**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**Apprenticeship Business Engagement Tools**

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JENNIFER JACOBS: Now without further ado, I'd like to turn things over to our moderator today, Gina Wells, senior analyst with Maher & Maher. Gina?

GINA WELLS: Thanks, Jen. Welcome, everybody. We're really excited you could join us today for what promises to be a really fun I hope and informative webinar really digging deep into skills that can help us all with our business engagement and outreach when we're talking about apprenticeship. We've got a great group of experts with us today, people who have been doing this work in the field and we're excited to share with you some tools that are available on WorkforceGPS that can help you in your own working space as well.

These tools were developed as part of some work the Employment and Training Administration has been doing with 37 state apprenticeship expansion grants, are working all across the country to expand the use of apprenticeship as a work-based learning strategy. These states and their partners have learned quite a bit about effective business outreach strategies and engagement strategies and we were able to capture those in the tools that form the basis of what we'll be talking about today.

So just a little bit about today's objectives. We want to provide you with an overview of these three new business engagement tools, but we're not going to walk you through them line by line or skill by skill. Instead, we want to give you a chance to hear about how the skills and tools provided in those documents are used every day by folks who do this work as part of their everyday profession.

So we've got three great guests with us who are going to be sharing these stories with you and we hope that you'll join us in the conversation. If you have a question at any time, we would love for to chime in. If we get a couple of topical questions, we might take them as we're moving through our content.

But I was also looking at our survey that you took as you signed in and I could see that there are a number of you who joined us today who do this business engagement work every day as part of your work and we know you have some great successful strategies as well. So please, if something we talk about today reminds you of a great success story you've had or a strategy that works for you, please chime in with that as well. We'd be happy to share it. We'd love to learn from each other.

And just as a reminder you will have seen in the invitation, we're going to have a follow on chat on the 9th of October that will give us a chance to dig down into some deeper application of these tools, so if you hear something here today that really strikes a chord, let us know. We'll be reaching out with information about how to join that chat.

So without further ado, let me introduce these tools. You will have seen a link to this as you were logging in to the webinar. Let me just walk you through what these tools are. There's three of them and they're designed to really help you speak the language of business and refine your business engagement technique so that you get better results and to help you create and maintain successful collaborations with employers.

The first one I'd recommend you check out is our business engagement quick guide. That guide introduces three key phases of business engagement and we'll be talking about those three phases today, researching business targets and preparing to engage, building relationships, and getting to a commitment on apprenticeship.

Then you'll want to check out the one-pager on talking to business. That is a handy quick reference guide. If it's something that you're working on yourself, you might want to print it out and put it next to your phone. It gives you quick tips about how to talk the language of business when you're working and engaging with business on apprenticeships.

And finally, there's a document called strategies and actions that is some little tiny case studies, real world examples of how some of the skills and tools we talk about in these two guides can be applied in your work. And so, like I find that to be a really helpful tool really thinking through OK, what are some challenges that I might be having and how can these skills help me?

So we encourage you to take a look at all three of these tools. Today's webinar certainly won't give you the full depth and breadth of them, so you might want to bookmark this or yeah. Print them out to look at them later so that you can apply them to the work that you're doing.

And now we'd like to get into the meat of our conversation, so I want to introduce you to our three great presenters. Well, I'll start with Sonya Grant. We're pleased to have her with us today. She's the chief operating officer of the Southeast Michigan Community Alliance, which is a workforce investment board that provides leadership and strategic planning and oversight for seven Michigan Works agencies in two large counties near Detroit. She's joined by Bill Kraus who was born and raised in Brooklyn, but he has served as USDOL's Georgia state director of apprenticeship since September of 2014.

And prior to that, he was the apprenticeship state director for New Jersey and New Hampshire and he brings years of experience tailoring apprenticeships to meet business needs. And last but not least is Gerry Ghazi. He's the founder of the Institute for American Apprenticeships at Vermont HITEC and is board chair and president since its creation in 2000. He's a state federal apprenticeship subject matter expert on various technical assistance projects across the country and he has extensive knowledge and experience in the areas of apprenticeship and linking resources together to support apprenticeship development.

So we know that you're going to enjoy talking and hearing from all these folks, so I want to get right to it. But before we go any further, we wanted to have Bill talk a little bit about just why is it so important to do effective business engagement. You know when we're busy, there's a lot of different ways to go about this. Bill, can you talk to us a little bit about why you think some of the best strategies and techniques out there really makes a difference in our work?

BILL KRAUS: Of course. Thank you very much, Gina. I appreciate your introduction. First of all, thanks. Hello to my friends in New York, Georgia, New Hampshire and New Jersey. I cut my teeth in apprenticeship when I was working for the New York State Department of Labor many, many, many, many years ago and they gave me great experiences. I'm bringing it forward, carrying the torch.

Business. What do we do? Why does it, why should we engage business and why does it matter? Well, let's face it. Business creates jobs. The government doesn't create the jobs. Business creates jobs. Not only do they create jobs, they create careers. They are the center for the stimulus of our entire country. What's happened over the years, there's been great attrition. There's been great growth. However, the skill gap has gotten larger and larger and many, many businesses over the years have reduced or cut their in-training programs and that's resulted in a skill gap right now where we have older workers who want to retire and we don't have anybody in the pipeline.

How do we do it? Why do we do it? We're going to cover a lot of that but remember, the most important part about engaging business is that we remember that this is an employer-driven system. These employers need jobs created. They need jobs filled with talented people, so we need to really do a really good job now to make sure that the business is engaged with us so we can bring resources to bear on this situation.

In many states across the country, the workforce development boards, the school systems, the high school systems, the non-for-profits, the community-based organizations are working together to help meet the needs of businesses. So why does it mean something? It's very important. Business wants to create jobs. We have a skills gap. We have about six million jobs right now in our country that are not filled, so we need to move forward and we need to engage them and meet their ongoing needs.

MS. WELLS: Thanks, Bill. That's great. It really is such an urgent challenge and we have such an opportunity to provide great solutions that meet the needs of business and job seekers and using some of the best tips and tricks out there so that we're delivering solutions that business valued is really critical.

So what I want to do now is introduce you to one of the first tools in our tool kit and that is this concept of an apprenticeship mindset. So something that the states we've been working with on apprenticeship expansion have found is that the ideas, the mindset that you bring to the table when you're preparing to talk to business about work-based learning and apprenticeship matters a whole lot and there's three key concepts that it's particularly helpful to have in mind.

So the first is that apprenticeship is a workforce development tool for business and that's in contrast to coming into the conversation with the idea that apprenticeship is a product that you might need to sell. So by thinking of workforce development as a tool that responds to a particular challenge that a business brings to the table, you're able to have a more collaborative, creative and productive conversation with business.

The second is the idea that apprenticeship is a formalized approach that enhances existing business practices and I think Gerry's going to talk to you a little bit about this over the course of our presentation. But the idea that apprenticeship is something different from what a business is doing can be challenging or off-putting to a business. Instead, it can be very powerful to learn very deeply how a business currently operates, how it recruits, how it onboards, how it upskills and advances its workers and to present apprenticeship as a formalized way of enhancing and doing what the business already does. It's less threatening and it's honest and it can create new and very promising conversations with business.

And finally, it's the idea that your pitch on apprenticeship is only as good as the apprenticeship program that's created. So you can be the most powerful, compelling salesperson of apprenticeship out there, but if the partnerships aren't there to bring together really great related technical instruction, really great recruitment and support to the workforce system, all the other kinds of partners that need to come to the table to bring an apprenticeship program to life, then you won't have an opportunity to work with business in the long term.

They need to know that the product that they've signed on for is excellent. So really being thoughtful about the partnerships that you're building and kind of your roll in the broader picture of creating great apprenticeship programs is important.

So Gerry, we wanted to ask you to talk a little bit about some examples of how these mindsets have influenced your work and your business engagement activities.

GERRY GHAZI: Great. Thank you so much, Gina. So one of the key aspects of looking at apprenticeship is as you said, a workforce development solution. So from the perspective of the employer, one of the things that employers love to hear is that you truly understand their business, so you're putting yourself in their shoes and really feeling their pain points along the way.

And so it really, a mindset that you go into is that if you're a collaborative with that business, if you're actually collaborating on helping find solutions and it happens to be that the apprenticeship framework is a solution that will help them fill a lot of the skills gaps they're facing.

So one of the things that I like to do is intense research before going in and then basically seek to understand. Walk in their shoes and try to get a feeling for what that employer is currently going through, and that approach will help you develop trust with the employer. It will give the employer the confidence that you understand their businesses and that you can approach a solution together.

And so again, one of the key aspects of it is truly understanding that business perspective and that takes using their language. It takes researching the business and also takes – (inaudible) – work with that employer or partner.

MS. WELLS: Thanks, Gerry. Thanks. I really appreciate that and we'll be coming back to you again to talk a little bit more about some of the work that you've done with businesses and really applying some of these pieces.

So our slides have been, our slides are moving around but Jen's going to get it back up for us. But what we want to do now is talk a little bit about the first phase of business engagement as it's outlined in our tool kit and that first phase is research and preparation. So this is really built on the idea that rather than going from business to business with cold calls and connecting with them about apprenticeship, you can do some legwork upfront that helps ensure that you're spending your time with businesses who have the type of workforce challenges that are well-suited to an apprenticeship solution.

So we're going to talk a little bit here about some techniques you can use to find these businesses, the types of data available to you that might help you uncover businesses that are likely good candidates for apprenticeship and then how to prepare and organize that research before you ever talk to a business so that, as Gerry said, you can come to them from this place of empathy. You know their sector. You know their likely pain points. You can do really good listening and create a conversation that they are really excited to participate in.

So while we're waiting for our slides to come up, I'm going to turn it over to Sonya and she's going to talk a little bit about types of preparation that can help make business outreach successful. Sonya, can you talk a little bit about that from your experience and what works in Michigan?

SONYA GRANT: Sure. There are a number of key indicators that you can use to recognize some of the business challenges. Employers may see the challenge, but they don't always know how to resolve it or have the resources to resolve it on their own.

For example, employers, they may have positions that have been posted for a long period of time or maybe there's positions that have been posted and reposted or maybe even they're facing a number of retirements in the very near future or they're using proprietary equipment. So recognizing these indicators very early on and taking a more consultative approach and coming in prepared to address the potential challenges to their success is really critical to successful business outreach.

Employers are, keep in mind that employers are very well aware of all the challenges that exist in resolving these issues. They're aware that there is a skills gap in this country and that there's a retiring workforce and that attracting talent and retaining talent is challenging. That's why it's even more important to come in prepared with effective solutions already identified.

And I cannot stress enough the importance of listening to that employer and just starting to validate their pain point by acknowledging OK yes. You know, we know that there's challenges out there and these challenges may appear to impede or slow your ability to resolve the issues. However, these challenges are not insurmountable.

And coming from the workforce agency perspective, we found that more often than not employers are not aware of the wealth of resources and services that are available at our America's Job Centers. So we want to make sure that we're able to present the employers with effective solutions that are coupled with funding strategies because that's going to add credibility and establish you as a business resource.

So prior to your meeting and coming in and having that discussion, you want to make sure you've conducted that research early on and make sure you have knowledge about potential training partners that might be able to develop some customized training programs for that particular employer, some potential funding sources that might be able to subsidize some of the cost for the training.

And these are all strategies for positioning yourself as an asset to that company, so having that true comprehensive understanding of all your potential partners, their resources and what value that they can potentially bring to that employer in meeting that employer's needs is really going to allow you to more quickly to be able to bring all those right players to the table to help you start developing that effective strategy very early on.

And don't be afraid to start thinking through really quickly suggested solutions like in developing those apprenticeship programs and on growing talent from within because these are all very easily feasible solutions to help start looking through and thinking about that skill talent recruitment because these kinds of solutions are going to make that employer a much more attractive workplace, place to work. It's going to improve that employee moral as well as improve retention rate by creating loyalty among the incumbent workers that they already have.

You want to also think of start looking at date – oh, I'm sorry, Gina. You also want to research –

MS. WELLS: Oh no. Go ahead.

MS. GRANT: Thank you. You want to also research and identify business and to do that, to find businesses that have critical needs where apprenticeships might be a good solution, that could really be as easy as just reviewing local job postings or you can utilize research and real time data to start identifying growing industry sectors and looking at labor market supply and demand for workforce needs.

Remember, this is really all about establishing yourself as a credible resource and using data can really support that credibility as well as help you identify potential employers who have those particular needs.

I know for us, we found that working very closely with business organizations and employer consortiums has really brought values to those particular groups as well as those employers because it's simultaneously adding credibility to our business service professionals. And we've been able to work together to develop business engagement strategies and organize, by organizing employer information sessions to educate employers about effective business solutions as well as utilizing this whole partnership approach because it became a very easy mechanism for those employers to access those resources.

And this also, for us as a workforce agency, provided us with an entire pool of employers who have indicated already that they have these needs and it allows us to work with those employers very closely to determine which of our business resource tools are the best solution to help meet those needs.

And keep in mind that as you move forward, when you're identifying these employers, they're all going to be at varying stages of readiness. So this means that every business is not going to be ready or even willing to tap into the resources that you have. So therefore, it's going to be extremely crucial that you have as well as utilize a CRM because this is going to help you keep track of who you met with, who, what your last contact with them was as well as what their needs are. So truly, a good CRM is definitely worth its weight in gold.

MS. WELLS: Oh that is such a – yeah. That is such a good point, Sonya, and I really appreciate you sharing such a wide range of approaches that can work in identifying businesses. And a few of those that are really underscored in the tool kit is sort of different data sources that are available to all of you to help find businesses for whom apprenticeship is going to be a potential good fit for their challenge.

So you know, apprenticeship is really great for businesses who have skills gaps in hiring, who need to develop their existing talent, who have trouble attracting and retaining talent so they may get a lot of applicants to their jobs, but a very small number of those applicants meet their qualifications. But you know, there's a lot of interest, but the folks might not be meeting the business's basic, you know, baseline skill expectations. Apprenticeship can be a really great solution for that.

So those kinds of businesses can be uncovered by looking at job postings that have been open for a long time, jobs that are constantly posted and reposted so that that data is out there. And then once you have a list of businesses who seem like it might be promising, you can begin to build out your knowledge there.

And Gerry can talk a little bit more about that while he shares the approach that he takes. Gerry?

MR. GHAZI: Thank you, Gina. So one of the aspects of taking all the research and having the partnerships before you actually approach the employer is the fact that you'll be able to set up for the return on value for that given employer. And what you want to do is approach it in a way that the employers – you have to think about that the employers are already hiring. They're already recruiting, they're onboarding, they're hiring and they're educating. So what value does registered apprenticeship bring to a model that they may already be using, but although it's not registered?

And so, what you want to do is start talking about specifically wages, right, because it's very important that individuals, when an employer hires them, they're trying to get an exact match to a job description, right? And when there's a skill match, there's a range of salaries they're willing to offer.

Well, the beautiful thing about a registered apprenticeship program is that the gap is so wide in terms of them investing in the individual that you can actually offset the cost of on the job learning, the cost of the RTI with the wages of the apprentice because the wage of the apprentice is usually started at a much lower wage. Then they would bring on a fully competent individual. So that's one of the things you want to bring to the table to discuss with the employer.

The second thing you want to do is about talk about increased retention and one of the key aspects about increased retention is employers themselves. When they invest in individuals, they don't really know if a person of the streets is fully competent. They're bringing in all the skill sets. So there's really no investment in that person is going to produce the return on investment that's great for that wage.

Otherwise, when you bring on an apprentice, that actual individual the employer is going to invest in both their RTI, their education as well as giving them the mentoring. So it creates a longer term investment by the individual to stay with that employer as well as for the employer to keep that individual on.

And then finally, one of the key aspects of it is, and these are the intangibles, is a repeatable framework that the employer will get out of it. Bringing the research to the table, having those conversations with an employer will uncover things that they're doing extremely well, and you want to package that as part of the apprenticeship. But there are things that they could use help with and guidance with, and so you create a framework around those items and help the employer implement them under the framework of apprenticeship.

And then some of the extrinsic value, the actual dollar amounts that you can bring to the table, and this is very important to do the research in advance, are like the tax credits. So you want to go out to each state that you're working in. If you're doing a national program, if you think the employer's going to do the first kick-off of that in a given state, research the tax credits involved. Get to understand the workforce development grants that are available within that state, whether they be state subsidies or federal subsidies.

And then again, one of the key aspects is it's the entire spectrum that you're bringing with the apprenticeship program. Not only is it the education and the on the job learning that's the package, but also the recruitment of individuals. You may be able to share recruitment costs with the employers, driving their costs down. Gina?

MS. WELLS: Thanks, Gerry. We had a question come in while you were chatting. I think it would be great if you could talk a little bit about how you do this, Gerry. Folks are asking what source you use to look for job postings. So when you're doing that initial research, can you tell folks the sources that you particularly go to?

MR. GHAZI: Absolutely. As soon as I think that there's an employer that might be interested or I want to start, I look at some of the larger employers within a given state and then I go out to their websites. And then I go onto their website and I actually do searching of careers and then I dive down into the website under the careers and I start looking at the occupations. Now, if there's a lot of occupations I'll cut and paste them to an Excel spreadsheet and sort them so I can see how many postings there are for a given occupation or given position and I have that in my back pocket when I go visit that employer.

So when I walk through the door, we start talking about their business needs. I start talking about how are you sourcing these? I noticed on your website you have 15 medical coders opening. Are they all in the same geographic area? I noticed that they are all out of California, but are they really out of California? So you start – they get impressed by the fact that you really understand and you've done your research on that.

So one of the key resourcing areas is the employer's website to see what openings are on or you Google the employer, you type in jobs. They may not have it on their website, but you may go to a [deed ?] or other kind of online services and jobs will come up. The most important thing to do is when you're on their website and you're looking at a given occupation or a few, just open up the job descriptions. Read the job descriptions. Look at the qualifications. Look at what the job functions are and be able to talk to those qualifications, job functions in terms of work processes, in terms of the type of RTI that would need to be delivered for an individual that would come in with none of the experience or none of the education that's actually posted.

MS. WELLS: That's great. Thanks, Gerry. And that really takes us to our, the next phase. Kind of a nice transition into the next phase as outlined in the tool kit. So you've done some research. You've found business who seem to be having the kinds of pain points for which apprenticeship might be a good fit. You've gathered job descriptions. You're starting to think about the types of partners that you might bring to the table to be able to present a great solution. You've familiarized yourself with that industry sector. You're prepared to sort of use the key terms so that the business gets the sense that you understand their industry. You're ready to reach out, begin talking with employers and building relationships and that's really what phase two is all about.

So for our first bit of discussion about this phase, Bill is going to share some of his wisdom on how to do this based on his years of experience in talking to business. Bill?

MR. KRAUS: Well, you know, thank you so much and listening to Sonya and listening to Gerry really, you guys really know how it works and the reality of it. Some things that are really interesting. First, listen. We have to spend more time listening to our employers. We need to, like it was mentioned previously, know your data, know your community, know your workforce. Know individuals who have been separated form the workforce or individuals who have not been included in the workforce, individuals with disability, displaced homemakers and so on.

Some things that really work well with the employers. You have to develop trust. They need to be able to open up to you and tell you what the problems are. You need to be smart enough to be able to listen without passing judgement. You need to be knowledgeable, not only about the employer like Gerry mentioned, but you need to know your programs. You're not going to bluff these individuals. They want someone to give them a strait shot. Am I doing this right? How do I do this?

And when I say to be knowledgeable, I also mean to be knowledgeable about the workforce development system. Be knowledgeable about the right and left limits to WIOA. Be knowledgeable of your environment for vocational education, be it in the high schools or in the technical community or four-year colleges. Be honest. The employer is suffering through a difficult time. Listen. Gather information. Respond back. They don't expect immediate answers right at that table.

Lastly, a few other real quick points. Make sure you know your apprenticeship staff in your state. If you don't know who your director is, you need to learn who that person is and establish your relationship before you need them. Lastly is I want to say you need to be responsive and you need to have good follow up and that's where the CRM kicks in. In the Department of Labor, we use (scale sports ?). It works well. We know what each other's doing. So know your partner and know your abilities.

But the main thing that's really important is communicating effectively without initial slide number 15. If you would like, what you need to do is you need to go there with a positive open attitude. Don't go in there saying, well you know, I know you've been a failing company and you have 45 job postings, but we know what's good for you and we'll tell you how to do it. That's not the way to do it.

You want to embrace the employer. You want to take what they're already doing and, as we would say, build upon their successful model. They've worked hard at this. You don't want to poopoo this. You want to make sure that we're working correctly. Don't tell people what your immediate judgements are.

Bring together your partners. After I meet with my employers, I bring together my workforce boards. I bring together my technical colleges. I bring together SMEs. And in many cases, and if you're not familiar with the intermediaries like Gerry, you need to know who they are in different sectors, in manufacturing, in transportation. Use them. Not only do they have subject matter expertise, they also have financial support that could be brought to bear.

So in follow up and ending this, basically listen, learn, research, gather, share, and more importantly develop those partnerships. And in the state of Georgia where I am right now, what I have done is I have used more and more colleges and workforce boards to be the face of apprenticeship. They're not dealing with the Department of Labor as much as they used to. They're dealing with experts like Sonya. They're dealing with experts like Gerry.

MS. WELLS: That's great, Bill. Thanks. I love your slide there about what not to do and how to take a consultative approach. I think one rule of thumb that's sometimes helpful for folks is to go into these conversations and plan to spend 75 percent of your time just listening.

You want to go in curious and use these initial conversations with business to learn as much as you possibly can about them and how they operate because that's going to help you build an apprenticeship program that truly meets their needs. And if you open the tool kit, you'll see in there there's actually a little table that you can use to help organize the information that you learn to help you build an apprenticeship program that builds on existing business culture and business practices. And I'm going to turn it over to Gerry now to talk a little bit about how he does that.

MR. GHAZI: So one of the key aspects – and thank you, Gina and Bill. Great Segway into this point because it really is having a business mindset. So I just want to begin by saying everyone needs to recall that an apprenticeship, right, is a workforce development solution and the workforce development solution really has five components, right?

There's employment, there's educated education, which is related technical instruction, there's on the job learning, which is the mentoring, there's a wage progression, and finally a nationally recognized credential offered by US DOL.

So what you want to do is you want to convert those five elements in your own mind's eye to business speak and bring business along that same pattern because every business that you deal with, every business out there, there is they are hiring. They're either hiring new staff or they're promoting staff within, which means they meet the first criteria of the five elements of a registered apprenticeship, right?

So you want to talk about it in their terms. So you know, what are you're current job openings? What are the hardest ones to fill? Or what is your progression within an organization? You know, what's happening to your workforce today? Is it draining out? You need to take individuals in lower levels of the organization and bring them up through a career lattice, so the very first key is use that business terminology as you're dealing with them.

The second thing. Once you hire an individual, an employer basically looks at the skills gap between their resume and the job posting and they have to fill that skills gap and the first thing they fill it with is knowledge, right? So they take a new employee in and send them off to a class or it may have an OEM vendor or manufacturer come in and educate the individual in a one-on-one session on some of the machinery they're using.

So there, they have an onboarding of new staff to fill those knowledge gaps. Well, in registered apprenticeship, we call it related technical instruction, right? It's the transfer of knowledge that an individual has to actually embrace what they necessarily need to do as they're applying that knowledge to the third element, which is basically when you bring a person on, they get new knowledge. They're onboarded. Now they have to apply it to the job functions that they're responsible for, right?

And that's not just a let out and cut loose on the floor or in a hospital. They're mentored. They're actually put under a supervisor, a manager, a team lead. That's a traditional method of getting an individual basically mentored to be fully competent in that occupation. In registered apprenticeship, we call it structured on the job learning, right?

But what you want to use with that business speak is about the mentoring. How are they set up for mentoring? What is the progression of individuals throughout an organization in terms of different levels and how do they reach those different levels? You know, do you have a one-on-one mentoring system in place? Does a mentor happen from a manager or supervisor? Learn to understand that from a business perspective.

Then the fourth element is that everybody is, you know, every employer is hiring or promoting within. Every employer is filling those gaps. They're actually mentoring. And the fourth element is when a person proves themselves, they actually move into the whole area of gaining rewards for that return on the investment. They get wage increases and they get merit reviews and that's what we actually have the wage schedule for, right?

And if you've ever looked at registered apprenticeship's wage schedule, normally there's some statement buried therein that says those wages will progress upon performance as well as time. So they have to be performing and employers do that already. So instead of bringing on a wage schedule, you talk to the employer about how are they are actually approaching basically progressions of an individual through the life cycle and developing that individual within the organization.

And then finally, the national occupational credential, we talk about the certification of completion. But employer speak, they promote people to new levels and that new level comes with a new title and those confirmed job titles is just like the credential that the national office is offering, right, because on a resume the credentials that an individual has is really those job positions they possess. So that's really turning apprenticeship speak into what business already do and understand what businesses already know.

So kind of as a summary, in looking at this particular slide, you have to speak their language. So when you're talking about your outreach and selection, your qualifications into apprenticeship, talk about recruitment and interviewing and sourcing. Use that terminology. When you're talking about the actual occupation itself, use it's a position. You know, and when you're talking about the work process in apprenticeship, instead of saying that and the competencies, talk about basically job descriptions and position responsibilities and have a copy of the job description with you that you pulled off their website.

Instead of talking about related technical instruction, you need 144 whether it's recommended or required, talk about what do they do for onboarding? What do they do for internal, external training? Do they send their folks out? Do they bring vendors in? Understand it from their perspective and many times, they'll open up to you and show you the gaps they have. And that's when they have those gaps, you can tell them, put a framework of registered apprenticeship around it as a solution to fill those gaps.

We talk about on the job learning. They talk about mentoring and supervision of the work performance of an individual and those work performance reviews that occur. We talk about stepped-up wages where they talk about merit-based increases and performance increases. So use that terminology when you're trying to find a wage schedule. So how do you promote within? Are you on an annual review basis? Do you have six-month reviews? And then build that into the stepped-up wages. Build that in to the performance review process for the apprenticeship.

And then finally, the certificate of completion, whether it's a state-offered certificate or a U.S. Department of Labor-offered certificate, talk about how do people actually get promoted to that next level? One example simply is that you have levels within an organization, let's say for programmers or software engineers. There may be a level one, level two, level three and level four, an associate, then a senior, then a lead, then a principle.

Turn that terminology in your own mind. Talk about it through their terminology but think about stackable apprenticeships that they could have. So that's the kind of language that you want to use in terms of, and the approach you want to take to get employers invested in what you have to offer later as a solution because as you're conversing with them just to talk about their pain points and problems, you're using their terminology versus the terminology of apprenticeship itself.

And Gerry, if I may just pick up on what you just said, a few things. One is whenever I talk about the wage increases, what I talk about is that it's predictability in the wages, which actually leads to greater retention, which actually affects the profitability and the bottom line.

So one thing that, to pick up on what Gerry said, is I think the word flexible is something you've probably never heard in the federal dictionary. But the flexibility right now to adopt and utilize their business speak is more and more relevant. When I deal with health care, do you think they really know what apprenticeship is? No. But they sure to heck know what an internship is. And I think we need to know that we need to go to their level of language, use their words.

There are a lot of things that would kind of, I just want to kind of go in real quick about working with a business. Know what your business wants. If you see that they are friendly, talk about the post 9/11 GI bill. Talk about the benefits that were accrued to both the individual apprentice and to the company. Talk about items like the SkillBridge program, which will allow the important benefits for the individuals being payed by Department of Defense for six months while they're doing their apprenticeship program for an employer.

Put yourself, like Gerry said, in their seat. Think about bottom line thinking. Now if you're working with workforce boards, think how you can make it easier. I have 19 boards in Georgia with 19 different rules. You need to be an honest broker in bringing these together because most of these employers are going to be multi-sites and in multi-locations. So you need to bring together the right people, speak their language, be honest, be truthful and listen, listen, listen.

MS. WELLS: Thanks so much, Bill. I think this is such a critical piece of building these skills and such an important part of creating comfort and connection and trust with businesses that allow us to develop really great solutions for them. So you know, we're still in this phase of building relationships with business and something that we hear a lot from folks is, you know, I'm great at getting my foot in the door. I have a really good initial conversation. It's positive.

There seems to be excitement and momentum building and how do we get beyond that. You know, after that, it's I can't get another meeting scheduled. You know, what can I do for follow up to really deepen this partnership and keep the process moving so that we can get to a solution for business? So Sonya, can you just talk quickly about these strategies that have worked for you in building on a successful first conversation and continuing to grow that relationship with business?

MS. GRANT: Yeah. First, I want to say I echo all of the comments that were made earlier from Bill and yourself and Gerry. You know, it's important I think for folks to remember that this is a process. It's a marathon. It's definitely not a sprint. So relationship building is going to take time and it's going to require nurturing.

So with that said, you know, you must ensure that that first conversation is the first step in the journey, so you want to leave that meeting or that conversation with that employer with the expectation that there's going to be some level of follow up in some way. It can be something as simple as providing information or scheduling a date for a deeper dive into resolving the issue. If it's a new employer, ask questions about how to best follow up because you want to be able to follow up without being annoying of course.

And you know, you have to think about the fact that, you know, employers are always thinking about the WFM, what's in it for me? So that's really what an employer wants to know, so let's be honest with them and because they're extremely busy. And while it's important, you know, what you're talking about is very important to their success, they often have to be able to differentiate between what's urgent and what's important. And for many of these employers, these issues are ultra-important, but right now they don't feel that urgency.

So again, it's important to come in prepared to listen and be equipped with the knowledge and resources about partnerships and what drives value for your employer and how your particular value proposition fits into that particular picture. So you want to remember that you're in the process of building trust and demonstrating how apprenticeships can be value added for that company and you can do that in a number of different ways. You can provide examples of what other businesses are doing with apprenticeships. You can use video testimonies, testimonials or drop names of large employers and small employers that might be in the same industry sectors or have similar occupations.

Or you can, might be able to develop a proposal that identifies the ROI for that particular employer using an apprenticeship model versus their existing model. And be sure that in that proposal is identifying all the potential partnerships and the funding resources that can be provided to the employer to provide support because they have to know that they're going to have to put some skin in the game. There's an investment to be made here.

So you may find that at the time of connecting with that particular employer, they may not be ready for the apprenticeships, so remember that each company as I said before is going to be at varying stages of readiness. So you want to again identify their pain points and determine how you can be that resource. You're going to have to be able to think outside the box and it's back to leading into your partners because at the very time that you're speaking with them, that might not be a pain point for them.

So that's why it'll be important to have your partners in your mind and around the table and be knowledgeable about the resources that they have because this is going to add value for you and be able to build that level of trust for you for the provision of future resources. So I think that's one of the most important pieces. Go ahead, Gina.

MS. WELLS: Thanks, Sonya. You know, we had a question come in and I wanted to toss it out to the group, Gerry or others. Folks are wondering, you know, who within an organization would it be ideal to have initial conversations with business and then who else needs to get involved to get the buy-in that you need? If you could talk a little bit about your experience with that.

MS. GRANT: I think it's important that – oh I'm sorry. Gerry?

MS. WELLS: Go ahead.

MS. GRANT: I was going to say I think it's important to work with the decision makers if at all possible because again this is about tapping into resources and you need someone that can make a decision.

So if you're not able to talk with a decision maker and that might be challenging, you can collaborate with other business organizations to help support and add credibility to your organization and to the resources that you have because a lot of times, what's going to happen is companies don't always trust that the resources are real and that you need that extra level of credibility by working with these other organizations who have that who can provide that soft hand-off.

MR. KRAUS: If I can speak up on that, and Sonya that was really great. What we do in Georgia, and again we're a growing state, we have just about doubled our apprenticeships, is that we have a team that travels and it's made up of a workforce development member, a technical college member and U.S. Department of Labor.

And we have a team that goes around and brings all the resources to the employer at one shot. You said it very well. They don't have a lot of time. They don't want to go through a lot of rhetorical discussion. They want to have a solution and we bring all the parties to bear and then we come up with a business plan, which is what they want, of how we can address their needs.

MS. WELLS: That's really great. Thanks, Bill. Thanks to both of you for chiming in. OK. I want to keep us moving because we want to make sure that we get to phase three.

So phase three is, you know, you have that initial conversation. You've done some follow up, instilled trust. Maybe you've put your business in touch with another business partner in the community who's already using apprenticeship. Maybe you've done a small ROI calculation so that they're starting to think through some of the bottom line benefits of apprenticeship. You know, maybe you've even put together an initial proposal of what a solution might look like.

How do you get from that conversation to commitment? And this is one of those places where you find yourself tackling some deep held beliefs about apprenticeship or myths about apprenticeship that you might need to try to overcome as part of this work. So Bill, if you could maybe in just a minute or two talk us through some of the myths or challenges that are, have most frequently presented themselves as obstacles in this work to you.

MR. KRAUS: OK. Great. I'll give you some examples. You know, Georgia is a southern state, a right-to-work state and it's a very different environment than what I'm used to. However, there was some things that were really important for me to address straight, not to keep the misconception going – hey, it's full of paperwork and there's all kind of compliance issues and then Department of Labor's going to be snooping around my books and then we're going to have workforce, we're going to have these Wage & Hour people in there and OSHA people in there. And you have to tackle these things up front.

One of the ways we tackled them down south and I know Gerry has done this too is that I have intermediaries who are contacting the employers directly. If you have a technical or community college in the area, they're known to the employer. There's a trust. Use them. Get your workforce board. You're made up of a lot of leaders in your community. Use them. That's really important.

You have to get rid of these concepts that oh, it's so expensive. I'm going to be losing staff. It's going to cost me tons of money. It's going to be so full of paper. We need to do a good job in first of all, and I've said this many times so I'm not going to get fired this time for it, is we need to take the gobbledygook that the Labor Department puts out and put it into business speak. We can't talk about, you know, this program and that program. Let's explain what it does and then we can deal with incumbent workers. We can deal with all the different elements that they're concerned about.

We have to get rid of the ideas that oh, we're going to make it an investment and the apprentice is going to leave. Well, you know what? The reality of it is people do leave but make your worksite attractive. Give people an incentive to get a degree, a diploma, a certificate, grow within the company, take that seat office one day and people will stay. We have a 91 percent retention rate in apprenticeship and there's a reason for that. There's a mutual growth.

And the apprenticeship is for everybody. This morning I was on the phone with an insurance company out of Switzerland who wants a program in Georgia and before that I was on the phone with a plumber. We do everything and if the job doesn't exist and someone has to question about jobs that don't exist and different titles, we're flexible. We look at O\*NET. We use O\*NET. We're able to convert what's being done to new occupations if necessary or modify old occupations and I think Gerry and myself are the only ones who remember punch cards. We don't use them anymore. We have to use today's terminology. And it's not just union. It's everybody.

MS. WELLS: Yeah. That's absolutely right, Bill. Thank you so much. A couple other things that we wanted to hit on this piece and I'm going to, I want to bring Gerry in here. So and before I do that, I want to ask all of you who are listening in to chime in to help us use these last ten minutes. So I'd like to hear one of two things from you. A, if there's a particular industry sector that you're having a tough time cracking into with your conversations, type it in now into the Q&A.

We're curious to hear where you feel like your struggling the most. And the second is of the phases of business engagement that we've talked about so far, which one presents the greatest challenge to you? We'd love to hear one or both of those things from you, so please type them into the chat while we're wrapping up our presentation.

So, you know, one of the things that we hear can be a real struggle when working with businesses is the idea that an apprenticeship program is a lot of administrative work and that it's too big of a barrier, either for business because they don't have time or if you're working with small businesses, they just don't have enough staff to handle that administrative work.

So I want to ask Gerry if you can talk a little bit about how intermediaries and how the intermediary playing the role of sponsor can be a great solution for businesses that are concerned with that issue. Gerry, are you there? OK. Well, Gerry's coming on mute. I'll just – and interrupt me at any time, Gerry. I'll just talk a little bit about this.

So, you know, the traditional model for an apprenticeship would be that the business is working as serving as the sponsor and handling all of the administrative tasks of maintaining a registered apprenticeship. But it's very possible now to bring in other organizations. In Michigan, they use their workforce board.

You know, Gerry has experience using independent organizations, his Vermont HITEC organization. Community colleges can play these roles. And these organizations can come in and hold the standards and sign an employer acceptance agreement so that the employer only has to focus on running that program and the data pieces and the administrative update pieces can be done by this other organization.

So it can be really powerful when you're working with a new industry sector or something like advanced manufacturing where there is a lot of very small employers perhaps in your region. Finding that intermediary to play the role of the sponsor can take some of that burden off the business, create a really strong solution that's sustainable in the long term. Gerry –

MR. GHAZI: Gina?

MS. WELLS: Yeah. Jump in.

MR. GHAZI: Sorry, guys, about that. So yeah. One of the key aspects from Vermont HITEC has been playing that role for about 20 years, both New Hampshire and Vermont. And actually, I personally set up probably 12 different intermediaries around the country. Taking on the burden off or taking the burden off the employers and placing it within the intermediary itself.

And as you indicated, it's really from an employer by employer and it's an evolution. So some employers want nothing to do with the actual structure of the registered apprenticeship program from a program management perspective or a program administration, so they love intermediaries to step in. And then, through seeing how easy it is for demonstrating for the employer how easy it is, they start taking on pieces of it.

Perfect example is Dartmouth-Hitchcock Health out in New Hampshire. They started with Vermont HITEC did everything from the recruitment to the actual selection of candidates to the actual education, the RTI to the mentoring. And we transitioned that role as they felt more and more comfortable seeing it in action.

They started taking on pieces and today they now have their own set of instructors, their own set of mentors and they've actually registered the apprenticeship program itself directly with the U.S. Department of Labor instead of using an RA as a sponsor or instead of using Vermont HITEC as an intermediary sponsor. So there are great ways in which you can help offset that burden off the employer and place it back on the intermediary itself.

MS. WELLS: That's great. Thanks, Gerry. So we just have about five more minutes left in our webinar and we've gotten some great questions, so I'm going to move on to those questions. For more discussion on other tips to get to commitment, we encourage you to take a look at the tool kit. And just as a reminder, in your window you can see a little box called web links and there's two links there.

The first one will take you online to WorkforceGPS where those tool kits are housed and the second one will take you to the webinar tools here, where you'll also be able to download today's presentation, so you can see that over there in the file share. So access those resources so that you can take a further look at the tool kit.

A question came in that I love, and I want to give a shout out to this person who asked it. And they asked, what has been an unexpectedly effective strategy that you have used to build an effective relationship with an employer? And I'm going to ask one of our presenters to chime in with a response there and just a short one. Do any of the three of you have an unexpectedly effective solution to share with folks today?

MR. KRAUS: I have one that just happened last week. This is incredible. In one particular town in Georgia, there are two companies that make the same product. One company that has a program convinced the other company to have a program so they don't steal their workers.

MS. WELLS: Perfect. Yes. Use your current sponsors as an important tool in building programs. That's great, Bill. Thanks. Anybody else have a very quick, unexpectedly effective strategy?

OK. I'm going to keep moving because we have a couple more questions. I know everybody has a few tricks up their sleeve. We had a great question here. How much time do you spend in preparing for an initial visit with a company? So when we're in that research phase, you know, can we give folks a sense of how much time they might spend in that phase?

MR. GHAZI: So this is Gerry. For myself, I spend about two hours basically combing their website. I read all about their products, their services, their offerings. I try to get a feel for how large the company is. But again, most importantly, I go right to their careers, see how many actual job postings they have and get a sense of where the pain points are for that. Many times, in their websites under the careers, they'll show how long a job has been posted and that'll give me a sense for, you know, the amount of pain they're feeling for getting those jobs filled.

MR. KRAUS: Yeah. And Gerry, what I'm going to say is a little different is that I actually, we do, we triage everyone first and then we bring together the partners between us who are able to figure out who should be the lead. We figure out what resources we could bring to bear and then we don't overload the employer. We go there with one or maybe two people and we, then we start listening. And so, I would say the first calls, probably a half hour and then follow ons are probably an hour and a half, two hours.

MS. GRANT: And if I could chime in here, our approach is my business services team meets monthly where we share best practices and discuss challenges and then identify solutions together. So we're constantly preparing for any of our meetings that we have coming up and I think it's a great way for, to build capacity amongst your team members as well.

MS. WELLS: Great. OK. So we're coming up on the end of our time and there's several more questions in here and I want to say we knew this would happen. This is such a rich topic. We could spend, you know, we could probably all travel to a whole conference where we could spend days working on this together.

We are going to have a chat next Tuesday specifically so we can get into more detail on some of these questions. And what we're hoping to do with that time is A, get to some of the questions here that we didn't get to and B, hear first-hand from participants in that chat specific business engagement issues that have tripped you up. You can bring a specific challenge and we'll work it through with you, so stay tuned for information on that and we look forward to being able to continue the conversation there.

We're so grateful that you spent some time with us today and hope that you all got some new skills and ideas to inform your practice of working with business. Jen, is there anything else we need to go through here in the webinar space? I want to thank our speakers so much. Gerry, Bill, Sonya, you brought so much to this conversation, so thank you for spending time with us today and we look forward to spending time with you on the chat next week.

MR. GHAZI: Thank you.

MS. GRANT: Thank you all.

MR. KRAUS: Thank you.

MS. WELLS: All right.

(END)