**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**H-1B Ready to Work Lessons Learned & Promising Practices**

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LAURA CASERTANO: Now, I'm going to turn things over to your moderator today, Danielle Kittrell. She is a workforce analyst, the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. Danielle, take it away.

DANIELLE KITTRELL: Hi. Great. Thank you so much, Laura. And again, if you guys could let us know what your role is in the Ready to Work grant. Are you an authorized rep, program director, performance specialist, or IT professional or other? Let us know what your role is. We'll take a second and do that. All right. Excellent. We have quite a few authorized reps and program directors. Thanks for joining us, guys. All right. Let's keep the ball rolling.

So again, my name is Danielle Kittrell. I am one of your moderators for this afternoon, and I am so happy to introduce two of my colleagues, Ms. Angel Harlins, your Ready to Work TA lead, and Ms. Erika Humphrey, one of your TA coaches. So I will now go ahead and turn things over to Angel. Angel, take it away.

ANGEL HARLINS: Thank you, Danielle, and good afternoon, everyone. I'm super excited about this call today. This is a wonderful time for the Ready to Work grant. We are coming towards the end of the program, but we have done some amazing work with our participants, and we really look forward to this call being an opportunity for you guys to hear a little bit more about some promising practices and lessons learned in the Ready to Work grant.

So far over the course of the grant period you guys have already served 20,000 participants. That is great information and also a great push to helping us to end long-term unemployment. So I'll hand it over to Erika Humphrey who is going to be your co-facilitator for today, and we'll get the ball moving.

ERIKA HUMPHREY: Great. Thank you so much, Angel. I just want to welcome all of the grantees that are on the line, and on behalf of myself, Keisha Tompkin, Lyell Newman (ph), and Erin Leason (ph), we want to just really take the opportunity for this webinar to celebrate and share the lessons learned and the promising practices from the Ready to Work grant. It's been a good four years I'm sure.

I'm sure that the slow starts sometimes in year one, but as you guys have continued to move into the various years, how you guys have continued to have so many promising practices. We really want this to be very interactive. So we really want to hear from you. You will also hear from our Ready to Work colleagues, and they will share how they overcame challenges and unforeseen natural disasters. They'll also share lessons learned from managing the Ready to Work grant and how their promising practices are impacting their communities.

So our grantee presentations, again, you'll hear from four of our grantees. You'll hear from Florida State College at Jacksonville, and they're going to really share about overcoming challenges in year two of the grant. Alachua Bradford Workforce Board doing business as CareerSource, you're going to hear one of their promising practices, programmatic closeout. They actually will be ending October 31st. So they're going to share with you how they're closing out their program.

And then we also have the San Jacinto Community College, and they're going to be talking about disaster management after a hurricane, and then we have Puerto Rico Technoeconomic – excuse me – Technoeconomic Corridor, and they're going to be talking about getting your grant back on track after a new disaster.

So I want to start off with a quick poll, and the poll is, will your Ready to Work grant continue after October 31st? So I just want to hear if your grant will continue. Well, so far the majority of you that are on the line is sharing that your grant will continue. OK. We'll move on to our next poll.

If your organization is receiving a no cost extension, what areas are you focusing on to meet your performance goals? Again, if you're getting that no cost extension, what areas are you going to focus on to meet your performance goals? So I see a couple people saying enrollment, credential attainment, job placements. OK. Great. Great to know. Great to hear. I'm sure that you'll have various strategies that you'll share what you'll be doing to reach those goals.

And so I want to move to our grantee presentations. Our first presentation is going to be from Florida State College at Jacksonville. Once again, overcoming challenges in year two, and you're going to hear from Grainne Dwyer.

GRAINNE DWYER: Hi. Good afternoon. This is Grainne from Florida State College. I just want to move directly into the initial problems that we had in year one, the processes that we went through and how in year two and year three how we saw really the hard work that we did in that first year just work out. I'll just briefly list the issues that we really had to work on in year one, and then I'll explain them in more detail in the following slides.

We had curriculum, finding adequate professors and instructors, funding, our companies and business partners, participant screening process, the internal processes here at the college, and also certifications. I'll go into more depth now with the curriculum.

When we were presented with this grant and when the college was awarded the grant, obviously, being an education institution, there are hundreds of IT classes out there. People can learn online, here at the college itself. There are multiple courses that people can take, but we wanted to create something different because it wasn't just about the learning aspect. It was dealing with long-term unemployed. So we knew we needed strong curriculum, but we also knew that it had to be industry-driven.

As I said, we had the classes here, but we wanted a different slant to it. So we engaged our four business partners at the time, presented them with our curriculum from the credit side, and we had as a group decided we would make our curriculum non-credit.

That way it gave us a lot more flexibility rather than cut into the college's semester and the restrictions that that can cause and also we – because we also knew that the program had to be also very structured, had to be flexible. Our main goal was to give our participants new skills but also that they could get a job, and dealing with the long-term unemployed, that is their main focus. So this was also an integral part of the program.

We engaged our own subject matter experts here at the college, technical writers, and we took our non-credit and then developed our own programs. CSX were a huge partner at the time, and we presented this curriculum to them and we state that, if this was your ideal wish list that employees would come to you with a certain skill set, what would you like to be in this curriculum?

So we worked on that over two or three months with huge support from CSX, but we also set up a steering committee meeting or our own advisory kind of thing. One of the things that kept on popping up all the time from day one was the importance of soft skills training.

So in stepping back and looking at the curriculum that we we recreating, we also knew that it was very important to have soft skills training embedded in our program. They were 11– (inaudible) – programs. Eight of those involved soft skills training. We addressed resume workshops, mock interviews, meet and greet, absolutely everything because this is the one area that our business partners told us that many people were falling short of.

Next area was funding. Originally, when our grant was approved, we could not have funding in our program approved for tuition. So we worked very closely with CareerSource and that also caused a whole other administrative area for our participants to be approved. At the time it was WIA.

Then it changed to WIOA, and of course, as everybody knows, there was reduced funding. So within the first six to eight months after going down that road, we knew that we had to approach and request a budget amendment, which was obviously approved, as tuition funding is an approved cost within the grant.

Moving on to the next area was our companies. This, again, had to be industry-driven. If our participants were to be successful and get a job, we needed the community involved in this. We started off with four business partners, and right to this day we have 53 business partners. We found that at the beginning our grant literally, in my opinion, had everything a wish list could have. It had supportive services, bus passes, tuition, absolutely everything in it.

So when we would present this proposal to our business partners – (inaudible) – nine-week we call it try before you buy, you can go and have this participant for nine weeks, allow them to work and showcase themselves and prove themselves to you, it was actually quite difficult to convince the local business partners that this was actually a no-risk option for them.

Once that word went out, once we proved how good our participants were, how stringent our recruitment and our training was, our success rate in that area and recruiting more business partners, particularly by word of mouth, has been very, very successful.

When everybody – and I think you probably all will agree with me. When everybody sees a DOL grant, a lot of people think free. So actually, recruiting participants was not a problem. Recruiting the right participants was going to be a problem. So we decided to create a multi-barrier approach.

So literally, from day one when our potential participants reached out to us, their interview process – (inaudible) – how responsive they were, how timely they were, and absolutely everything. They had to take assessments which we developed with CareerSource; used CareerScope. We also used WorkKeys. They had to interview with an advisor. They had to interview then finally with me. Really their experience was not – actually, one of the DOL conferences that I had been at, it said that we recruit for attitude.

We train for skill set. And I think that very much has been our motto. So it was a participant's attitude had the biggest impact on whether we found that they were suitable for our program or not. So we really thought that with this multi-barrier approach we were able to screen out and we were able to pull what we considered those that would be more successful.

For our first cohort we only ran one cohort in our first year once the curriculum was developed, once we had some business partners on board. We screened 125 participants, and we accepted 14 for that class. But I do believe that because of the time that's spent in the curriculum, working with our business partners, and then creating this multi-barrier approach, we were really choosing people who really had the highest level of success or ability to be successful.

A main issue we did have or one of the barriers that we did have is that even though this perfect wish list had been created, some of the – some of the deliverables within the grant, particularly with the internship portion – (inaudible) – itself here, did not have any internal processes in place.

So we worked very closely with human resources and payroll to actually create new processes and create where our participants could get a very comparable hourly rate compared to other universities in the area so that they could have that nine-week try before you buy.

Again, this has been our biggest draw with companies, particularly starter companies or mid-size companies who can't pay out that big dollar for staffing agencies. So our goal for placement was 168, and today we have placed 215 people in full-time employment.

And last but not least, I think from what I hear a lot of people have been having difficulty with certifications. This has been our biggest challenge of all. Initially, in our naivety we felt that people would think, oh, this grant is going to pay for training. It's going to pay for industry certification, but once our participants got a job the lure of that certificate lost it – (inaudible). So we have tried many strategies.

We moved the certification portion not just at the end, but they finish our program. We opened up the whole slew of certificates that they could actually sit for – study for and sit for. We moved it to the middle. We moved it to the beginning. We have created the other classes that we've embedded in the technical classes. So our goal of certifications was 225, and we're at 115 right now. So our last year is 100 percent focused on our participants gaining that certification.

We have a huge communication level with all our participants. Our goal was 300. We have recruited 305. From right back from our original cohort, we e-mail them quarterly. Keep on drawing them back, any other resources that they can have, our networking events, our meet and greets.

We continuously invite them back so that, even if they are working, we allow them to still avail of the benefit of being part of the I-Tech program, particularly if they have not had their certificate because once they've been in that job for a year or two and that desire to, again, learn and grow and maybe get a promotion at work comes back into place.

So right now, we have set our schedule for the next week – or sorry – for the next year where we, again, will be running additional technical classes not for new participants but for all the 305, for those that have not got their certificate to come back and they have the opportunity now to study and sit for an industry certification.

One of the things that we engage in with our partners, particularly when our participants were in that nine-week try before you buy period, we worked with our business partners on the back end to talk to our participants and to encourage them and to state that this certificate would definitely increase their options, particularly their opportunity to stay.

So if anybody's got any questions, I'd be happy to answer.

MS. HUMPHREY: Grainne, this is Erika. I just have a question. So I know that you are taking a no-cost extension.

MS. DWYER: Correct.

MS. HUMPHREY: So what are your strategies, the key strategies moving forward to – to make sure that your – you meet that performance goal? Can you share any of those strategies moving forward?

MS. DWYER: Certainly. Certainly. We have found, again, when people get caught down that rabbit hole of unemployment, again, the lure of the job, any job is very, very important. Our classes are – again, because of our multi-barrier approach, we explain to many of the applicants that this is a boot camp. So it's 11 weeks in total. So we understand that our participants are already stressed. They have families to run.

So again, we give them a lot of moral support but also life support. We have our business partners come in. We have volunteers from staffing agencies that come in and do mock interviews, and this is something that we talk to our business partners to really pass on to our participants. Our participants want the certificates in their head, but because life has taken over it's very difficult for them to really focus on those because they're focusing on the class.

And we believe that these additional choosing classes and networking events that we're setting up within the next year and a lot of just – just that communication between each other will definitely encourage – we have found even people from four cohorts back, now that we're setting these classes up, they're now coming back around and saying, I want to be involved in these classes now.

So we're actually very lucky to have this year, and our participants are very lucky because, even though at the time they got the job, they're totally overwhelmed with the newness of this new job, it seems that just six months later we sent out a survey and we sent out another e-mail just three or four weeks ago and we have 50 responses within two days. So in taught us also that at that moment in time somebody could be maxed out, but a few months after the event.

So really it's just that constant communication, keeping our partners engaged, asking our partners to communicate the importance of the certificates to our participants, and also these technical classes and their additional new classes that we set up, I think that gives our participants past and present a fresh look now – now they're working, now they're motivated in a different way. So our – the three classes that are up for January already have 50 enrolled in them.

MS. HUMPHREY: That's great. And you said something very key, that you – you all are sending out surveys to those individuals –

MS. DWYER: Yes.

MS. HUMPHREY: – that you haven't heard from in a while and being able to get that information back. So that's great.

So if anyone has any questions – and you may not have a question now, but if you're thinking about it and you want to ask Grainne in reference to what they actually put on their surveys to get these responses back, you can definitely put your question in the chat box. We will continue on. Thank you so much for that presentation.

MS. DWYER: Thank you, Erika.

MS. HUMPHREY: We'll now move over to Alachua Bradford Workforce Board. They're doing business as CareerSource, and we have on Meredith Montgomery. She's the chief of staff, and she's going to be sharing a programmatic perspective how to close out your program.

MEREDITH MONTGOMERY: Hey. Thank you, Erika, for the introduction. Happy to be here today.

As Erika mentioned, I'll talk a little bit about our program at CareerSource North Central Florida and will provide a brief overview of our project, talk more in depth about the activities and steps we've taken over really the past year of closing out our activities, our cases, and then kind of what happens next.

For us – (inaudible). So CareerSource North Central Florida is the regional workforce board in Alachua and Bradford Counties. We're the lead entity on this grant. We formed a partnership with two other local workforce boards, CareerSource Capital Region which is located in the Tallahassee area and then CareerSource Flagler Volusia who is located in the Daytona area.

And our project really addressed work readiness, providing job skills training, offering paid internships, entrepreneurship training, and of course job placement activities for long-term unemployed and underemployed jobseekers in the science, technology, engineering, and math industries. And so our program locally was dubbed the STEM-Ready program.

OK. So at the beginning of the grant we had set up our project with internal goals and targets for hitting certain milestones, so things like ramp up activities, processes, policies, setting the timelines for implementing paid work experience programs and other types of training activities, and so forth.

And really what we found, though, is that we often were reevaluating our project plan and resetting these timelines as we experienced hiccups along the way or really just the circumstances changed, and they certainly did.

For example, we had originally planned to put participants through paid internships up until near the end of the grant. However, it was in such demand among both our employers and our local communities and with the jobseekers that the funding that was allocated for internships was spending out at a much more rapid pace than we originally anticipated.

So we had to make some pretty quick changes to the point that we ended up closing our our internship activities probably around this time last year, so pretty much a full year before our grant's expiration date.

And so there was a lot of coordination and communication that really needed to happen between our partners in the other two regions, our employers, the interns of course who were all at various stages in their internships, and really needing to be sensitive to how we would adjust our timelines to accommodate what felt like our rapidly shrinking training budget so that we have the most minimal adverse effects or impacts on our interns and employers.

So we really had to put a plan in place to, first, discontinue any new enrollments into internships and really just focused on getting the existing interns through their training at their work sites with a pretty short amount of time.

And so with the help of our communications and business services teams we crafted frequent written correspondences with both our employers and participants on revised internship closeout dates, had the work sites adjust their training plans with the participants accordingly to meet a new deadline, and so forth.

And we really ended up closing out probably about close to 200 internships within a 30 to 60-day window, and that was really our first major activity of closing out any programmatic activities or services. But I think it's important and it was a lesson learned that to set and focus on established internal project milestones and deadlines but not to sound like too much of a cliché but to also expect the unexpected and to be nimble and adaptable and really take appropriate action and make change when needed.

And so that really kind of goes hand in hand with my next slide, which is when we're approaching the final year of the grant, the final six months, final three months down to the end, it's really about continuously monitoring our program targets and adjusting where and when needed.

So we, like all of you, are really closely monitoring all of our performance measures or indicators on our grant probably early spring of last year – or of this year and having to decide ourselves whether or not we were going to apply for an extension. And as Erika mentioned earlier, we have not applied for an extension.

We are actually ending October 31st, but to determine that we really had to look at really monitoring kind of three high-level main areas. So really looking at the activities of the program, of course our performance outcomes compared to where we were at compared to our grant goals, and then of course our budget, looking at expenditure rates and then looking ahead against what we had left remaining in our budget.

And so as I mentioned a minute ago, internships was a big component of our grant's programmatic activities, and the demand for it required an adjustment based on the number of people we are – we were serving and other outcomes as well as our budget constraints, but we were still serving people in a number of other ways.

Participants were still engaged in occupational skills training, classroom-based training, distance learning, receiving support services, job readiness and job search activities, and so forth. So at the time that we closed out our internships we really shifted toward looking at occupational skills training and comparing our ITA budgets with all the participants enrolled in educational activities and then at that point had to decide to limit any new enrollments into education for those in the other two regions.

So lead region nine where I'm at had already really high volume of people that we were serving, but the other two regions still had enough room in their training budgets to be able to support new enrollment, which they did. But for our region we pretty much stopped new enrollments and maybe about nine months ago or so, and the other two regions pretty much ended any new enrollments probably around June of 2018.

So again, it's about looking at kind of where your performance is at, where you're standing with your budgets, and kind of projecting ahead to make determinations about what direction you're going to go.

So for the final few months we've really continued – I mean, we've continued providing career services such as resume writing, job matching and referrals, support services, and we will continue to do so until October 31st right up to the end. We do still have people on our case list who have not yet obtained employment, and so then for those we talked about, well, what happens to those individuals who do not enter employment prior to the end of the program?

And I think really a simple answer is – to that is it just depends on the individual case by case, and right now our case managers and providers are reaching out to all of those individuals and evaluating each of the cases. And for those that aren't returning calls or we can't find them or they're just not active or if they state that they just no longer needed the services for whatever reason, we'll go ahead and close their case.

If they do still want or need assistance and are still looking for employment and engage, we'll certainly look to perhaps dual enrolling them in one of our other programs such as WIOA or another grant or referral to a partner who might also be able to assist them. So good partnership to have for anyone who may not already is – is with your local workforce development board who can really help potentially in this area.

And so speaking of partnerships, as we think about what next, we have these conversations around how to maintain these relationships with our organizations that we have developed in the form of sustainability of our programs. And so we talk about things like what's worked in this grant, what maybe hasn't or what maybe could be modified to work better all in an effort to keep growing and to find ways to keep serving the people in our local communities.

And so for us we might take a look at internships, for example, and determine how effective those completing internships were to job placement outcomes and maybe compare that data to other program activities that we've done in the past such as OJT, on-the-job training. Do we want to keep doing internships? Would we rather focus on OJT? What has the greatest outcomes and then apply that for future opportunities and programs that we might apply for? So whatever we decide, we might shift, add lessons learned to do better for the next grant or program.

Let's see. Final reporting. Somewhere. For – we're in the process right now. We pretty much are working right now on our July to September quarters report that will be due next month, just like all of you guys. And since our final month of the grant is in October, that actually will fall within the next quarter's report.

So I believe that one won't be due until February, but I guess for final thoughts on this I would just refer everyone to your grant agreement with DOL. There's where you should be able to find closeout and reporting requirements along with some links to helpful documents such as ETA's closeout, FAQ document and the closeout, and user manual for the financial piece of the closeout, which will be happening for us in the coming months.

So that's where we've been for the past year and some of the things that we have coming up over the next couple of months. So I am happy to take any questions that anyone may have.

MS. HUMPHREY: And while we wait for some questions, Meredith, one of the things I just wanted to point out about this – (inaudible) – that you shared was that you are now looking at the data, really using your data to see which programs were more effective than others. So that's a really great tool that you guys are doing.

MS. MONTGOMERY: Thank you.

Q: Erika?

MS. HUMPHREY: Yes.

KEISHA TOMPKIN: Hi, everybody. This is Keisha Tompkin, another one of the TA coaches. I wanted to thank you all for a great – you for a great presentation just now.

You mentioned sustainability planning and your engaging of partners to do that, and just wanted to ask you about your process of doing that. How do you engage your partners in sustainability planning specifically? Do you meet quarterly, monthly, look at data, that sort of thing?

MS. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. We – we've – we have a lot of great existing partnerships in our communities with our educational institutions that we've worked with plenty on. We also have strong relationships with a lot of our employers in the community who are very supportive, but also looking at other partnerships, for – I can give an example.

One of our boards initiated in our strategic plan is a focus on self-employment. So we actually have developed a entrepreneurship training program. It's called Startup Quest, and we actually did that under another grant prior to this one. But with the success of that program, we had included it in this grant that we have, along with some others.

And so for us, now that this grant is ending, we look at, well, how can we – how can we look at this one little piece of the grant that we have and how do we apply it for upcoming things or how can we connect with other partners who may be interested in engaging in entrepreneurship training activities and self-employment?

So, for example, right now we're talking with other organizations who might – who might serve hard-to-serve populations such as ex-offenders where self-employment might produce better employment outcomes than for that population who might have difficulty finding jobs in a more traditional setting.

So we're talking to Department of Corrections, and so we really just try to think of things that are maybe a little bit outside of the box or take the components of our programs that work well and think about what other partnerships can we form that we think would be applicable to these certain things.

So yeah. And we do – we've got a lot of – we do – we engage in a lot of community events. We have strong distance services teams. We're partnered with the chamber of commerce who also is a business services service provider for us, and so there's just – it's really kind of constant communication really.

Q: Thank you.

MS. HUMPHREY: Great. Thank you for sharing that process that you're using for sustainability. Are there any other questions before we move on? And again, we'll also have time at the very end to ask questions, if you haven't thought of a question as of yet.

So we'd like to move to our next presentation and that is from San Jacinto Community College and they're going to be focusing on disaster management after a hurricane and we have Oscar Trevino. He's the program manager, and he's going to be sharing some strategies and some tips, things that actually happened with the hurricane and how they overcame that.

OSCAR TREVINO: Good afternoon. Thank you. Yes. I'm Oscar Trevino. I'm the project manager for the Ready to Work grant. We do have some partner colleges, Lee College in Baytown, College of the Mainland in Texas City and Brazosport College down in Brazosport. We're also partners with the Workforce Solutions, which is our one-stop.

So a little – about a year ago we had a hurricane come through by the name of Harvey. It was about 100-year storm. It was a category three that hit right before the classes started. There weren't any mandatory evacuations that were ordered, but our school closed down the Friday before. The college reopened a little bit after Labor Day, and then during the storm we just made sure that everybody was OK.

We had constant contact with our team just making sure everybody's okay. Some people were affected a little bit or a lot in some cases. We had about 30 participants who were affected. They didn't – and they didn't report to class. Eight of them relocated. Thirteen of them found employment. Five of them didn't have transportation, and we weren't able to contact four of them.

Some of the classes were delayed up to two weeks, which created more work to secure classrooms and reschedule our vendors, and four of our staff members were hit pretty hard. All of them are still working, and they continue to serve the community. And some of our instructors were also affected by the floods.

If you look here, this is the director of the Brazosport College's home. It looks like he has a nice little lake out there, but unfortunately, that's inside of his home as well. So if you see here, this is some of the insides of the home. So it's constant trash piles everywhere. Looked like a war zone in some areas. If you see here, this is a picture of the Raceway Park down in Baytown.

Right around – you take a look at this area right here, this next picture will demonstrate some of what's going on or what happened. So that's – that's about the area there. If you notice all the cars, these were all the flooded vehicles that they parked. That way the adjusters could come and look, review the damages.

You might think that this is a nice furry steering wheel cover, but this is actually mold that grew on a car after the flooding, and this is a picture of Nancy's sister's home. They had to get some of their belongings, and as you can see, they have a canoe inside.

So as we said, the storm hit a week prior to when the classes start. In a perfect world every applicant would come in with all their documents ready to go, but that wasn't the case. We do have – we have applicants who slowly bring in their paperwork. Usually, the – the week prior to classes is when we have the biggest turnout of individuals. They hear from their friends or other participants that classes will be starting, and they want to try to get in the class.

Now, our industry was hit pretty hard, and it impacts – the impacts of the disaster lasted from weeks to months and reports claim 40 percent of the industry was affected. A number of companies were forced down due to precautionary measures for unforeseeable circumstances.

This created a situation where some people did not have a job to report to. An influx of short-term unemployed jobseekers were – were experienced at our one-stop with a surge of applications – applicants for financial aid. The Port of Houston also plans to dredge out another 10 feet. Much of the shoreline was swept into the water.

So for our grant participants, we at San Jacinto College, we received e-mails from many of the local nonprofit resources, and these e-mails, we send them to our participants. That way we – they can find out information about where to apply for help, where to pick up any donations, and aid for shelter and food. Some of our participants were able to benefit from these programs.

And after a year most of the community has gotten back to normal. About 10 percent haven't. There is still a lot of rebuilding happening around the city. Flood control projects have been defined and are being funded. Flood storm search protection studies are ongoing, and new housing regulations on how high to build off the ground are mandatory. One such neighborhood evaded flooded homes due to this height regulation.

More Harvey effects. Grants have been awarded for construction training due to the needs in the area. Our local workforce board had a Harvey grant doing some of the same trainings we were to try to help people out, and on July 4th the Texas Governor Greg Abbott declared a state of disaster around the Houston area. As much as eight inches fell within the four to five-hour period bringing on floods, and as we speak today, our rain still continues. Any questions?

MS. HUMPHREY: Great. Thank you so much, Oscar, for that presentation. I know that when a disaster hits, it really does affect not only the community but it definitely did affect the grant. So it's great to hear how you all are – have put strategies in place to really – to continue the grant.

MR. TREVINO: Right. Yes.

MS. HUMPHREY: Questions? Hi, Keisha.

MS. TOMPKIN: Hello again. Hi, Oscar. Thank you for sharing. You talked about 30 grant participants who were affected by the storm and that affected them starting class, et cetera. Did any sort of resurface months and months later to pick up where they left off that sort of surprised you?

MR. TREVINO: We did. We had a couple that some of them had moved away and then they came back and then we were able to get a couple back in the class. Some of them who – some of them who were approved who never took a class, the ones that were affected, we hung onto them, and then we were able to – we actually have a couple in class now.

Q: Great. Thank you.

MR. TREVINO: Thank you.

MS. HUMPHREY: Are there any questions – other questions for Oscar? Again, you'll have that opportunity at the very end, if any questions arise.

Q: Hello? Erika?

MS. HUMPHREY: Yes. Hi. Yes.

Q: Hi. Therese in Denver Workforce Services. Interesting presentation, Oscar. I had a question about how the construction industry – were there more jobs available as a result of Hurricane Harvey– (inaudible) – were employed then?

MR. TREVINO: We had a lot of residential and commercial construction go up. Of course a lot of the houses had to get dug out, and so we had – so some of the people – some of our participants, they took jobs like those quick jobs like that, and we lost a couple that way as well. So – but, I mean, the – it was a lot of construction going on, and as we – we still have some more as well.

Q: OK. Good. We were just talking about this here in Denver. So that's good to know even though it was a terrible unfortunate situation.

MR. TREVINO: Right.

Q: Thank you.

MR. TREVINO: Thank you.

MS. HUMPHREY: Are there any other questions? And Keisha says that after – for the pictures, they gave her a better appreciation of what really happened and how you guys were able to come back from the storm. So that's great having a strategy into play.

So we're going to now have our next presenter. We have Puerto Rico Technoeconomic Corridor, and they're also going to be talking about getting your grant back on track after a disaster. I think we all know what happened to the island of Puerto Rico when the hurricane hit. So this will be a great presentation as to sharing strategies that they used to get their grant back on track and what they're doing now. Lara?

MIRIAM LARACUENTE: Hello, everybody. This is Lara, and I'll be talking a little bit about what happened here and how we have been dealing with it. Before the hurricane, for you to have the perspective on how things were before and after, we were just hitting in stride in terms of our program performance and our training strategy was very recently modified to include some boot camps for intensive training.

And both employers and workers were very enthusiastic about that, and we had experienced an intake wave that resulted in the inauguration of a new office in the metropolitan area Puerto Rico, given that the main office Ready to Work is in the western part of the island. We have also a new private sector partners employers coming in and joining.

So we were very enthusiastic back then, but then, as you might already know, we have on September the 6th a category four hurricane named Irma and it made landfall in Puerto Rico. And it was – it left a third of the island without power, and it was just a few days afterwards that we had the impact of Hurricane Maria, which is the one that almost everybody knows about because of the devastation that it left on the island.

So we saw two major hurricanes almost consecutively and we experienced the longest blackout in U.S. history. So it was a terrible, terrible devastation. The photos that you saw that Oscar shared from Harvey, you can imagine the same thing here and all through the island. There was no corner of the island spared. We had more than 50 million trees lost, and all that debris was everywhere.

Roads were blocked, and communication was very, very challenging. We had a very unprecedented situation which we had products and services very hard to come by. Food, fuel were we could say – you cannot just find a vendor for those, and we had no communication systems because a lot of the phone lines and antennas, everything was down.

So it was like back to '30s or even earlier in terms of communication. We only had AM radio, a few stations in the island, and they had very limited range and they were operating with generators. And as I told you, because of the fuel being scarce and hard to come by, they would be oftentimes off. So it was not even that reliable as well. And another element and not a lot of people tend to think is the lack of currency because not everybody went to their ATMs and had cash on them prior to the event.

And the banks were affected as well, and they were closed for weeks. So even though you might have money in the bank, you didn't have money to buy or to trade with other people. So again, we went back to trading things for things. So hospitals took a major hit as well and many were closed and some of them were operating and the situations there were really, really dire.

In terms of the impact on the grant activities, almost everybody – our employees, the PRTEC staff, almost everybody was focused on their safety and that of their loved ones. It was very difficult for you to just get out of your house. To tell you just one story, we – my husband and my family and me, we spent just one day cleaning one week because there was a fourth of a mile of trees just to get to the entrance of the community in which we live in.

It was just one day to get there, and it was two or three days to get to a main road that connects our community to the town. So it took a week for a person to reach the PRTEC facility – (inaudible) – area affected. The building, it withstand the storm very well, but it lost part of its roof. So we have some – a little bit of flooding in some areas, but in general we were very lucky that we could – it required very little repair for it to become functional again.

And a little after a week we started communicating with radio stations that were operating, started coordinating – (inaudible) – messages to communities so we can say that what we could do and if we were open or not, answering those questions, and most of all trying to account for the people, trying to know where our workers were and if we could – the work that the – the few place that we – that could connect PRTEC staff. We're looking to see if we can refer them to immediate services, where to find food, water, and fuel.

We set a meeting place in our WIOA career center in the town and – because they have power before us, before our building, but they didn't have internet access. So we started moving to different places looking for – (inaudible) – and employers. We knock on their door to see if they have the space that we could occupy so we could continue trying to account for workers and – and helping them to recover.

And that took a few moves from place to place, and it was – by the third week that we gathered the files for the – (inaudible) – were able to make it to a facility for PRTEC and get files, information so we could continue reaching participants that we couldn't reach because we didn't have any information available. We had some lists that each case manager had, and we referred to that, but they were not complete.

So for the fourth week we moved back to our building, and we got power. We were one of the luckiest companies in the area because the – (inaudible) – that we are five miles away from a huge power station and it was one of the first to get power in the whole island. So luckily for that, we started working by the fourth week after Maria. We continued sending radio messages and then saying that we were already in our facility and most of the roads that were incoming to our facility were cleared. If not cleared, they were safe to transit.

And so we were inviting people to let us know how we could help and they could come here. And by the sixth week we got internet access and began full operation. Unfortunately, it took us up to the eighth week after the hurricane for all personnel to be accounted for. We had one case manager that was trapped in her house for about all that time, two months. We sent – we had communication with the National Guard, and we coordinated to have them sent to her and her community food and water to have (inaudible).

So we also lost contact with around 20 percent of the workers enrolled prior to the hurricanes, and it happened, as you might know, that a lot of the people in Puerto Rico moved from the island to continental U.S. looking for a place in which they could be safer and provide for their families.

So we had a lot of exit that arise because of that, and we had a lot of people that reported losses in terms of the homes or their cars and so it was pretty common and even an employer reported two deaths during the storm and shortly after there were more. You might have learned that – on the news we had around 4,000 casualties for – after Hurricane Maria only. So we have major companies that could resume their operations soon after the hurricanes, but they have a big issue with the internet access.

A lot of the companies discovered here the main – (inaudible) – Fortune 500 companies that have very good different kind of – (inaudible) – and generators and stuff, and some of them were also lucky enough not to experience a lot of major damage to their facilities. So they were ready to get up and running and were functional just a week after the hurricanes.

Unfortunately, because of the communication issue, they have to wait more than eight weeks, sometimes almost three months for them to resume their operations and having no internet access, no e-mail. Nothing. So they couldn't begin their operations. Some of them were very creative.

They did something like we did in terms of finding different places where you could establish temporary operations, and they – and we – (inaudible) – them to find hotels and other places that could have power, internet access so they can temporarily place their workforce and resume operations. PRTEC reached its partners and shared and exchanged services as needed, and some of the partners even worked with the PRTEC facilities a while because of our having power and internet access.

Right now, we are fully operational. We're catching up as quickly as we can and trying to make it up for the lost time and program momentum. We are still, fortunately, recording worker exits, given the situation of that hurricane and the impact on the demographic that they had in the island, and we have the situation in which a lot of them came back to Puerto Rico sometime afterwards.

So they did resurface. I know that some of you asked Oscar about that. We experienced that – the same thing, and we were very happy to welcome them and continue servicing them. We requested and were granted an 18-month no cost extension, and we are redefining our strategy to make sure that we can meet our performance goals. And we're, as you can imagine, very much affected.

We resumed very successfully the boot camp training strategy we had running prior to the hurricane, and we are currently developing a plan to get PRTEC new facilities that are aligned with an upgraded business continuity plan. It definitely hit us hard, and a lot of the business community – (inaudible) – work were just – (inaudible) – to outside the window because we realized how – (inaudible) – we were in many aspects and how ill-prepared we were, even though we thought we had a good plan because we never planned for something as devastating as this Category 5 hurricane.

And you can see in the daily news now almost every hurricane gets up to very high intensity, three to four, five category, and it's very, very challenging for us because it's more frequent that we are experiencing hurricane with that very extreme devastating force. We are coordinating and executing an island-wide outreach and placement strategy that includes job fairs. We're having one this next Thursday, and we have been coordinating them all through the island so we can – (inaudible) – the outreach strategies for the program.

I think the lessons learned that you never – (inaudible) – and in terms of community and partner engagement, we just realized how important it is for us to have that – (inaudible) – commitment to community and public communication and the strategies for us to be in touch with communities after a disaster. So partnering with radio stations and with public media so we can get out our messages and be even more effective in another situation is one of our priorities.

We are also focused on aligned execution, which means for us, we are planning to develop these very creative solutions to mitigate capacities of training and all the situations that – (inaudible) – imposed. We are also – in terms of organizational capabilities, we understand that it's very, very important to – (inaudible) – very strong experience – an experienced leadership team so we can establish a very integrated government – governance between PRTEC, the public, and everybody that wants to support the workers that we are serving as well, which is government agencies and other funders.

And we – in terms of strategic focus we are developing a very– (inaudible) – framework for priority – (inaudible) – recovery needs so that we can use that as a guide and roll it out after a major disaster.

Those are very high level elements, and we have been working and will continue to do that for the rest of the grant. And we are also partnering with our employers for our sustainability strategies to include also business continuity strategies as well. So that is in a nutshell where we have been and where are we going and what we have learned. Any questions?

MS. HUMPHREY: Thank you, Lara, for that presentation. As you shared, a lot that you all had to really come together really focusing with that community and partner engagement, where you were all able to barter, where you able to go into other facilities to do the training, where you're looking for your participants and participants who have left the island. You're still providing them resources that they can take part in.

MS. LARACUENTE: Yeah. (Inaudible) – and thank you for the opportunity to share this. We truly hope that it serves everybody out there. I know that our Florida partners and others in the south of the U.S. are very highly – (inaudible) – to hurricanes. So whatever that you need and however you might think that we're doing can help you, we are very much open to serve you and to share so you can be as prepared even better than us. You can help us – we can help each other a lot.

MS. HUMPHREY: That's a really great point. Definitely a great point, and thank you for sharing that. Again, if you have any questions after, you can reach out to Lara.

We're going to now move on to lessons learned, and here's where we want everyone else to start to share some of their lessons learned. And I have city and County of Denver, and I have Liz on the phone.

Liz, if you could \*6 on your phone, you should be able to speak. And I know that you will be speaking on pathways to employment, the role of work-based training and credentials. So again, if you hit \*6 to unmute your line. Liz: Can you hear me? Can you hear me?

MS. HUMPHREY: I can hear you, Liz. I can hear you.

LIZ: OK. Great. Sorry. Forgot about the \*6.

MS. HUMPHREY: That's okay.

LIZ: Thank you. I'll be speaking today and just for a few minutes making an intro, and Elaine was going to provide some customer examples. What we found in Denver, in the Denver metro area, we've had to evolve with the grant over the past few years. So the intent and the things that we wanted to do with employers had to change as we found that, when we first applied for the grant, we were at 5.3 percent unemployment. About a year ago we were at 2.3 and we're slightly higher now but it's still a significant change and tech is one of the fastest growing industries in the Denver metro area. So we found a couple things in our lessons learned.

One, you have to really keep connected to the employer. Different employers are going to have different needs. When we've looked at work-based training initially, we found that some employers had a great emphasis on soft skills, depending on – including communications, and some of them it would depend on the kind of occupation and if the individual was trainable, so to speak, if they had the capability to learn based on their past tech skills.

We found for customers that the tech portfolio is extremely important. It's great that they have a credential, but the projects that they've done, what they've done, how they've applied their knowledge, what have they built, these are important things. So we've also found inside of this work-based training, such as work experience internships, have played an important role with closing the gap for some of the customers that we've had. It continues to change.

Our Denver Metro Tech Partnership, which is the sector partnership that was established last year, has played a very important role in helping us to understand what are the changes in those industries. They're actually looking at diversity in hiring and some of the other things that they can bring to the table as individual businesses in order to increase access to jobseekers that are going to work within their company.

Elaine has a couple of examples that we had on customers that didn't – that went through training but didn't actually go to the credential piece of it and some of the reasons why. Elaine, are you on the phone?

ELAINE: Yes. I am.

LIZ: OK. Go ahead.

ELAINE: Hi, everybody. This is Elaine from Denver. So as a program administrator, what we're noticing as the grant is progressing to the end of program year, the employers are not necessarily looking for the credential right up front since. Due to the low employment, they need to fill their position as soon as possible. So we are finding out that individual may go through the training, but they're – they continue to look for job while they're going through the training.

So as a result of that they do find employment, but oftentimes they may not be able to complete the training. So they end up focusing on the employment, and then we continue to follow up with them with the credential. So we encourage them to finish their program so that we can have the positive outcome. So many of them are doing that.

The other scenario is that the individual may just, in finding a job on their own with the support from us, going through the resume assistance and the job coaching, and individuals may not need to complete the certification. So they're focusing on employment. One individual found a job at Lockheed Martin as he was trying to prepare to go to his training, and come to find out he didn't need it.

So he ended up getting a job at Lockheed Martin making $104,000 a year. And so some may come back eventually if they need a credential, but oftentimes the employer provide those additional training on their – with an employer anyway. So ultimately, we end up getting the employment outcome without the credential.

So things are a little different in – now than in the beginning of our program year because of our nature of our unemployment is different than – more jobs are available nowadays in technology positions. So we are looking at more of a – like Liz said, soft skills are important as well as the able to provide a portfolio what they have done in the past and be able to find a job with that model of experience that they have.

Not necessarily to have additional credential to find a position, but that would also help eventually later on. But at the moment the employers are looking for quick skills and portfolios what they have done so they can fill the position as quickly as they can.

MS. HUMPHREY: Great. Thank you so much for sharing that. And then we have Memphis Bioworks Foundation, and they're going to talk about lessons learned as it relates to training completions. And, Christy, are you available to speak? And all you have to do is hit \*6.

CHRISTY: Hello?

MS. HUMPHREY: Hi, Christy.

CHRISTY: Hi. How are you?

MS. HUMPHREY: Good.

CHRISTY: Good. Yes. One of the things that I included in our lesson learned was that specific to training completion, and as you can see, I spoke specifically to multiple credentials. And just essentially, what that does or what that means, if nobody is doing that, when a participant is enrolling, for instance, in a diploma program for information technology, they have an opportunity at various stages throughout the training program to obtain certifications based on whatever material has been covered.

So at the first trimester, three months, or second, they may be eligible to sit down and make application and take the test for an A+ certification or CCNA or ITIL, any of the certifications that are very popular right now with the technology companies, especially here in our city.

And so when students don't feel that pressure of having to be in a training program for 18 months before they feel any type of success where they're able to sit and take an exam, we just found that when there are multiple credentials involved in the training programs that we select, students are more likely to complete because once a student can get one or two certifications at three or four months and then, like, wow, I can go another two or three months and obtain two – at least two more certifications on top of the diploma or the degree that they're going to obtain, it's really morale boosting for them.

It also speaks volumes to their ability to get internships with employers because they do come in with that knowledge. They do come in with the certification or at – on the verge of obtaining a certification because of where they are in their studies. And I wouldn't necessarily say it's an OJT but it can potentially turn into an OJT and they just come in with a wealth of knowledge.

And so we just think that that's – it just kind of makes the employers more involved. It gets them a lot more eager to be participatory in our program and investing in our students.

MS. HUMPHREY: Great. Thank you both, for the County of Denver as well as Memphis Bioworks, for sharing those lessons learned. We have – also have a promising practice from NOVA Workforce Development, and I know Jeanette Mandel (ph), she is on and she's going to talk about job placements for their promising practices. And again, just hit \*6.

JEANETTE MANDEL: Hello. Are you hearing me?

MS. HUMPHREY: We can hear you Jeanette.

MS. MANDEL: OK. Great. All right. Thank you. So I wanted to just touch on a couple of things in our grant. So our grant is tech focused, similar to Denver's. Just a quick thing on the demographics. We serve a very highly educated population. The people in this grant, 80 percent already have a bachelor's degree or even higher, and also they are older. About 71 percent are 45 and older.

So a lot of them had been working in their jobs for a long time before they lost it. So what happens is they get out of work. They're kind of embarrassed. They try to do things on their own, and by the time they come to us – obviously, it has to be at least six months after they lost their job – they're feeling kind of isolated, and they really don't know what to do.

So what we have found was really a best practice was what we call success teams, and these are based on a model that we already do in the rest of our grant, which is called ProMatch, which is a professional networking group. And so part of ProMatch is this idea of success teams. So they are small groups of the participants in the grant.

They come together with a facilitator who's a staff person, and they share job leads. They give each other assignments to do between their meetings, and what we have found is that the first thing that happens is they overcome their sense of isolation. So – and that's huge. So it becomes motivational that they can see other people are in the same boat, basically, and they get the support of their peers is the other thing.

But I also want to mention it encourages accountability. So they give each other assignments, and then they have to come back and report on how they did it, so whether it's to research a company, whatever it is. So it really keeps them on track in their job search.

And what we have seen is that as a result for the people that do the success teams, which is optional – for the people that do it, it actually results in a higher placement rate. So I just wanted to share that very briefly as a best practice.

MS. HUMPHREY: Thank you for sharing because a lot of the grantees, they have workforce individuals who are older. So again, those success teams that you're using may have been very successful for you all. So again, and like we mentioned, having that networking and giving them that accountability. So thank you for sharing that promising practice.

MS. MANDEL: You're welcome.

MS. HUMPHREY: We have a poll now that we want everyone to take. Choose your number one lessons learned from the below cate- – excuse me – categories that impacted the overall grant during the four years. So again, choose your number one lessons learned from the below categories that impacted the overall grant during the four years.

OK. See recruitment, training design, credential attainment, partnerships. OK. Credentialing again. Recruitment because we definitely know that recruitment was, especially for that first year of the grant, just getting the foundations – (inaudible) – to our grant and then going out and recruiting. Job placement. OK. Great. Thank you all for taking the poll.

And so we wanted to – either you can do it on the line. You can do it in the chat box. If you can just share how – one of your promising practice, just share one of those. How is it impacting your community now that we're in year four? And again, I know a lot of us have that no cost extension, but how – just share one of your promising practices. How is it actually impacting your community? Again, you can hit \*6, or you can just state it in the chat box.

We have several people typing. OK. We still have several people typing. Miriam said from Puerto Rico, she said, focusing on designing boot camp trainings that allow people with no formal IT background to redirect their professional knowledge has motivated workers from all ages to join. That's great.

The – (inaudible) – work, using OJT and paid work experience has really helped build employer engagement with the potential to address the dual problems of– (inaudible) – shortages and high poverty rates amongst people that are working in our region. Great.

Christopher with College of the Mainland, we have been quite successful in targeting – targeting supportive service to assist participants to be more marketable to employers by providing basic supplies, materials, work-related clothing, and, where needed, to start new programs. OK. So you do those supportive services, and they really customize those supportive services. So that's great in the community.

Grainne from Florida says, the constant communication and engagement that we have with our business partners have led to a high level of full-time placements. Great.

Denver says their tech desk aid to assist case managers to assess and– (inaudible) – customers interested in the tech jobs. So that tech desk, others can actually use that not only in their particular programs but in other.

Christy says, one of our promising practice that's affecting the community is that it allows for our students to complete training through a no cost extension and still be able to obtain credentials that we're committed to them obtaining and that will help them to move up their career even further. Thank you, Christy. Thank you for sharing.

So we definitely – and you all should definitely be commended, all of the great work that you're doing with Ready to Work and how you're going to sustain this particular grant and how you all have that imprint on the community from this particular grant because individuals are getting those jobs and getting those higher paid jobs. So thank you.

I want to turn it over for final thoughts to Angel.

MS. KITTRELL: I can close it out. So –

MS. HUMPHREY: OK. Yeah. Sure.

MS. KITTRELL: So thank you all so much, everyone, and thank you, Erika. So we want to celebrate the Ready to Work grantees who will be completing the grant at the end of October and sustaining parts of their training program. All right. So thank you all who are continuing, and thank you all who are not. It's been a great program.

And just a few other things for the save the date. We will be having an all group webinar titled managing change when staff transitions before the grant extension year ends. So please be on the lookout for that in November. More information is forthcoming.

And also, as always please go ahead and refer to the Ready to Work Community of Practice that's always available for updated resources and past resources. And as always, there is the contact information.

So if you have any questions or concerns, feel free to reach out to your Ready to Work TA coach, your TA lead, or e-mail us here at rtw@dol.gov. And again, we just – oh, yeah. Sure. Erika, you want to close it out?

MS. HUMPHREY: Yeah. Yes. I was just going to say thank you for all – to all the Ready to Work grantees. Thank you to the presenters. Again, thank you for those, as Danielle mentioned, who will be closing their program out.

Again, we just want to celebrate all of you, celebrate all of the individuals that went through your training and are employed, have either earned credentials, have increased their skills and received supportive services, and what the Ready to Work grant really gave that holistic approach. And we just thank you for that.

We just have a few minutes. So if there are any questions –

MS. KITTRELL: Absolutely and –

MS. HUMPHREY: Go ahead. Angel?

MS. HARLINS: Yes. Thank you, Erika. Sorry. My phone was kind of going in and out. I needed to step away.

But yes, this webinar was great. It was so great kind of hearing some of you guys' lessons learned and your promising practices, and I really hope that just because this grant program is ending and some of you are not continuing that you guys will still continue the work at your companies to really help us bridge that gap for long-term unemployed.

And we really look forward to the grantees who are going to be extending with us and really making sure that we provide you guys with the most technical assistance that you need in order to progress your grant forward. I thought that this was a great call.

We do have an opportunity for you guys to provide us with some feedback. So if you could, Laura, go ahead and get those questions up, and we just want to know how this webinar turned out for you guys, if this information was valuable, if you'll be using it moving forward in your grant program.

I just want to say thank you to all the presenters on the call, Florida State, Alachua Bradford, San Jacinto, and Alachua Bradford (sic). I mean, these promising practices were great, learning about what your grant programs have done in order to succeed, which is amazing. And so we're super excited to be a part of this process with you all.

Thank you to our coaches, Erika Humphrey, Keisha Tompkin, Lyell Newman, and Erin Leason, and most importantly, thank you, Danielle, moderator, for today, really helping us to move this webinar along.

So I'll hand it over to you, Laura, unless there are any other questions from anyone on the call.

(END)