**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**Engaging Employers to Support Work-Based Learning as a Strategy to Diversify the Talent Pipeline**

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LAURA CASERTANO: Again, I want to welcome everyone to today's webinar. Now, I'm going to get myself right out of the way and I'm going to turn things over to your moderator today, Danielle Kittrell. She's a workforce analyst with the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. Danielle, take it away.

DANIELLE KITTRELL: Well, thank you so much, Laura, and good afternoon everybody. So before we get started, we'd also like to understand the role that you play in your organization's TechHire grant.

So please go ahead to take a moment to choose the polling option that best describes your work, indicating whether you are the authorized rep, the program director, the IT data manager or staff, a training partner, employer partner, or service provider. And if none of these options describe your role, please go ahead and type your function in the chat. Excellent. All right. That looks good. All right. We'll keep the ball rolling here.

All right. So now that we have a better idea of who has joined us this afternoon, I'd like to officially welcome you to the H-1B TechHire Webinar on "Engaging Employers to Support Work-Based Learning as a Strategy to Diversify the Talent Pipeline." I am Danielle Kittrell. I'm an analyst here at DOL in the Employment and Training Administration of the division of Strategic Investment. And I'll be facilitating today's webinar, so welcome, again, everyone.

I'd also like to introduce my colleague, Ms. Lamback, who is the associate director for Jobs for the Future Building Economic Opportunity group, which focuses on providing solutions to help low-income adults train for and succeed in jobs with career advancement potential. Sara has nearly 10 years of experience in education in workforce development and as a member of the TechHire TA team. And Sara will also be moderating today's webinar. I am also joined by my colleague, Mr. Kila Orel, who was our on-site TA liaison here at the national office.

Now, our presenters. I'd like to introduce you to, first of all, Mr. John Shaw, who's the research and strategic initiatives manager at Northern Virginia Technology Council. Mr. Paul Spivey, who is the assistant dean at the division of technology, engineering, and mathematics at Bossier Parish Community College. And last, but not least, we are also pleased to have Mr. Eric Seleznow, who is now a senior advisor at JFF.

Now, as you can see, we have several objectives for you today. However, our main objective today is to help you better understand the dynamics of work-based learning and introduce several specific strategies that your TechHire program can use to broad or deep employer support for work-based learning initiatives. So again, welcome, everyone. And now, I will turn things over to my colleague Sara, who will talk about the agenda for today.

SARA LAMBACK: Excellent. Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you so much, Danielle. I just want to give us a little bit of a roadmap of where we're going today. First, we'll hear from Eric Seleznow, who will highlight what work-based learning is and provide so insight into the various types of work-based learning and how it can support the priorities of both students and employers. So he'll be our first presenter.

And then, we'll pass the baton over to John Shaw, who will explore some of the work that the Northern Virginia Tech Council is doing to better understand employers' perspectives on work-based learning and to better get a handle on what constitutes the ideal candidate, uh, within the tech sector more generally.

Our third presenter, as Danielle mentioned, is Paul Spivey. He'll showcase some of the specific strategies that Bossier Parish Community College has used to build strong relationships with employers in their local area over time and how this has enabled them to develop and launch a capstone internship program.

We'll leave plenty of time for question and discussion at the end of this webinar. So please feel free to type your questions into the chat box at any point. We'll be keeping those behind the scenes and we'll be keeping track of what comes in. So just as questions occur to you, please go ahead and just share those through the chat function.

So let's move over to our next polling question. We'd love to get a sense of what is your comfort level or expertise in engaging with employers around work-based learning opportunities? Please indicate if, number one, you're a beginner and you're new to engaging with employers about work-based learning too.

If you feel that you're at an intermediate level, you have a basic understanding of how engage with employers around work-based learning opportunities. Or three, do you feel like you're advanced? That would be someone who's experienced at engaging with employers around work-based learning opportunities. Or indicate four if you're not sure. You can also use the chat box down at the bottom if you want to provide any additional detail on this response.

It looks like we have a number of folks who are typing in responses. We'll just give you another minute or so to finish up your selection. So based on responses so far, it looks like most of the folks on today's webinar are at an intermediate level. I think we can go ahead and close this poll.

Around 70 percent of folks – just over 70 percent of folks who have joined us today feel like they have a basic understanding of work-based learning and how to engage with employers. So they're really looking to broaden and deepen their partnerships and expand current work-based learning opportunities.

MS. KITTRELL: Excellent.

MS. LAMBACK: So I'm very excited now to pass it over to Eric Seleznow. As Danielle said, he's a senior advisor at JFF, where Eric directs JFF's Center on Apprenticeship and Work-Based Learning. This center works to highlight innovations across the field and apprenticeship and work-based learning and to advance both the work of apprenticeship initiatives and a range of work-based learning opportunities as key strategies for workforce development and as a talent solution for American businesses.

Prior to JFF, Mr. Seleznow served as a deputy assistant secretary for the U.S. Department of Labor, Labor's Employment and Training Administration. So we're really excited to draw on the deep expertise he has around both an apprenticeship and work-based learning during today's discussion. So without any further ado, I will pass it over to Eric.

ERIC SELEZNOW: Thank you very much, Sara. Really appreciate it. Eric Seleznow from hot and muggy Washington, DC today. Thanks for having me and thanks for the folks at DOL for putting this session together and inviting us to be here.

I was heavily involved with TechHire during my former stint at DOL. So it's nice to be connected, again, today. And Sara, in my bio, talked about my last job, but my previous job is I ran a local workforce agency and ran a state workforce board and a state workforce agency. So I really come from the local level and the state level in sort of doing programs – a range of different workforce programs.

So anyway. Thanks for doing it. So I'm going to zip through some of my slides here. You can read those later. But I think the real issue, again, here with the TechHire program and some of the things we're talking about today is there's a lot of talk and conversation all across the country and there has been for the last four to five years on apprenticeship and other forms of work-based learning; right?

And we have to agree, I think – or I think what we've all agreed or all seen over the last four or five years, there's a notion that applied learning works. Real-world work experiences work.

Many of you who are practitioners out there I'm sure have heard from employers. Oh, gee. I hired somebody with a degree or a diploma or a 10-year degree or whatever and they didn't know the basics of the lab or they didn't know how to read a tape measure. They didn't know how to enter data correctly.

And so a lot of those things you can't learn in school, but a lot of those things on the job, you don't learn in school. You learn them on the job. It's applied learning and it's a proven record – a proven method for certainly helping people learn skills and competencies that employers need.

I think the other issue here is that we're in a really tight labor – an incredibly tight labor market; right? There's huge competition for talent, huge competition for workers with skills and competencies. And so how do employers in this scarce hard to find skilled workers environment, how do they grow their own workers? How do they create their workers, their next generation of workers and their pipeline of workers? And work-based learning and apprenticeship opportunities provide that opportunity.

So I could spend my 10 minutes or now I have nine minutes left just talking about this one thing, but I'll zip through these slides real quick and then talk about it. I guess one of the other notions, I would say, is that there's a lot of companies across the country who use apprenticeship and work-based learning strategies, and I'll talk about both of them, as a strategy to diversify their workforces; right?

As a way to sort of outreach to community colleges and workforce boards and community organizations and to screen people from various and different backgrounds to bring them into the companies to diversify.

Some programs – some companies have participated in apprenticeships simply to diversify their pipelines and have outreached to various communities, whether it be community colleges, in some cases in high schools, in some cases community-based organizations in their communities. Just to diversify their workforces. And companies are having some progress around the country.

So what is work-based learning; right? The basics of it is expose participants to work, a career field. Strengthens academic learning. Enhances professional skills. But it basically provides a temporary or permanent job. I'm much more interested in a permanent job, as you are. But there's different levels of work-based learning; right? So we have this continuum of work-based learning.

And here is just a quick little chart that JFF has done. You can find it on our Center for Apprenticeship website. But basically, the bottom line here on career exploration at the bottom, really good for high school-age students and younger learners. But even at the college level, career exploration and awareness sort of activities and preparation.

As you move up to the middle line and see career exposure and career engagement, there's certain activities around there. Might be shorter term internships or pre-apprenticeships and these activities that are preparing for exposure to the career and engagement in the career. And then, at the top of the line, the models, of course, include apprenticeships, and there's a range of them. And on the job training and other applied learning activities. So just a quick graphic to set things for you.

The benefits of work-based learning, I mean, it's obvious and instinctual to me. I was a former intern and a former college student in college. So I got a lot of work-based learning experience in my life, as many of you did. But it develops professional and career skills, gains real-world work. Gets people, and this is really important, on a career pathway or some sort of pathway to earn a post-secondary credential that meets the needs of the employer.

And this is not just a supply side thing. This is really important for employers, to get the workers with the skills needed, to get the workers that they need. We know that apprenticeship, and there's data that DOL has on this, that apprenticeship is really, really good for a couple of things. Ensuring people get employment, ensuring people get good wages, and ensure people have really long rates of job retention. And I think DOL – (inaudible) – apprenticeship that apprentices are – have retention rates of 90, 91 percent.

So really, this sort of pathway, this investment by employers, this investment of the worker really does learn, leads to reduced turnover, greater productivity, lower cost, and an employee who's much likely to reduce churn and stay with that company. And that's a real selling point when you talk to employers, is to understand these data points. Good skills, good jobs, good wages, and excellent job retention rates, really key point with employers for whatever population you're talking about.

And look, we have a range, as I said, of work-based learning registered apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeships, on the job training, OJT contracts that many of you can do at the local level. Customized training. Up-skilling and incumbent worker training integrated with work-based approaches. A range of work experiences, including apprenticeships and even transitional jobs, can be work-based learning.

We at JFF have sort of created about seven principles of work-based learning. We know that – and I'll talk about apprenticeship in a minute. But large, principles of work-based learning. We want to support entry-level and advancement in a career track. Provide meaningful job tasks that build career skills and knowledge. So working four hours a week in an office and getting coffee for people is not a meaningful job task. That's not really applied learning. It could be a piece of it, but that's not really the applied learning.

Work-based learning should be paid. It's certainly our recommendation and preference. Identify skills to be obtained and how the gains will be validated. Reward skill development. Support college entry, persistence, and completion, and provide comprehensive student supports. Now, the basics of the principles of work-based learning is that it's a structured program that leads to a career pathway that leads to something; right? In apprenticeship, you have a job and it leads to mastery of that job. Other work-based, it can lead to a job or other outcomes.

Let me switch to apprenticeship. So apprenticeship is a work-based learning model on that continuum. Registered apprenticeship is probably at the highest end of that in terms of evidence and success. And then, there's a whole range of those other programs that I just reviewed with you. But to many of us on the line, apprenticeship is a matter of quality, rigor, and standard. It is paid; right? So it's not training and then you go get a job. It is paid.

It has a structured on-the-job learning component supervised by a mentor, typically a year or more. It has a related training and instruction component on the job. So they're on the job, two, three, four days a week. In the classroom, one day a week, or weekends. Depends how it's structured. So you're getting the classroom skills and the on-the-job learning. Most importantly, you're getting some intense supervision from a mentor or supervisor who's ongoing – giving you an ongoing assessment of your skills development as you progress towards mastery.

And any apprenticeship worth its salt, whether it's registered, non-registered, or the new IRAT model culminates in some sort of recognized post-secondary credential. And that's really important, that these are not just short-term programs that get you some sort of certificate of completion, but that they end in a meaningful recognized credential there.

So there's a range of pre-apprenticeship activities that can be aligned to registered apprenticeship activities. I don't have enough time to go into that now, but certainly, refer to this or DOL's website for how you articulate pre-training, pre-apprenticeship programs into existing apprenticeship efforts. The biggest challenge all of you have is employer participation. I think as I talked earlier, employer participation is really critical, how you get it.

Are you armed with the facts? It's a tightening labor market. Employers get a chance to grow their own workforce. They get to craft what the workers get trained in. So it's a real win-win for employers. They get skilled workers and they get to train them the way they want them. So employers can have a central role in setting up what their requirements are of that job or that position.

Again, the tight labor market makes it really imperative for employers to get in the game. Stop complaining about high schools, the community colleges, in four years. Get into the game. Get involved in the education system. Employers can provide those on-the-job learning activities. It helps their company. It helps to create the next generation of workers. And there's also a range of intermediaries out there who can be very helpful in help setting up these programs.

So I rapidly went through a lot of information. I think probably the bottom line I'll leave you with, and I'll pass it back to Sara, is there's plenty of information out there, both at DOL and elsewhere or our Center for Apprenticeship and Work-Based Learning about setting up highly structured high-quality work-based learning. Whether they be registered apprenticeships, non-registered, or other forms of work-based learning. Whether it's with younger students or older adults and students.

So there's lots of information out there. I think the key is to get an employer partner. Work with them to craft a program that works. And the most important thing is, outreach to your local workforce boards. Connect with your community college. Work with veterans' programs. Work with women's programs in your communities. But really, expand that pipeline of workers you bring into the apprenticeship and work-based learning space. Sara, I'll send it back to you.

MS. LAMBACK: Great. Thank you so much, Eric, and as you mentioned, you did cover a lot of content in those 10 minutes. So for all of our participants who are in attendance, please don't hesitate to type into the chat box if there's a particular area you'd like to learn more about or if you have any questions about some of the information that Eric just shared.

Before we move into – move onto our next presenter, Eric, I'd love to hear just a little bit from you if you have any specific examples of how employers and workforce organizations have really used some of – excuse me. How employers have used work-based learning as a strategy to diversify their talent type pipeline and their workforce. Are there any particularly strong examples in field that you might want to share with folks who are on the line? And any kind of best practices there that may be just worth touching on for folks who are looking to do that?

MR. SELEZNOW: Yeah. There's – yeah. Sure. And I'll keep it brief. There's very few best practices, but there's a lot of promising practices out there. I'll just give you two that are just on the tip of my tongue because I know they're new ones. But I'll give you three real quick ones. So Aon, which is a global financial services company; they're based in Chicago.

Basically, they never partnered with their city community colleges and they looked out over them every day, as their – (inaudible) – assistant CEO would say. So they crafted a highly structured apprenticeship program for the insurance industry. They worked closely with DOL to do that, by the way. And they partnered with the school and the students go to work three days a week and they go to class at the city college two days a week and they become certified credentialed insurance claims administrator.

What that did, by them partnering with the city colleges of Chicago for this program, opened up a range of diverse students that they never accessed before. They were – and they were bringing everybody in the door saying you had to have a bachelor's degree and they changed that policy. They don't require a bachelor's degree anymore. They went to the community college and it just opened up – because they realized they didn't need a bachelor's degree to do this job. They could train them their own way, grow their own, and get what they needed.

So it opened up a huge and diverse array of students for them to come through. So Aon's probably a good example. You know, Amazon has done these incredible cloud services apprenticeship programs and they've reach out very specifically to veterans in many of their sites. So that has brought them – the veteran populations in and the diversity of the military in there.

And there are other examples, too, – (inaudible) – to go into here, where companies have reached out to other community-based organizations or intermediaries have brought in some of their constituency groups from the community and connected them with employers. So in the interest of time, I'll stop there, but there are many examples of increasing diversity by doing that outreach.

MS. LAMBACK: That's great. Thank you so much, Eric. And there's one question that came in from Tori while you were just touching on that question. And she's wondering what are some of the intermediaries who are assisting with creating these work-based learning opportunities?

You mentioned the important role that intermediary organizations play. I know that you have some familiarity with a range of organizations that actually do this work in supporting the building of work-based learning opportunities. But who are some of the main players you've seen in the field so far?

MR. SELEZNOW: Yeah. So I mean, there's a lot of them that are national, and DOL has funded a range of industry intermediaries. The American Hospitality and Lodging Association. JFF, we want a manufacturing intermediary program. They have Bell's CIO. And there's several other national intermediaries that DOL has funded, and you can find that through DOL's website at the Office of Apprenticeship. So they do it by industry.

So for example, the American Hospitality and Lodging Association is working with hotels all over – the hotel industry all over the country – to bring in more apprentices. And so those are national intermediaries. They're national industry associations and there are also local ones. So the Central Manufacturing – the Manufacturing Association of Central New York, for example, is an industry intermediary there that works with manufacturers to expand apprenticeship.

In North Carolina, there's a community organization that established the Guilford Apprenticeship Partnerships, which is a regional semi-rural apprenticeship also in manufacturing. So it depends where they are in your community. There's, of course, the traditional industry labor and construction and building trades organizations. I mean, they're intermediaries as well. So let's not forget them.

But it's a matter of finding out who the intermediaries are in your area, making a relationship with them. Making sure that it gets your clients ready and prepared to enter into either work-based learning apprenticeship with them. So it's really finding out who those intermediaries or partners are.

There's a growing number of community colleges across the country that are becoming apprenticeship intermediaries and sponsors. There's a few work-force boards are getting better about that in terms of becoming sponsors and intermediaries on a number of community organizations and associations.

So they're out there. I can't name them all here. We did a webinar in intermediaries, if I can plug it. It's on our website. You can sort of get a download on how to work with intermediaries. Just takes a little elbow grease and work in your community to find somebody who can partner with to be an apprentice. And I think a couple of the guests that are coming up are going to really highlight what it's like to have other people in the industry who can be helpful as intermediaries.

MS. LAMBACK: Excellent. That's very helpful. Thank you so much, Eric. And for our participants, please feel free, again, just to keep bringing those questions into the chat box. We're happy to ask those of the presenters and/or hold them until the broader Q&A. So don't hesitate to just keep the questions coming.

At this point, I would like to introduce our next speaker. John Shaw is a research and strategic initiatives manager with the Northern Virginia Technology Council, a trade association for the tech community that currently serves over 1,000 companies and organizations in the greater capital region. John leads a range of innovative research projects that highlight the current landscape of talent demand in the tech sector and really showcases how this informs employers' perspectives on a number of issues, including work-based learning. John, I'll pass it over to you.

John Shaw: Thank you, Sara. As Sara mentioned, I'm with the Northern Virginia Technology Council. We are a membership and trade association based in Northern Virginia. But that said, we're looking at issues that are affecting the region. So when we're looking at workforce issues and the like, we're taking a greater Washington D.C. perspective.

We're the largest tech council in the nation. We have approximately 1,000 members, the vast majority of which are in the IT line of business while they're also sort of partnering or adjacent industries that get involved as well. Just financing and the insurance, other sort of support services, and the like. And membership is on an organizational basis and so, within that, we have about 300,000 people within the D.C. area that we're representing.

We have in our – within the resource department, our program we call the Tech Talent Initiative. And that's where we house the majority of our workforce-related programming, as well as the original research and online resource materials so that we're trying to serve as a hub for the community to get as close as we can to a one-stop shop for workforce needs.

We've got one particular program that's salient to this conversation, and it's our Tech Talent Employer Collaborative. We're using the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Talen Pipeline Management methodology, which is basically just taking the best practices of supply chain management and using that to put – to bring employers together so that you have a business-driven shared needs approach to developing a regional pipeline that has the skills that business needs for them to be successful on day one of their employment.

We're in our second year of running this. Last year, we focused solely on software development and cyber security. This year, we're continuing focus on those while also adding in analytics and network infrastructure. And it's open to anyone. The only constraints for membership is that you would need to be hiring for one of those four positions in the Greater Washington Area.

Work-based learning has come up numerous times in that project, as well as in other places. We've certainly done the most work with it, though, in that Tech Talent Employer Collaborative. Actually, I'm sorry, I jumped ahead a little bit too early on that one. A bit more context on the employer collaborative, is we've got currently over – had as high as 30 and we're currently sitting at 22 IT employers based in D.C. that are participating in that.

So we're doing with real-time projections from them to find out what are their best-case, max growth hiring projections. We do things where we'll track back to find out where the talent that they've hired within the last 12 months, that sort of matched this recipe that we're building towards. Where did they find those?

Through there, we're also looking at any type of edge we can find to addressing the problem of workers shortage here in this region, where we're always under capacity in terms of the job openings, but especially so in cyber security and software development. Because of that, the folks that are participating in the employer collaborative have expressed a good deal of reluctance to start up an internship program.

To be blunt, the view is that they do want to spend time cultivating a resource that isn't locked in onto a hiring plan. One of their – also, their hiring pain point, the real problems that they're facing, is at the mid-year of experience. So which we're to finance more than two years, less than five years of experience.

They just don't have enough time and bandwidth to support those kinds of things. It's not that they don't think that they're valid. It's just they need to more closely align with filling the positions, as opposed to doing more of the gardening approach, where they're hunters instead of gardeners in terms of how they're getting their staffing.

Perhaps unique to this region, given that it's so heavily dominated by the federal contracting space, is also one of the prohibiting factors for them to get involved with. The internship – any internship that has been performed does not count as actual work experience according to the federal government. So they may have an intern for over two years, but they're still coming in, as far as the government is concerned, as zero years' experience working professionally in that.

The folks that are doing traditional internships have been doing them for a very long time. And so it's just keeping things going, as opposed to starting something new. They have processes and manpower in place, clearly defined roles, and they're just, at this point, following through on what – for the most part, on what they've already done. And generally, those are tied as well to their larger recruitment plan, which means that they're going after the places where they think they're going to find their future workforce.

All this said, the one place where I've seen genuine openness is around apprenticeships, which is also one of the ways that I personally think is, too, the best ways to address the fix for the mid-tier experience level. Because if you're an apprenticeship, that is actual on-the-job experience, and that counts. So graduating out of that, they're already graduating into a mid-tier level.

Some of the other work that we do is – includes a needs assessment, where we do interviews and talk to employers to find out where are their – what are the highest demand positions that they're trying to fill? What are the pain points? What are the skills gaps there? And then, finally, what does that position look like from a skills attributes perspective? And finally, what – which of those skills are the most important to them? Which ones are they basing their hiring decisions on?

We last published the needs assessment in December, 2016. We are scheduled to publish an update in mid-October of this year. And in fact, the final draft is due to my co-authors on Friday. So I'm a little frantic currently. In the newest version, we took a little different approach and we had employers participating in the aforementioned collaborative to submit anonymized resumes of what they considered to be their model employees.

We then broke that down into discrete data points to – so that we could analyze trends around educational attainment, work experience, certifications, coding language competencies, frameworks competencies, and applications and toolkits competencies. And then, some of the data that we're about to jump into is coming from that. It will be used to help derive the development, the needs assessment report that is to help drive the development of workforce pipeline.

We're partnered with our local community college and they used the last one to help guide their curriculum development, as well as some of the programming around coding languages. And we want to extend that as far as we can. Just – when I run over it, there's a lot more of this kind of data here that you're seeing on the screen at the end of it, in the appendix. In it, there's basically – there's two lines of data coming through. The first slide will be data that's collected from the resume analysis. And then, the second slide behind it is data from labor market information resources.

So I went back and checked the high frequency appearances from the resume collection do, in fact, tend to match what we're seeing. So if we look at Java and JavaScript and we look at certifications by add citations, it starts to get a little different there. And then, also included are the generic job profiles that were created by the employers last year as well, the ones that we're doing this year. Any questions?

MS. LAMBACK: Thank you so much for that presentation, John. And again, I'll encourage folks to just keep typing those questions into the chat as you have them. And as folks are doing that, John, one thing that I was wondering during your presentation. I know you said that it's rare for employers to – among the employers that you surveyed and those who participated in your study, a lot of them felt like there were impediments to work-based learning and they may not have been aware or likely to partake in work-based learning.

But among those who did, did you get any insight into what might be the enabling conditions or in what circumstances that the employers were more likely to participate in work-based learning opportunities with a local community college or a workforce agency?

John Shaw: To be bluntly honest, and I say that because it's not exactly the kind of answer – or the answer is not one you would necessarily think, the ones that are doing it tend to do it because of a personal association. Either they or someone with authority within their organization has a relationship with an existing talent source.

So they're largely driven by we have a internship program with alma mater or with my wife's alma mater or what have you. The ones that – beyond that, the other ones that are open to it would be the ones that saw real value from personal experiences. So it's not necessarily a broad-based messaging thing. It's more of – driven by personal experiences and their history with an organization.

MS. LAMBACK: That's really helpful. Thank you, John. One other thing I was curious about, you shared so much data and I know you mentioned that some of that is available in the appendix portion of the presentation, for folks who are on the line and want to just learn a little bit more about what emerged from the ideal resume analysis. But will the full report be available on the NOVA Tech council website? Or where can folks go? I know it'll be a couple of months, but where can folks go to find that one as it's available if they're interested?

John Shaw: It will be available on our website and the – our intent is that it – there is no impediment. There won't be a membership firewall between someone out in the world and this report. You may have to submit your e-mail address, but you don't have to join NVTC in order to get the data. Really, our work here is – if we don't get the word out, it's meaningless.

MS. LAMBACK: Thank you so much and thank you for the presentation, John. At this point, I'd like to move us over to our third speaker, Paul Spivey. Paul is the assistant dean of technology, engineering, and mathematics at Bossier Parish Community College in Bossier City, Louisiana.

Paul has an industry background and has done extensive work at Bossier Parish Community College as part of a round two TAC grant in strengthening the institution's relationship with employers and really building out a very robust employer engagement effort, generally, and a capstone internship program, which he'll share a little bit about during his presentation. So without further ado, I'll pass it over to you, Paul.

Paul Spivey: Hey, everyone. As she said, my name is Paul Spivey. So appreciate you having me come to speak with you all today. I've really kind of been a boots on the ground. Any time I'm doing a talk, I'm going to make sure that you understand what we implemented and get some best practices, maybe, that can work for you. So today, that's really what we're going to look at. And really, to set the stage, let me go over some challenges, maybe, that you're experiencing with employers.

You may be in a position where some of employers have had some bad experiences with maybe a previous student that they've hired. You may even be in a situation where your faculty really, really love their courses and are resistant to changing those courses. You may have a situation where the employers have misconceptions about the caliber of students that's coming out of your program. Or maybe their HR departments are still rigid in the requirements, needing higher levels of education or experience.

And lastly, you may be in a situation where your program is new and really just unproven and you have to get it out there. And so from our experience, when I was with a TAC two grant, they brought me in at the very last year of the grant, which, in hindsight, that was really a big mistake because someone in that position that's trying to engage employers, that should have been done from the very beginning. In where you bring the employers in and make them part of the discussion.

And so one of the first things we did, we invited all the hiring managers from IT companies and essentially had a round table discussion. And it took on a life of its own. You know, we were worried about are we going to have write questions?

But I promise you, once you get them all in a room, they are going to be so willing and happy to talk about what their problems are, what keeps them up at night, and how you can help them. And this round table really was the launching point to create the buy-in from the employer side, where they really, honestly, felt like they were listened to.

And we took that feedback. We implemented it and we updated the curriculum. We created new courses. And from that, a lot of our programs, we flipped the model where there was an internship capstone class that our students would end up taking. So you probably know a lot of the benefits from an internship course, but what we saw along our end was a lot of our students, it highly increased their chances of being employed. You had a more engaged learned because they knew what was at the end of the program. And we saw employers really buy into the idea.

And so from a logistics standpoint, we would have each employer sign an MOU only one time, which I think we're going to make sure to share that file. And my advice to you all is to use that MOU to the best of your ability, edit it, so that it makes sense. What I tell the employer is this is – so that we set the expectations.

Students can have a form they're going to sign too. We just want to make sure that it's quality work that the students coming in. But most importantly, that students coming in, because you have a chance to see if they have the capacity, if they're a good team player. And so we have – like I said, both do an MOU and then the students in agreement.

Some of the parameters we put around it, we want to make sure that the mentor is in that particular field. They must be knowledgeable and the work that the students do and apply it to their degree. They can't be doing janitorial work. Something to keep in mind, a lot of the things that we were doing in TAC two were IT-related. So we didn't want to just focus in on only IT companies. We wanted to look at schools and hospitals and banks and get with their CIOs and invite them and share about the internship opportunity.

And there were some students that just had difficulty placing. And so as a result, because I know you probably had a question, what do you do with those? We would sub a higher level course where we had to. We tried not to do that, but if push came to shove, that's what we – the route we would take. And as far as the actual academic course, our students, they received three credit hours.

And so I think this paves the way for a lot of the employers to make the decision of they can do an unpaid internship or a paid internship. Because at the end of the day, if students knew they were going to get credit for it, went to the program, and also, it could lead to a job. So both – it gave some flexibility and the students were engaged from that point.

We've done online classes, where a lot of the class management was online. But all the internship was either face-to-face or virtual. We've done some versions that are hybrid classes, where they do – would do a week at the site. And then, the next week, they would come back to the class and the instructor would share things and help. So we've done it both ways.

Usually, we're stipulating about 100 contact hours a semester. We'll have some students that want to do a internship, but it – one of the requirements we made is that they have to be enrolled in the course at the same time as the internship. So that's something you might encounter as an issue. We can find the intern sites or the student can. It's really up to them. And we've done local, national, like I said face-to-face, and virtual. They've been paid or unpaid. And none of the 12 programs – we have it where the capstone course is required.

But there are three of them that are new and upcoming and we're still building those relationships. So we kind of have an and/or where it's an elective, but they could pick a higher level. And so that gives you some flexibility if you're just now starting this.

The mock interviews is something that we've embedded into that internship capstone, and that's been really a powerful employer engagement event, where we'll bring in, say, three or four managers and they will do a mock interview with our students. And I can't tell you how many times that's led to our students getting a job offer or say, hey. We actually want you to come in for a real interview.

And just to give you an idea of something you may end up doing differently if you don't go fully to the internship model. We've developed a new course in our programming program. And essentially, the students will always go to that classroom, but the employer comes to the classroom. They provide actual projects to work on and from there, they give feedback on how the students are doing.

And this isn't related necessarily to the internship course, but these are a lot of activities that worked well for us. We invited our alumni who were working in the IT field at a particular company to come back. And we had a alumni-employee panel, and that was really powerful because students got to hear from their peers and they really liked that a lot.

Another event that we've done, we did a resume and interviewing workshop, where I brought in HR experts or HR managers from the IT companies and they could share kind of the dos and don'ts of resumes, what they're looking for. And then, tips for interviewing. And students really got a lot out of that. Of course, we brought in classroom speakers to enrich content if we have an expert in that area. We've done tours over at building – or different employment sites, where the hiring managers will share kind of the day-to-day operations.

And the academic curriculum summit, we have a company next door. Now, they're General Dynamics Information Technology, but at the time, they were CSRA. And they brought in a lot of their experts and hiring managers and whenever trends – what they're looking for, and really, identify our students where they could improve. And that was really powerful on continuing the conversation of what our curriculum looks like, how can we make those updates.

And lastly, we have some joint career fairs that we've done, where I always make sure that our table is right by a lot of our partners. So that if someone comes to their company and they want to get a job there, that recruiter can point to me and I can say, OK. Well, you want to go there, we have some programs that will help you get to that place. So I think I'm close to my time being over, but I would love to welcome any questions that you may have from our experiences.

MS. LAMBACK: Excellent. Thank you so much, Paul. One thing I was wondering as folks are typing their questions into the chat boxes, now that you have a couple of rounds of work under your belt with the internship capstone program, what type of feedback are you getting from employers and students? Have you had to make any changes along the way? And kind of what are you hearing about the program so far?

Paul Spivey: We get really positive feedback on it because one of the things we embed and I forgot it was we have an employer feedback survey. And so they send that back to all of our – on every one of the students that intern there. And so it gives us a chance to find out what we're missing and it really gives the employers a chance to mold that student into their culture and what they want.

And they could see if they're a good fit. So I think that from the flexibility of not necessarily having to even pay it, that particular student, and understanding that we're going to continue to refine the curriculum, it's really been beneficial. And like I said, with the students, they know what's at stake and they know that if they do well and improve themselves, that they'll be able to likely get a job at the end of it.

MS. LAMBACK: That's really helpful. Thank you, Paul. All right. So we can move into our broader Q&A discussion. And I think the first question that I'd like to pose, really to all of our panelists, I think that picks up on a couple of points that both Paul and Eric mentioned, but also ties directly into, John, your presentation as well. I'd be really curious what you all are seeing and your perspective on how to actually move the need and move employers from kind of one level of partnership into a deeper type of partnership that involves another form of work-based learning.

So for example, Paul, you spoke about employers who might participate in an alumni or employee panel. How do you kind of move them from participating in what's kind of a light-touch activity into actually taking part in your internship or capstone program? What's that conversation like and what type of strategies have you had to use to kind of move folks from one level – or move employers from one level of engagement into another? And maybe, Paul, I'll start with you and then I'd love to hear from Eric on that question as well.

Paul Spivey: You know, I hate to simplify it, but I think it's having someone who's committed to building that relationship. And so for me, I enjoy them. Like, I really did enjoy getting to meet with the employers and always say find a need and meet a need.

And so if you're asking the questions of what do you need, what jobs are you having a hard time filling? And if they know that you're a partner, I think it's going to go a long way. They're going to be willing to invest in the program because they know it's going to be – in return, help them. So it's cheesy, but it's about relationship and it's about being present and not just invited them to an advisory board once a year.

MS. LAMBACK: That's great advice. And Eric, go ahead. Sorry.

MR. SELEZNOW: Well, I was just going to – I completely agree. It's not about coffee and doughnuts, an advisory board a couple of meetings a year doing that. It's not it at all. It's really – most of this work happens – and I think Paul had it right. It happens on the sort of local and regional partnership level. And employers got to know that there's somebody there to help them with the heavy lifting, that you have a qualified education and training provider, like a college or some other, and that they see this happening elsewhere across the country; right?

So getting them examples, which I thought was good about your question. Really, giving these examples of an internship capstone project or highly structured work-based learning or a registered apprenticeship in IT, of which there are many now, and a range of IT and cyber and elsewhere.

And so it's all about developing this relationship over time and it may not happen immediately; right? So for those on the webinars now, it's sort of frustrating to talk to these employers. They don't get it. It may take a while to get them there and you may eventually have a breakthrough with an employer or group of employers.

It's also sometimes helpful to do this by industry sector; right? So bring 10 to 12 employers together and go through that industry sector process with them, if you're familiar with doing that. But it really is – it's local and regional. It's about the partnerships you develop and how you build them over time. And start small and build; right? So maybe it's a work-based learning internship program to start. Maybe you borrow some stuff to do a capstone-like program.

Maybe you advance that into an apprenticeship. Maybe one of you becomes an intermediary that works with the – either the state apprenticeship agency or state DOL apprenticeship rep to turn it into an apprenticeship, making it easier for – easy for the employer. So there's a couple of different ways to do it, but I think it takes a little bit of persistence. And again, a lot of this work is, you know if you're in the workforce business, it is about local relationships and trust and competence that they have in you.

MS. LAMBACK: I think that's really helpful, both the notion of starting small and kind of building and then also, of course, just the importance of really focusing in on that relationship itself as being the key to moving from one level into another in terms of engagement. John?

John Shaw: It's hard to find time to do that. Pardon the interruption. It's hard to do that work; right? And so I want to honor that to people who are listening. But that's where you see it take off and succeed over time.

MS. LAMBACK: That's great. Thank you. And so one of the questions that's come in from one of our participants is about measuring the aptitude for IT positions. This is a hot button issue for a number of employers. They feel like the hard skills, they can develop, but oftentimes, figuring out who has an aptitude for IT or the tech sector more generally is often a particular challenge.

And from this question, it sounds like a lot of times, employers are looking for maybe folks with a certain level of aptitude before bringing them on to participate in an internship or a apprenticeship or some other form of work-based learning.

Is that anything – have you all used any tests or any types of assessments to measure aptitude before folks participate in work-based learning opportunities? Paul? And then, Eric, have you see anything broader in the field? If there's anything that's been used kind of across different types of organizations to gauge the fit for someone within a work-based learning opportunity?

Paul Spivey: This is Paul. I can speak from our experience with some of the IT programs, as well as some of the other ones. And what we found has been really helpful. We map a lot of our courses to some of the industry-based certifications that the employers have highlighted that are important to them.

And then, when our students are applying, on their resume, they can say that they have that certification. And we always remind the students that what the certification gives an indication to the employer is that you have the capacity to learn, you have a good foundation and a starting knowledge of the material.

Doesn't mean you're an expert, no, but this is something that at least they know that in addition to the degree, that you have a good understanding. And even if that particular certification doesn't directly apply to the job you're applying for, again, it shows that they have the capacity to learn and that they're a quick study. So that may be an approach that some people look to take in mapping their curriculum.

MS. LAMBACK: Mm-hmm. That's great. That's really helpful. And Eric, is there anything that you may want to add, just based on what you've seen in the field more generally?

MR. SELEZNOW: Well, and I think most folks probably know this, but any highly structured apprenticeship or work-placed learned program is going to have some sort of entry-level requirements; right? Part of that is being assessed in certain levels of math, certain levels of science, certain aptitudes that folks want to have.

So there's many tools out there. I think in 20 years, we found many of the programs out there have some sort of screening and assessment mechanism. I'm not an expert on them. I'm sure our other guests are. But they're out there and you'll need to have them. And sometimes, it's as simple as a TABE or a math and science assessment for these. But people should not go into this thinking, oh, I can just put anybody into this program. There may be some pre-work to do to get them up to that level.

And I would also just want to plug in as you career pathway these things and sort of whether it's pre-apprenticeship-type of program that articulates into a more intensive internship that articulates into an apprenticeship, or something like that. But we should look at these as sequential learning that sort of ups – brings up the skills of people over time. And that's one set of courses or instruction or training certification that relates to another more advanced one over time.

MS. LAMBACK: Great. Thank you so much, Eric. And that's an important point, just around making sure that these opportunities are really built into a broader career pathway and ensuring that folks do have kind of the knowledge to translate this into – as participates go through, they have a sense of what they're ultimately building toward and what the next step might be along that pathway as they move along their career.

Another question that came in, and it looks like this is directed to you, Paul, is just around the funding for the capstone program that you discussed. How are the intern wages funded? Are they – are folks provided with stipends? If so, where do those come from and what types of funds do you draw on to support that internship program?

Paul Spivey: Yeah. So we really stay clear of any of the money exchange. We leave that up to the company and it's their choice if they want to do a paid or non-paid internship and how they onboard that student. And I'll have to look back on if that's specifically outlined in the MOU. But that's something that you could easily update and edit and put it into the MOU as you kind of make it your own. And if there are funds out there, I'd love for you to share those with me so that we can also utilize those.

MS. LAMBACK: Great. Thank you. And this is just another call for folks to keep typing those questions into the chat box so we can make sure to get them. We have definitely enough time to get to two or three more questions. So if you have anything that's on your mind, please go ahead and just type that right into the chat box.

One question that I was curious about, in thinking about kind of the history of apprenticeship and work-based learning in some of the sectors, like construction and the skilled trades, there's been – apprenticeship and work-based learning have been used for a long time. Employers are familiar with those different strategies. And I think there's just a general kind of not only familiarity, but kind of an enthusiasm for work-based learning as way to build a talent pipeline.

Are there any recommendations that our speakers have? And I think – Eric, this is directed towards you. But I think also, John, based on your knowledge of the tech sector and what you saw from some of the employer survey data too. I'd be really curious if there's any kind of in-points that you're seeing and kind of – in-points that you're seeing to develop work-based learning opportunities in tech.

And what might be some of the areas where a sector that's kind of getting started in doing this can really take advantage of learnings from construction or skilled trades to do this right as they roll out some of these apprenticeship and work-based learning opportunities.

MR. SELEZNOW: This is Eric. I guess I'll go first. I mean, I think John is going to have a much more interesting perspective and modernized perspective than I would. But I would just say, in the last 80 to 100 years of apprenticeship in the United States, right, it's been the purview of the building trades and construction trades and a little bit of manufacturing, and others. But mostly those.

They've perfected a process that met the demand needs of employers, the supply needs of workers. It works very well for the industry. They use an intermediary. They use training. It has high quality. It has high standards and it's really met the workforce needs of that industry and just keeps a steady pipeline of qualified workers going to them that they get to train the way they want them.

So the lessons learned from that is – and that's why the Obama Administration jumped out into apprenticeships, because they said if that model can work there, it can work anywhere. And in fact, it can. It's some of the myth and misperception about apprenticeship that holds people back. But I think it's refreshing to hear John and Phil talk about how this new generation of work-based learning and apprenticeship is coming around, particularly in the tech industry. So I'll let him comment on that.

But it still needs the same thing. It's meeting an industry need and it meets it not only from employers, it also meets it for workers and provides some excellent pathways to the middle class. And there's benefits on both sides of this and I think the tech industry is finding that as well.

MS. LAMBACK: Thanks so much, Eric. John, any thoughts on your end?

John Shaw: Yeah. So the idea of IT apprenticeships is not well circulated in the greater public. It's something that's, I think, just starting, at least in – with the folks that I'm talking with around DC. It's a whole new – a lot of them are seeing this as potentially as I could have had a VA-type moment.

And I think it's just - the challenge is going to be in communicating to them how it benefits them to making the sell of, OK, there is time "lost" in the classroom, but at the same time, they are – it's something of a co-op atmosphere, with them being on the payroll. Also, the retention side of things, which I think – I don't remember the figure that was put out earlier, but it was exactly in line –

MR. SELEZNOW: About – (inaudible) – percent.

John Shaw: Yeah. I think that's going to be the one that's going to ring the loudest for these folks, because retention is a huge issue. If they could get a ahead of the retention side of things, that's going to eliminate a lot of the bandwidth-draining activities they're already engaged in. So I think it's about messaging and the value to the employer, how it'll take this off your plate. How it ensures retention. How it helps you graduate workforce out of the entry level.

MS. LAMBACK: Thank you for that, John. One of the other questions that came in from folks on the line was just around how do you work with an employer that sees the tech hire program as good? They value the program in general, but they're put off by the amount of time it takes to upskill a student.

Knowing that it costs money that's taken away from production and other activities, just to get a student ready to contribute to the company and onboarded to a work-based learning opportunity or an apprenticeship, what do you do there? How do you counteract that? And how do you kind of work through some of the challenges, especially when there maybe have been past experiences where students may have left after they spent that time to upskill? I'll let any of our speakers who have thoughts on that weigh in and leave it open to anyone who wants to take that question.

Paul Spivey: This is Paul. I think this goes back to you having a relationship with an employer and being able to speak candidly with them. If a student is taking time, they want to get a job. If they leave, there's a reason they're leaving.

So why are they leaving? And I think you have to have that honest conversation. Is it the culture? Is the pay that they need to look at redoing the pay structure? Is it the working hours? Is it the management?

There is a reason and I think on your part, being at the institution and having – we send surveys to our students, post-graduation surveys, and have good relationships with them too. And so we have a good feeling of why they leave, but I think the employer has to really look at their company and if they're willing to address the issues of why those students aren't staying, that can change for them.

MS. LAMBACK: Thank you, Paul. John or Eric, any other thoughts on that question? Anything else you want to add there?

MR. SELEZNOW: I would just say – and I'll go back to what we talked about. I agree with what Paul said. I agreed previously with what John said. You know, there is such myth and misperception. There's imprecise language about this work. But it all really comes down to applied learning, to really learning on the job and getting skilled workers. And this – again, it's this tightening labor market.

There is competition for workers. I don't know how they can afford not to get more engaged with high schools, community colleges, work-based learning opportunities for their works and their companies, in a range of positions; right? I mean, they should be doing that with everybody from the warehouse to the front office to administrative staff. I mean, it's a great way to prepare your workers and to screen workers, quite frankly. It's a great way to do that.

So there's a lot of need for employers. There's a lot of complaints about the education and training system. And again, I encourage employers to get involved, get skin in the game, get involved to help grow their own workforce. It's in their own self-interest to do so. The companies that are successful at it feel like they found the secret sauce; right? They feel lucky and they feel like they've got this real secret.

And the other ones – on the sidelines are not that interested. But I guess that's our call, but how do you develop your next generation of workers even if it's only a couple – (inaudible)?

MS. LAMBACK: Mm-hmm. Absolutely. That's a great point. And before we close out, I'd just like to – Eric, since you just shared that with us, I'd love to just give both Paul and John maybe about another – like, one minute or so just to share any kind of closing thoughts or recommendations.

Paul, is there anything that you want to touch on or any kind of things that you wish you would have known as you started your internship or capstone experience program at Bossier Parish Community College that you might share with TechHire grantees who are interested in doing something similar or getting a work-based learning program off to the start?

Paul Spivey: Yeah. I mean, with anything, if you've never done it, if you don't currently have the employer contacts, just don't be afraid to come and start out small and just continue building on it. And if you have any questions, I'm always trying to think through the lens of if I were a student, what would be the most impactful thing for me to learn what I need to learn and to get a job?

And the same way, if I was an employer, what would I want? And most of the times, it's going to affect their hiring practices or the bottom line and how can I be an asset to them? So sometimes, just take a second to think through what's not necessarily what does my institution need to do, but what would they want and what's going to be the most impactful thing?

John Shaw: Paul stole my answer. What I was going to say, it's all about demonstrating the value to them. The more – if you're coming to them as a problem solver and saying, look. I can take these problems off your plate here, they're likely to listen.

And the more informed you are going into that about what their problems are, the more it will resonate with them. And I think that – I haven't really looked at it from the student perspective, like Paul had, but I imagine it's the same from there. It's about facilitating these connections. How do you drive them towards each other? And I think you do that by proving your value.

MS. LAMBACK: Those are great recommendations. So I want to give enormous thanks to our speakers, Eric, Paul, and John, for all of the expertise and insight you shared during today's webinar. Before we close out the content formally, I did want to make a quick announcement, just around the TA that we have coming up over the next month or two.

We've heard from many of you all, our TechHire grantees, that you're looking for some opportunities to connect with similar grantees and engage in some peer problem-solving and just learn from what other grantees are doing. So we will be launching a series of peer learning calls that are segmented by organization type in late September and early October. So we'd love to just – we wanted to make you aware of that and to give you a head's up that you'll be invited to a conversation with other institutions similar to your own.

So we'll be grouping institutions of higher education, non-profits, and community-based organizations and workforce boards and unions together, each as a separate type of peer learning group. So please, be on the lookout for that invite over the next couple of weeks and I think you'll find the upcoming TA in this area interesting and will be a valuable way to connect with like grantees.

So our last poll question of the day, based on what you've heard from our speakers today and the content shared during this webinar, we'd love to get a sense of how do you feel after what you learned today? You know, please select one, Geronimo, we're excited to apply these data and strategies and other resources to our TechHire project, if you're feeling good.

Number two, work-based learning what? This might be for you if still have a couple questions and want to dive deeper into the topics that we shared today and just want more information.

And number three, a little overwhelmed, but excited. So please, choose – make the choice that best represents where you fall on that spectrum so that we have a sense of where you're at after today's webinar. Excellent. It looks like a lot of you are excited to apply these strategies. That's great to hear. And I think we can go ahead and close that poll and I will pass it over to Danielle to do the formal close-out for this webinar.

MS. KITTRELL: Thank you so much, Sara. And on behalf of DOL's TechHire team, I'd like to thank our three panelists for sharing their insights and expertise today. In addition, thank you to the TechHire grantees for your participation in this webinar and your thoughtful questions and comments on the presentation.

So closing. To get in touch with your TA providers, please e-mail the national office at techhire@dol.gov. And again, please take note of the additional findings from the NOVA Tech Council's workforce assessment, which is located in the appendix of this presentation.

And again, thank you all so much and have a great day.

(END)