afternoon. Again, my name is Monica Evans, and I am the Strengthening Working Families Initiative or SWFI program lead. I am joined by my colleague Danielle Kittrell from the Division of Strategic Investments in the Employment and Training Administration or ETA. Presenting today are Emily Sama-Miller, Elizabeth Brown, and Jessica Harding from Mathematica Policy Research. Mathematica is the technical assistance provider for SWFI. Next slide, please.

So that you can see who will be talking with you, we have some pictures of the presenters on the next two slides. This slide shows you today's moderators, Danielle and myself, again from ETA, Division of Strategic Investments. Next slide. And here are the presenters from Mathematica Policy Research. Next slide, please.

We hope to use today's time to create an opportunity for SWFI grantees to learn more about each other and the TA services that are available to you. We'll go through a high-level discussion of SWFI TA activities and opportunities, and you'll be introduced to your TA coaches and subject matter experts or SMEs. By the end of the call you'll be able to know more about the next steps for requesting and receiving TA. Next slide, please. Next slide.

Great. So we have a full agenda today, and we want to encourage you throughout the presentation to please insert your questions in the chat box so we know what additional information we need to address. We'll start with an overview of SWFI and the SWFI TA model. We'll introduce the TA teams and their roles, and we'll go over how the SWFI TA systems will work.

The SWFI TA system is designed to connect you to responsive TA and coaching, and we'll talk about how you can request that TA as well as how to provide feedback. In order to make this TA as helpful as possible to you, we'll want your ongoing input and feedback. At the end of today's conversation we'll have time to discuss next steps, and we'll open the floor to questions. Next slide, please.

Now that you've seen us, we would like to get some more information about you. Unfortunately, it would take us hours to do an individual role call and introductions. So let's experiment with the way to connect with each other virtually. Let's – excuse me. Let's start by creating a virtual nametag. It should read, hello. My name is, and then your information. Hopefully you have this information accessible, such as typed out in a Word document. Throughout this webinar you will have several opportunities to give feedback both in the main chat box, as well as through polls. When you do ask questions, please copy that information into the main chat box so that those of us listening can follow up with you later. Next slide, please.

It would also help us and help each of you as you start to build a community of peers to know who is on the line. So in addition to the nametag, we have a polling question for you to select the role that you play in your SWFI grant. Choose the answer that best reflects you or your group, authorized representative, program director or manager, IT or data manager or staff, training partner, employer partner, service provider, or something else and then specify what that something else is. OK. It looks as though we've got people in a variety of roles, including a lot in program director. All right. Thank you. Next slide, please.

Now, we will – we would like to provide a refresher overview of SWFI. Next slide.

On June 14, 2016 the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration or ETA awarded approximately $54 million in grants to 14 grantees for the H-1B funded Strengthening Working Families Initiative or SWFI. The SWFI grants will provide support to parents who face barriers to training and are in need of increasing skills and competencies that will either prepare them for entering into an H-1B aligned career pathway or advancement along an H-1B aligned career pathway and into middle- or high-skilled jobs.

These grants will give more working parents a career pathway to secure higher-wage jobs by addressing the significant barriers to participating in and completing training and in trying to find and acquire affordable quality child care, including emergency child care, while attending skills training programs. Now, I would like to turn it over to Danielle for more information about the grantees.

DANIELLE KITTRELL: Thank you so much, Monica. Next slide, please.

So we wanted to go ahead and refresh your memory about where all the SWFI grantees are located, and as you can see, we are spread across much of the country. Next slide. And grantees are focused on a range of H-1B industries with healthcare, IT, and manufacturing being the most popular. Next slide.

Now, on our last webinar we talked about the plans, training, strategies, and activities, and based on our reports we have updates to this information for you. So as you can see, we've made a lot of progress. So as of December 2016 we had eight grantees that began recruitment, three grantees that conducted classroom trainings, two grantees offer credential programs, and two grantees had established job clubs or mentoring programs.

Three grantees have provided participant services and activities that support skill development, training retention, and employment, and we had about three grantees who also offered child and or dependent care or financial counseling. So now, we'll go ahead and turn things over to Emily from Mathematica Policy Research to talk about the technical assistance. Emily?

EMILY SAMA-MILLER: Thanks, Danielle. It's exciting for us as TA providers finally to be working with grantees. We wanted to take a quick poll to get a sense for what stage of implementation your SWFI project is in. So you've got four options here, preparation – that means you're still hiring key staff and identifying policies and procedures – the early implementation phase where you've hired staff and initial participants are starting to be recruited for service delivery, full implementation – so your project is fully staffed.

Service delivery is underway – and then we've also left an option for other, if you would consider yourself to be at another stage. Please just specify where you think you are. And I'll just give folks another moment to respond. OK. Looks like most of you consider yourself to be in the full implementation stage where you're staffed and service delivery has begun. A couple folks are still in early implementation.

So on to the next slide. We can actually skip ahead to – I'm just going to talk about SWFI technical assistance. So here is the project team. I'm Emily Sama-Miller, and together with Charlene Kemmerer we're leading this TA project. On the next slide are pictures of the four coaches who will be working with grantees. Could you go to the next slide, please? Thanks.

These coaches will work directly with each grantee. Their names are Elizabeth Brown, Jessica Harding, Lily Roberts, and Talia Kahn-Kravis. And in addition to coaching, Elizabeth will bring some subject matter expertise about the workforce system and Jessica brings her expertise about the child care system and I'll give you more information about coaching later on in the webinar.

On the next slide is an opportunity to meet our senior subject matter experts. Our team includes these senior subject matter experts from the Urban Institute. Gina Adams is an expert in the intersection of early care and education programs with workforce development programs and policies, and Shayne Spaulding is an expert in workforce development and postsecondary education programs and policies.

So next I want to talk about the objectives of our TA. Technical assistance for SWFI is intended to provide you and your partners with tools, resources, information, and support that will help you achieve your goals and to meet SWFI's objectives. We'll facilitate the sharing of promising practices and common challenges so that you can learn from each other. The TA we'll provide is designed to support your programmatic SWFI needs, and we'll work together with your FPO. If you could go to the next slide, I'll just give you an overview of the TA.

You can think of TA on this project as falling into two buckets, program-level TA and systems-level TA. Program-level TA relates to service delivery or the work you do with a target population. So this technical assistance might be general, provided to all grantees because it's a common or universal challenge, or it may be customized for small groups who are tackling the same issue. It may even be individualized, occurring during coaching conversations or during a potential site visit. Systems-level TA will address policies, practices, funding mechanisms, and institutions that provide the backdrop for program design.

On the next slide I have just a short table that shows you different types of TA. Program-level TA is going to take several different forms depending on your needs. Grantees will have regular phone calls and e-mails with their coach and you can discuss with your coach your needs and your coach will help you determine strategies to address those needs.

Webinars, peer learning opportunities, and the WorkforceGPS Community of Practice or CoP can connect grantees to one another when they're grappling with similar challenges. Our TA team will also develop resource materials that might include best practice tip sheets, newsletters, answers to frequently asked questions. On-site TA might be provided to grantees to address specific challenges, but this will not be a frequent method for delivering TA.

On the next slide I wanted to give you an overview of our approach to TA. Mathematica's TA approach is grounded in a systematic and collaborative program improvement process that brings social appliance theory and research evidence and practice wisdom all together. The approach is based on the objectives of the learn, innovate, improve process or LI squared.

The learn phase is just that. We learn from you to understand your program policies and activities. In the innovate phase it includes strategic planning and partnership building. We know that many of you have spent some effort in this phase already, planning your SWFI and developing partnerships. The improve phase involves collecting and using performance and other data to tweak the program design to fit with your target population needs.

Mathematica developed LI squared in partnership with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation and the Harvard Center on the Developing Child. Our goal of the TA is to collaboratively delivery and customize TA based on the needs that emerge for you.

We'll work with you to identify project challenges and brainstorm practical solutions that are evidence-based. We'll develop a plan to implement new solutions and address problems and find systems that you can use to continuously improve your ongoing efforts. We come from a research background, and we'll bring that understanding to support you with evidence-informed strategic planning. And we want to help you build your capacity for analytically-focused program improvement.

At this point I want to pause and see if anybody has any questions. If you have questions, could you just enter them in the chat window? OK. I'm not seeing any questions. So I'll go on to an opportunity for another poll.

So that we can start thinking through common challenges that might be valuable in focusing our initial TA efforts, would you please choose among the following to identify whatever your biggest need is right now? It could be training or education. So that would be understanding what participants need and the appropriate training and education resources for them and connecting them to those.

Employment activities to connect participants to the workforce or helping them retain jobs. Might be child care, assessing needs that participants have for child care, structuring training, education, and work activities to align with child care, and helping participants access the care that they need. It may be program designs and practices such as outreach and recruitment of participants, covering the cost of services, building tools, data systems, those kinds of things, or something else altogether.

OK. Looking like most people are finding that their biggest TA need right now is program design and practices, but there are responses under each. So everybody's got different challenges. We'll use this information as we think about how to target future TA. So thank you for that.

So the next slide is another polling question. Same response categories, but we flipped the question. Rather than thinking about what's your biggest need for TA right now, tell us about what do you think your biggest strength is, whether it's training, education, employment activities, child care, program design and practice. We'll just give folks a few minutes to respond. OK. So it looks like many of you are feeling like training and education are real strengths for you, and a couple thinking program design and practices are strengths. Thanks. We'll use this, again, to help us group grantees by their strengths and challenges as we think about TA.

So let me move on now to show you about the community of practice. To help you collaborate with your peer grantees, we've developed a community of practice for SWFI. This is going to be a one-stop shop for TA resources. It will look something like this image up on the screen. We'll also have discussion boards in addition to the resources to help you share experiences with one another and ask questions.

We'll upload all announcements for upcoming events to the community of practice. It's going to be available through the WorkforceGPS platform, and it's coming soon. We're putting the finishing touches on. We'll let you know by e-mail when it's available.

Now, I'm going to turn it over to Elizabeth Brown to talk about coaching. Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH BROWN: Thanks, Emily. As we mentioned before, each grantee will be assigned a coach who will work with you individually to provide program technical assistance. Next slide, please. As a reminder, one of these four people will serve as your coach. Your coach will serve as your primary point of contact for our TA. The coach assigned to you will be e-mailing you in the next few days to share her contact information and set up a time for your first call. We will schedule regular check-in calls to discuss your progress, challenges, and any TA needs you may have. We will also use this time to share resources and tools that could assist you with your SWFI activities. Next slide, please.

Senior subject matter experts will work with you to provide support that focuses on system-level needs that go beyond what your coaches can easily address. The senior SMEs for SWFI are Gina Adams and Shayne Spaulding from the Urban Institute. Senior SMEs may participate in convenings, some peer learning activities, webinars, and other TA activities during the grant period.

In addition, senior SMEs may periodically engage with grantees through the online SWFI CoP. Please work with your coach to coordinate collaboration with senior SMEs on an as-needed basis. Now, I'm going to turn it back over to Monica Evans who will talk about the role of your FPO versus that of your coach.

MS. EVANS: Thanks, Elizabeth. We want to ensure that everyone is clear on the role of an FPO versus the role of a TA coach. First, let's go through the FPO role. Your FPO will provide guidance with technical grant needs, such as clarifying the Funding Opportunity Announcement or FOA. They'll answer any questions about modifications to the statement of work, quarterly performance reports, fiscal questions, and any other policy questions.

The role of the TA coaches is to support with program-level TA. That will include all of the TA activities that we've been talking about like thinking through strategies for program improvement, building partnerships, discussing program sustainability and organizational structure, and connecting you to other grantees or subject matter experts. The coaches are here to share resources and assist you with programmatic challenges. Next slide, please.

So we've taken you through an overview of TA activities. Now, we'd like to know about the type of TA that you're most interested in. Please select from the following: peer learning opportunities, the SWFI community of practice, written resource materials, coaching, webinars, or let us know if there is something else that you'd like to see.

OK. Seems as though people are very interested in coaching, which is good, as well as peer learning opportunities. All right. Very good. So we'll make sure that we have all of these available to you. Thank you for participating in that poll, and again, if there are other things that you want to add, definitely do so in the chat box. Now, I'm going to turn it over to Jessica Harding to discuss how to request TA.

JESSICA HARDING: Thanks, Monica. So we've shared information about the objectives of TA and the types of TA we'll offer. So the big question is, how do you request that TA? Next slide, please. So there's a few different ways in which you can request TA. You can contact your coach at any time by phone or e-mail, and, as Elizabeth said, your coach will be e-mailing you her contact information in the next few days. You can also send an e-mail to the SWFI mailbox, which is routinely monitored. Be sure to include your grant name and number and copy your FPO. Next slide, please. Next slide, please.

So we really want to make the TA useful for you. There's several ways in which you can inform the TA to help us make it as useful as it can be for you. Responding to these webinar polls gives us a first sense of what you're interested in but you can also provide feedback to your coaches during regular calls and you can also e-mail the SWFI mailbox.

So here are the next steps for TA. A link for this webinar will become available on the SWFI CoP. You can review the TA menu that was e-mailed out earlier today which summarizes the TA approach and activities that we discussed today. As I said, coaches will be contacting you by e-mail in the next few days to arrange an introductory call, and we'll copy your FPO on this introductory e-mail. The CoP will be live by the late spring, early summer, and the in-person grantee convening is being planned now. So stay tuned for a save the date. Now, I'm going to hand it back to Monica to wrap up.

MS. EVANS: Thank you. Just a couple of housekeeping things before we close. Next slide, please. If you have updated program staff contact information and have not previously submitted it to SWFI@dol.gov, please do so as soon as possible. Updated contact information helps us to ensure that you receive important and useful program updates. When sending the contact information, please be sure to let us know if the new contact is an additional contact person or a replacement for someone else. Next slide. And here is the SWFI mailbox contact information again, SWFI@dol.gov. Next slide, please.

So now, we want to again address any questions that you may have. If you have questions, please enter them into the chat window. I see that there is one question about for child care how are grantees addressing concerns about potential liability risks? This is an excellent question that we can definitely put in our SWFI Community of Practice discussion board and get responses, especially from those of you who stated that you are strong in the child care area. Perhaps you have some experiences or promising practices that you can share with your peers. So we'll make sure to get that out.

Any other questions? I see some people typing. So we're going to give you a few moments to type that out.

MS. CASERTANO: And while everyone's entering their questions, definitely keep them coming. I just want to remind you that you can find a copy of the PowerPoint, that resource, the recording of today's webinar, and the transcript of today's webinar on WorkforceGPS in about two business days, but for right now, you can download the PowerPoint and the additional resource in that file share window on the bottom left-hand corner of your screen. But for now, keep the questions coming.

MS. EVANS: OK. So we see a couple of questions. One, "Do we have an ETA for the final data tool?" We believe that's a performance question, and we do.

MS. : You should be getting communication from us since your grants started around our interim performance reporting guidance, and if you have not, certainly follow that slide that Monica covered earlier about making sure we have your program contact information. We're still currently in an interim reporting guidance period, meaning our data system for submissions of your participant-level quarterly data is not yet up and running yet. We will certainly be sending an update soon about when that system will be available, when you'll have access to it. The system is called WIPS. It's the WIOA Integrated Performance System. So stay tuned for information on that. We'll also be training – doing a training in June on the data elements and how you submit, and please be sure to continue following the interim reporting guidance as you're just submitting a quarterly narrative as of right now.

MS. HARDING: Great. So another question that came in was wanting to know how participants are retained when they're being recruited two or three months before the scheduled training starts. And this is another topic that we'll definitely start a community of practice topic about to hear from other grantees about how they're working on retention with this lapse of time between scheduled training. So thanks for those great questions.

MS. EVANS: And also, we definitely think that's something you should follow up with your FPO about because we want to make sure whether or not the person – the people that you're talking about are actually participants. So again, following up with your FPO would be a good idea for that specific question.

So I see there's a question about whether or not we are organizing a convening. Yes. We are in the process of working on that, and more information and a save the date will be coming out soon.

MS. KITTRELL: It looks like there's a question related to the name and password for the database. I'm assuming that's a performance question, about the performance database. If you're referring to the DOL reporting database – oh, thank you, Laney [ph] – we have not issued any passwords or login credentials to that system. So no one has missed anything. We've not issued them because it's not accessible. You may have your own internal system that you're using that will eventually support the data you'll be submitting to ETA. So certainly we're not involved in that, but detailed information will be coming out with our orientations around performance in June about when you can expect to get access to that system and how access information will be sent out.

MS. EVANS: OK. Any additional questions? OK. I don't see any activity or anyone typing. So again, if you do have questions, you can definitely follow up with us at SWFI@dol.gov. Thank you. We'll go to this last slide here.

I want to thank you for joining us today on this webinar, and we look forward to working with all of you. I'm going to turn things over to Laura to wrap things up for us.

(END)