**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**H-1B RTW Webinar**

**Preparing for Staff Transitions during the No-Cost Extension Period**

**Thursday, November 29, 2018**

*Transcript by*

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JON VEHLOW: Again, if you haven't already done so or if you're just joining us, please introduce yourself now in the welcome chat. We'll have that chat up throughout today's webinar where you can type in your questions or comments at any time. Welcome to "H-1B Ready to Work, Preparing for Staff Transitions during the No-Cost Extension Period."

So without further ado, I'm going to kick it off to our moderator today, Danielle Kittrell, Ph.D., workforce analyst, U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. Danielle?

DANIELLE KITTRELL: Thank you so much, Jon, and hello, everyone. But before we get started, we'd like to also understand the role that you play in your organization's Ready to Work Grant. So, please, if you have not already, take a moment to choose the polling option that best describes your work by indicating whether you are the authorized rep, program director, performance specialist, IT professional, or if you're something else. Let us know. Excellent. We're going to welcome, everyone.

So now that we have a better idea of who has joined us this afternoon, I'd like to officially welcome you to the H-1B Ready to Work webinar. Again, title, "Preparing for Staff Transitions during the No-Cost Extension Period."

And again, as Jon said, my name is Danielle Kittrell. I am a workforce analyst here at DOL and I will be moderating today's webinar. I am happy to also introduce Ms. Kisha Toppin and Aaron Leson, who are both Ready to Work TA coaches. And they will be facilitating today's webinar.

Ms. Kisha Toppin is an independent consultant and trainer with over 20 years of comprehensive nonprofit experience. Her major areas of program experience include: service of delivery systems, program development, case management, and much more. Ms. Toppin is currently a TA coach and trainer for reentry employment opportunities, or the – (inaudible) – program, as well as Ready to Work Grant, the Department of Labor. So we're so happy to have Kisha on our team.

Mr. Aaron Leson, he is the director of training and development for tech grants. He has diverse professional background that spans from elementary school education to large-scale corporate training. Now, as an NCDA master trainer, Mr. Leson has provided professional development and training for thousands of individuals in numerous industries. Welcome, Aaron.

Also, please introduce my colleague, Ms. Akeelah Harrell, your Ready to Work technical assistance lead. Ms. Harrell has an extensive background in TA and project management. We are so delighted to have her on our team as well.

Moving on to your objectives for today – our main objective is to support you throughout the no-cost extension period, or period of performance, and to also introduce several strategies to address best transitions that Ready to Work Program can implement. So with that, again, welcome, everyone. And I'm going to pass things over to my colleague, Kisha. Kisha, take it away.

KISHA TOPPIN: Thank you, Danielle, and good afternoon to everyone, perhaps good morning to some. Thank you all grantees who have joined us today. I want to give a shout out to my team member, Aaron Leson. Aaron will be helping us out as well. And you'll be hearing from him a little later.

Before we get started, I want to first congratulate you on your period of performance extension, also known as your no-cost extension. And before we move into those strategies, we would like for you to indicate to us: What is the length of your no-cost extension? Please complete the poll.

OK. It looks like the majority of you have 12-month extensions. And we're asking this question because, depending on how long your no-cost extension is, will also be a factor in which of the strategies that you'll hear today, or that you're already utilizing, which ones really make sense based on how much time you have left on the grant. All right. Thank you for completing that.

I wanted to mention, we've talked about these strategies before – not as it relates to no-cost extension – but we've shared strategies in the past on previous webinars focusing on staff transitions, also known as a staff turnover, or we like to say when staff vacate, right? And some of the prior strategies we've discussed and shared, and some of you all have shared, is really the idea of proactively addressing the inevitable sooner than later. In other words, planning for when staff begin to move into other positions, and understandably so, because everyone knows that the grant will be ending soon.

Also, another strategy we've discussed in the past is developing just a plan B for when positions become vacant – not developing the plan B the day after those positions become vacant, but actually be thinking this through prior to it happening. So again, while this is not a new topic, we are talking about it now in the context of a no-cost extension.

Today's focus will address the four topic areas: Developing plans for efficient staff transition; secondly, preparing for a major staff exodus before the grant actually ends; thirdly, addressing when staff are fatigued and have very low motivation – which you all can attest to, I'm sure – and lastly, keeping staff engaged by using incentives, offering incentives. And I also want to share here that after we delve into these four areas, we will have a period of grantee sharing where we have four grantees who have joined us today who will actually be speaking about their strategies as well.

So let's jump on in. And as we delve into each topic – this being the first one – feel free to write any thoughts or comments or questions you have in the chat box. After each of the four sections, we will give opportunity for you all to share more information or ask any questions. So the first one, the first topic we want to delve into is developing plans, actually having a plan for efficient staff transitions during the no-cost extension.

And some of you have had to develop a plan out of necessity, while others have rolled out your staff structure early on in such a way so that when this took place – whether it was at the beginning, the middle, or the end of the grant – you were ready when staff moved into other positions.

So let's look at some strategies. And then we want to hear from you. The first strategy for developing a plan is to develop a checklist of the functions that are critical for grant success. In short, that knows the time line or expectations for the no-cost extension period. In other words, when does it end? And what is the part they have to play? Sometimes those roles change a little bit, as you know, because the number of staff working on the grant is decreasing. Thirdly, make a determination regarding the key positions that are needed to close out the grants, as well as working with clients.

And as staff vacate positions, you will probably be seeing staff – as they're moving out of their position, you may have to move some staff into their old position. So really just planning for that, and I'm sure that some of you are already doing this. The next slide has two more I want to go over. Overlap in-house roles in preparation for positions potentially becoming vacant, and then lastly, working with partners to designate a point person to support program reporting until the grant ends.

And what comes to mind here with this last bullet is those partner agencies that provide data for the grant to you, just making sure that they understand that there has to be one person still on board, even if it's that last project director or program manager or case manager. There has to be someone there who can still be responsible and will be accountable for reporting the data to you.

And I wanted to ask Aaron, my teammate – Aaron, do you have anything to add to what I shared?

AARON LESON: Well, you know what, Kisha? I think what's really important is that the open communication and thought that has to go in, even while you're still trying to make performance, is the key to transitioning staff. I think we all know, as being employees to someone at some point in our lives, having to guess and not know what's going on is probably twice as bad as really figuring out and knowing through open communication what the plan is, the time lines. And I think that's really key from the standpoint of the staff that you're overseeing.

And on our next slide, what we have is a question that we would like you to use your chat box. And the question is: How are you ensuring the staff – your staff – are transitioning efficiently? What ideas have you seen or utilized or are going to utilize that have been successful for you and will ensure the best to your ability that there is a smooth transition? If you have some ideas – definitely right now I see Jim Dowling (sp) is typing – use the chat box, and we'll address those as they come up.

Very good. I see that Jim being transparent about the process so everyone is part of the process. I love it. I think that's a great idea. And again, I think it supports the fact that not knowing is a lot of our own worst fears just trying to guess. So be open. Communicate the plan. Bring people in to openly discuss, especially in light of the fact that many of these employees have been working this program now for over four years. They're invested as much as we all are the same.

MS. TOPPIN: Aaron, I know that people are jumping in, but what you said and what Jim said – just that open communication and transparency. There's nothing like working on a grant and part of a team, and you feel like you're in the dark. What more reason to try to leave if you really don't know what's going on. So thank you both. That was great feedback.

MR. LESON: Excellent. And just quickly before we move on here, I see that Marsalis (sp) says, we met with staff a full 90 days prior to the end of the original grant and discussed all of the available options. Fantastic. Again, open communication and people are together and moving forward. Kim, transitioning staff to other grants as opportunities arise. Fantastic. I mean, what an ideal way to make use of your great talent that you have.

Anne Terry (sp), keeping everyone aware in ongoing communication. Fantastic. You guys can see the questions and the feedback is really – I think it's just such a wide move to be open and communicative with everybody that is on your team.

MS. TOPPIN: Thanks, Aaron. I want to also just throw this out there. Did any of you actually develop a plan for your no-cost extension of what the period would look like, just sort of lay out everything that you could actually give to your staff? I was wondering if anybody did something like that. If you haven't and you say, hey, that might be a good idea, consider – for those of you who have the 12-month – consider putting something out after the holidays just to get people back in the mindset after the holidays to say, hey, we're here for nine more months, nine or so more months, and let's get back to it, so just a thought. If you're doing anything like that, please – or have done anything like that – please indicate in the chat.

And I'm going to move on to the next slide. So the next topic we want to talk about here is preparing for a major staff exodus before the grant ends. In other words, you come into work one day and two or three staff have submitted their letters that they will be leaving, vacating their position. How do you prepare for that?

And here some of the strategies are conducting audits more frequently to ensure the collection of program data. So if you have this major exodus, at least you have the data that you need to continue to report to DOL. Also, with that, going hand in hand is ensuring that client files are updated, because those files are actually the backup to the data that you have submitted and have reported to DOL.

Confirming staff handoffs – everybody on the team working during the no-cost extension as roles are shifting to basically make it happen to finish on the best note and successful note, everyone should know what everybody is being held accountable to do, who's doing what, what the time frame is around turning information. If it's entering data into the system and you have a MIS person, when is that due to the person? Just being real clear about where staff handoffs are so that, as people start to vacate the position, you can move people around and know what the function of that role will be, or the responsibility.

Lastly, and if we don't focus on this – I mean, this is the one for which we are around as a grant – making sure clients – clients, clients, clients – remain engaged and connected to staff. That's a biggie – don't you think, Aaron?

MR. LESON: Yes. Very much. I think that really kind of even rolls into what we're going to ask next. But be engaged and connected. Be purposeful in doing warm handoffs when you know that your customers are going to have new case managers, new transition staff. The best thing – I know for working in American Job Centers for a decade in my past that our customers really don't like change as much as most people don't like change. And so the more that we can be purposeful in not – I know letters will go out and e-mails will go out – but to have that warm handoff, maybe meeting with customers in the office with their new staff member, with their old staff member to ensure that things will be handled and taken care of properly.

Being very purposeful I think, Kisha, is the key here when we're keeping our customers and clients engaged. As a matter of fact, we have a question here: How will you keep clients engaged until the grant ends? And how have you? What are you thinking? And what we have is, again, in your chat box, if you have ideas of what you're doing and what has worked for you, why don't you share that with us and we can look at in the chat box.

MS. TOPPIN: You know, Aaron, I think – I'm going back to that whole communication and transparency thing. Even being honest with the clients about what's happening, right? About the grant coming to an end soon, finish. But also staff may – like with life in general, there's always change. And there may be staff who are moving on. But the staff that remain are here to serve you 100 percent.

MR. LESON: Yeah. And I think, Kisha, what really makes it a little more difficult in when you build strong relationships with those you serve, sometimes we really don't want to – we resist having to build that relationship. And I'm not – you know, I think we could all think of practical applications whether we have a favorite physician or eye doctor or dentist. Any time we're forced to move or do something different with someone new, that resistance may not be anything reflective of your customers. Just to keep in mind it really just might be uncomfortable for that change.

And I see over in the chat box, I see Bonnie, job club especially related in getting employment. So having customers work together and build bonds with one another and work through as a community is definitely a great idea, Bonnie. Thank you. Jim, encouraging them to engage with other clients. Again, that sounds a lot like the job club where they're working with each other. There's a consistency there.

Hopefully, as they grow, of course, we want them to continue to get trained and placed, but that is a great way to comfort that individual transitioning. Nancy, throughout the grant, we have kept the clients engaged with the instructional directors who hold the classes. They will remain once the grant is – fantastic. So you've attached them and built relationships with staff who are going to remain for other reasons. Fantastic. If you have that idea, what a great idea. What a great way to have that consistency transcend the grant coming to the end.

MS. TOPPIN: Aaron?

MR. LESON: Yes.

MS. TOPPIN: So I added this in here because I was thinking about what you were saying and what was up on the slide. You know, clients can help keep the clients engaged, because they're that far into the process where they can provide peer support; wouldn't you agree?

MR. LESON: Yeah. Totally. And it looks like that really what we're seeing in the responses in the chat box are indicating the purposeful nature of building community within clients, customers so that they are their own natural support. So yeah. Fantastic. Thank you, everyone, for sharing.

MS. TOPPIN: Aaron, just a few more. Anne Terry says, we have relationships at different levels with our partner organizations. And Marsalis says, that is a good process when the program has job clubs in those types of connecting. Absolutely. And again, the individuals that come out that are in the clients that come out for those, hopefully, they'll keep in touch well after the program is over and continue to provide that support. So we're going to move. Thank you, everyone.

Moving on to addressing staff fatigue and low motivation – nobody has had to deal with that here, have you? Here's a few strategies. We know that this is inevitable in most situations. But here are some strategies: First, overlapping positions on other projects. And I know a couple of the grantees that I work with actually have done this. So while one grant is winding down, they're still very much invested in on board because they have another grant they're working on and will remain working on that other grant when this one ends. So that's incentive, I think.

Secondly, allowing for flexible and creative scheduling. So towards the end of the grant coming in to get the data reporting done, the case notes done. But hey, quite honestly, your folks, they may need time off during the day to interview. I mean, let's be real. But if they can come in later on in the day to get their paperwork done so that you can report the way you need to to DOL, why not – and if clients don't need to be seen as much. Thirdly, celebrating the performance achievements along the way – sometimes just giving accolades to staff goes a very long way. A lot of staff want to stay until the very end. They want to be there.

Two more – one is keeping the end goal in front of staff. So, you know, hey, guys. We're almost at the end, but we got a little more ways to go. Let's hang in there and finish strong. I mean, the pep talks, whatever it is that's needed. And lastly, in keeping the end goal in front of staff, maybe chart progress to the finish line. We got 10 more job placements we need to see come to fruition. We got 20 more credentials that we want to report. How many people are finishing the program so that we can do that? Those are some ideas to keep staff engaged. Aaron?

MR. LESON: Yeah. No. I agree. As I'm looking at this again, I'm thinking what a great idea. I think go back into, hopefully, our individual memory banks when we know that something is coming to an end and really we don't have a choice in it. And maybe for some of our employees, some of our staff, this is their Mount Everest – they loved it. They don't want it to come to and maybe you don't.

The support, really I think, stems from taking an active interest in – and hopefully, this has been ongoing and you have those relationships with staff – I think ultimately, when you do things such as allowing for more flexible scheduling, for example, what you're telling your current staff members is that you're invested in them.

It is always kind of a little bit of a unique career field that we have in which our mission is to train and get individuals work and help them to do that. And we have our own life cycle that we go from the one side of the desk where we're serving people to almost the other side where we're in that field where we're looking for new work. And so in that process, the more that we, as leadership, can support our staff and support them through relational activities and to be there for them with open communication that we addressed, the further and more comforting and stronger it's going to be to really address this next question, Kisha.

And it is: How are you – how are we going to address staff fatigue and low motivation? How are you doing that? What are things that you are finding that are successful with your staff? If you have any ideas – and you'll see in the chat box the question that is posted by Jon – how are you addressing staff fatigue and low motivation? Have you found successful ways to do this?

MS. TOPPIN: And while people are starting to write in here, I just want to draw your attention to a question that came up by Kim Tru (sp). "Does anyone know if it's possible to use Ready to Work funds to provide financial incentives for our staff to stay through the end?" And Kim, I'm glad you brought that up, because it's actually the next topic we're talking about. But also, this is your particular question as relates to financial incentives is one that the National Office will be able to address directly. And they will follow up with you after the webinar.

MR. LESON: Very good. Thank you, Kisha. I see – I got to thank you there, Bonnie suggested allowing time for training to help get next jobs with deeper skill sets and hopefully a promotion. Yeah. Fantastic. So investing back into staff. Yeah. Definitely one way to get motivated is to know that those that you've worked for care about you. And it's going to come through staff training. It's going to come through the investment of time, if needed, to search, and to look for other work, to offer those letters of support. June – oh, I see a question, Kisha. I think it's referring to Kim's question.

MS. TOPPIN: Yes. Thanks, Aaron. Yes. National Office is on a call, and they will be sending out an e-mail that they will send to everybody, clarify, provide guidance.

MR. LESON: Very good. I see also I want to just – Jim: Staff fatigue is, once again, about paying attention to people's needs. Look to their professional growth. Exactly. I completely agree. It's building and continuing and strengthening the relationship that you have with your staff and knowing who they are. And a lot of times even us career professionals need to sit down and make that career plan. And so however that looks for you in your area, be purposeful in building that plan, because the idea that when we have that plan will alleviate some of the mystery of what our next move may be.

Marsalis, thank you. Good. Got that same thing. Anne, I think is typing right now. It says, most of our staff members are integrated into multiple grants or projects to provide continuity and reduce turnover until we can locate additional work. We always plan to maintain staff and add instead of replacing. Fantastic. I mean, ideally, that would be everybody's response right there and we would just blow right through this question, because the ability to plan in front and to utilize your staff in other grants is ideal, especially when it fits those staff members and their skill sets.

All right. So thank you, everybody, for posing your statements and questions in the chat box. Kisha, we'll move on now to keeping staff engaged, which is also really closely related to this topic itself.

MS. TOPPIN: Absolutely. And I just wanted to make a comment about what Anne said that having staff on multiple grants. I think it's a very thoughtful approach, because if you have staff that are part-time on this grant and then part-time on another grant, well, that's a lot more work to track, a lot more timesheets you have to track. So it's more work, but what an investment you're making to keep people employed, your own staff. I just wanted to highlight that. Let's move on to our last topic.

Keeping staff engaged via incentives. And again, we had a question that came in about financial incentives the DOL will follow up on. But here are some other strategies, providing support and assistance to secure agency or partner positions. And so some of you may have actually had involvement with helping your staff apply for other positions internally at your organization or agency, or even with partner agencies. And that's wonderful because it's showing staff that you actually care about what happens to them when the grant ends. And for those of you who are even in position to do that, it's really an ideal situation.

Secondly, giving staff members additional responsibilities on the grant is another way to get staff to want to stay around. They feel valued and not just, okay, just hang around until the end so we can get the numbers from you. But also, you're an integral part of this grant and we want to keep you involved because you're doing such a great job.

MR. LESON: I agree, Kisha. Yeah. No, no. We can go right to that question, because honestly, it's tightly linked with our previous question, how do you keep staff motivated and engaged by this time. And we know the answer to the one question that was posed, are there financial incentives that can be done. That will be answered by main office as Kisha pointed out.

But are there other ways to incentivize staff at this point? Have you found something where you're like, this is really working, I mean, beyond what has been mentioned as far as – and it might be late for some to put others on different grant money so they can transition into those when R2W ends, but are there other ways to incentivize staff at this point?

And again, keeping in mind we know that the financial incentive we're going to get an answer for. Are there other things? I see Kim is typing. And while Kim is typing, you know, everyone, some of it is just – I think it might have been Jim who mentioned this – it's about knowing the needs of your staff.

And it's about continually building those relationships. It's about having, if needed, regular meetings so our staff members' minds don't keep creating stories about when things are going to end, and is it going to be a slow trickle layoff, is it going to come to an end at some point? The open communication is just paramount as you go through this.

And then if you already know that, we just want to emphasize at this point continue to do that, be purposeful in that communication. I see Anne said most of our staff members are integrated. OK. I see that. OK. And so we may not have any other incentivized ideas at this point, which is fine. And maybe some of you are just like, well, let me know if it's staff money and we can do it. That will be a – sometimes that motivates all of us. But that answer will be coming.

And I see – let me see here. Kim, one incentive is – depending on the staff level – is to remind staff of the benefits to their career of being part of a grant of this size from beginning to end. It's a great professional development experience to be part of this beginning and experience the full life cycle of the grant. So I agree, Kim. And I think what you can do at that point is not just remind them, but have a staff meeting where you guys can talk about how does that reflect on someone's resumes? What is the wording to be used to capitalize on that experience?

I'm a true believer in making it practical and real, because I agree with the idea 100 percent. But now let's take it to the next level and say, what are you going to put on the resume? How are you going to tout that you've done this? Marsalis, we have helped our staff prepare for what's next in the same manner. Oh, awesome. Fantastic. And I think you should. I think everybody gets a career plan.

I think everybody's staff member works, because we're all – pardon me for the cliché – we're lifetime learners and we're lifetime job seekers, for most of us. And the fact is this'll just be one transition in many of all of our experiences. And I say that because the average job change now is about two to four years. So we all need to be practical and utilize. Just like we would help a customer, we are going to treat our staff the same. So fantastic. Thank you for sharing.

MS. TOPPIN: Thank you, Aaron. This is some great feedback, especially that piece about they were able to finish the full life cycle of a grant. I mean, just to put that on a resume means they understand and have worked on the various phases relevant to a grant. Right, Aaron? From recruitment, to service delivery, job placement, just to partnerships. I mean, I think that's awesome, Kim. And, Marsalis, just to invest in your own staff as much as in the participants, I think, speaks loudly to staff.

So we are going to read this last thing here from Jim, we could be helping staff identify their accomplishments during the course of the program so they can incorporate that into their professional profile. I think all of this is great. It's just in my mind, having worked in programs, it's like, when you're at the end, sometimes it's so busy. How do you actually make sure you make time to do the staff investing, so to speak, and that not be lost? But if you're purposeful about it and it's part of a plan that you actually have in place helping your staff, I think it goes a long way.

And I see Akeelah is typing, but we will transition and come back for the sake of time. At this time, we have identified four grantees who just want to – we're going to unmute their phones and they're going to share more about their specific strategies. And here they are listed here. We will start out with our Maryland and Oklahoma grantees discussing decreasing the number of sites as they're winding down. But how do you still serve all clients even though the sites have decreased, right?

Secondly, changing direct service providers midway through the grant is a strategy that's now having positive impact for Providence, Rhode Island. And lastly, shifting roles as staff move to outside positions – we talked a little about that earlier. And then we'll be hearing from San Jacinto in Texas.

So I want to get us started, Bonnie, with you talking about your plans to decrease the number of sites but still serving everyone enrolled and served. And, Bonnie, feel free in the three or so minutes that you have to add anything else that you'd like to share with the group.

Bonnie: Yeah. Hi. Thanks, Kisha. We've had a lot of transition already. In fact, I'm a replacement for somebody who's already left. So this program initiative has seen a lot of movement already. And that includes our site. So in two seconds: We have a central location where many of us work, including our industry-focused people. But our client folks, our client staff are scattered around the state because we are a statewide program. So it has been one of our more trickier things to deal with the fact that some of those are the individuals who left.

You think about it, they're alone. They're working alone. Sometimes that's not everybody's favorite way to work. Or they've been taken by the people they're working with in those locations. So we've lost a few that way. So we've gotten pretty creative in how we replace those. Up front, of course, we replace them flat out.

We did some creative backs that we're seeing. We had one person in the next county take them all over, take over two counties – Baltimore City and Baltimore County. And then we used the Baltimore City to help train the Baltimore County. Plus the general area she knew a lot about, and her workload was a little bit smaller. So that worked out well.

A little bit later, we had another one leave in Montgomery County. And that was too late to end the grant. We didn't want to rehire. And that's a big strategy for us, how to keep people motivated. We have great people in this grant. So one of the things I'm not trying to do is overload this grant with new hires. One, it might be difficult to get with short time, but because I want all these folks that are here hopefully to be able to land in the organization. So I have been particularly, I think, creative trying to find other ways to backfill.

So when Montgomery County left, we tried to figure out how to do that. And one of our staff at Laurel, knew Montgomery County really well, had worked there before, actually had to tiptoe in part of that as his area assignment. So I gave it all to him, which was an area to tell him as well. So those days he doesn't have to commute too far. So that makes it a little bit easier for him. And then we backfilled his time here in Laurel by pulling somebody else from a smaller grant to backfill here, so basically, moving the people around.

And that's something that we've already done is close one of our smaller producing sites. It was also the furthest one away. It has helped us understand exactly what it's going to take when we have to close down the bigger sites. We have deployed one of our folks who has a smaller case load to cover those staff up there.

So that's been working pretty well. So the other way as we increase the workload of people covering everybody's territory, because we are down staff, we are looking at their work and saying, is there any of their work that we can offload? So we've been getting training providers who do more recruitment. That was something we did.

We are getting our consultant who developed the product to do more of the facilitation of our soft skills training instead of having them do it so they have more time to cover training. So it's sort of moving parts and then making sure that we're not overloading anybody at the same time. And that seems to be working. Also, obviously, it's a temporary staff model. And right now I am looking at a consultant and a temporary to source to help fill in to the very end on some of these same issues. So we've been moving everything.

And then the last one I think is most fun is we have a staff who just resigned. We've had two or three in the last maybe a month and a half. She's moving to China, but still wants to work for us. So we're getting very creative about how we think me might be able to look at an extremely long distance situation and see what parts of her jobs might actually be able to be done remotely, she doesn't move to China and lose everything she's learned. And we work so much on the computer at this point.

So even in a part-time basis, how might we utilize somebody like that – who is a great employee, by the way.

MS. TOPPIN: Thank you, Bonnie. You've added another great buzzword for today's theme: creativity. We have to remain creative. Thank you for sharing. I want to also now call on Marsalis and Joey from It's My Community Initiative. You guys, I believe your program, you have two satellite sites in addition to the main location. And you are ending at one site but continuing at the other. Would you like to share more about that? I think Joey's going to share and anything else you'd like to add.

Joey: Yeah. Thanks, Kisha. Our biggest discussion topic point that we discussed early on that Marsalis and – (inaudible) – together when we met with our partners in that area was we were going to rely heavily on the partners; one, for continued use of space, because we are a statewide grant. We want to continue to have that strong partnership so I can be on the road back and forth to continue to serve the participants in those particular areas. But another thing, as far as it goes with staffing, we wanted to make sure we transitioned those staff folks back into the one-stop centers or the workforce boards.

And so far successfully, we've been so successful in that because our two in Lawton, which is about 80, 90 miles away from Oklahoma City – we were able to transition them already back to other grants and other opportunities there in the one-stop center, one of them actually taken over as a one-stop center manager because of the job she'd done with us. But really reliance on our partners in Oklahoma City is our main hub. But Tulsa, we've relied on the workforce center there as well. Since our last conversation, we will be closing down that office as well. I'll be doing all the searches remotely – whether you use Skype, e-mail. At this point, everybody's finished up their training.

But we've relied on the center manager there to refer our folks for resume, job fairs. Any of that stuff they host in-house that we normally were doing, we've asked if we can use their facilities and use their workshops and combine. So that's what we're going to be doing is relying on our partnerships. But I started this. I was the first person on the grant back in 2015. And so I'll be the last one. So I'm going back to hit the road a little bit to continue to provide the services. We do not want our services to fall off.

So obviously in those areas, the numbers are dwindling down training wise. But we have done a great job with partners to rely heavily on them to use space. But also because of relationships, they've reciprocated that back to us and say hey, whatever you need, we're here for you guys.

MS. TOPPIN: Thank you so much.

MARSALIS: Hey, Kisha. This is Marsalis. I just want to add one real quick thing. Joey and the team have done such a great job with our partners and on either side of the state that we know that we have partnerships going forward for subsequent grants. And really, not having burned any bridges, building those relationships, I think, is a beautiful thing.

MS. TOPPIN: OK. Thank you, Marsalis, for adding that. If anyone listening on the webinar today, if you have any additional questions, feel free to ask them of the presenters as we continue in the chat. And we'll be sure to come back for your questions. Or if you want to chime in and say, hey, we did the same thing and it's working great, or we did the same thing and it didn't, feel free to continue to dialogue in the chat.

Next we'd like to go on to our second topic under grantee sharing: Changing Direct Service Provider Mid-way through Grant. And this particular grantee – Laura Lee Costello (sp) from Providence, Rhode Island – Laura Lee will you just give us a quick recap of what went down and how you responded?

LAURA LEE COSTELLO: Sure. And thanks, Kisha. So we had a four-year grant. And we had originally contracted with the hub for IT in the state, a different agency just to do most of the frontline service delivery. They had been experiencing a lot of changes in leadership and consequently changes in staffing overall throughout the first two years.

So last year in the summer, we applied for a modification to our grant. And we were able to bring the service delivery in-house. So that's been really beneficial for us as far as staffing goes, because not only do I have more of a direct line to what the staff is doing – because the outcomes had been lagging – this way we can work a little bit more proactively on that – but also the positions here were in an American Job Center. So there are permanent positions.

So the preponderance of the grant works now where we're kind of delegating to the staff that are already here. And then the remainder of the staff that is working on this grant kind of echoing what some other grantees are doing where diversifying their workload and starting to work with them on different projects so that we can ensure they'll be around.

MS. TOPPIN: Thank you, Laura Lee. And if I can just highlight real quick one of the staff people you brought from the outside agency to your agency. And so when we talk about the whole client piece and maintaining that relationship, this program was able to do that because they brought the case manager inside to work on their – the side of the grantee when they made that transition. So, Laura Lee, wouldn't you agree that that helped a lot to keep folks retained in your program?

MS. COSTELLO: It was critical, and so that individual had been here for the duration. And it's been good for both the clients and the new staff because he knew a lot of the nuances of the grant that when you're starting to get people up to speed, there are things that a frontline provider will remember that necessarily I wouldn't remember while training. So that was helpful.

And also because he had to pretty much be a one-man band for a little bit while we were getting the new staff involved, he's really aware of all the different roles. So now I've been finding by cross training staff he's able to help with that, because there were times when he had to do job development. And sometimes they had to do the training referrals. And he's able to kind of keep the rest of the staff informed as to how to do that.

MS. TOPPIN: Yeah. So this is an example of an early strategy midway through the grant that is now having a positive impact on your no-cost extension experience. So thank you, Laura Lee.

MS. COSTELLO: Thank you.

MS. TOPPIN: You're welcome. Lastly, shifting roles as staff move to outside positions. And we want to hear from Nancy from San Jacinto. Tell us more about that, Nancy.

NANCY: Hi, Kisha. Yeah. At the beginning of this webinar, you discussed about identifying critical tasks to do. And about a year ago, that's what we did – we made a list of whose primary role to do the hub, whose primary role to pay the invoices every month. So we had a whose primary and whose backup, and we made sure everybody knew those roles that they would be taking over. But of course, people do leave.

I experienced in the spring, I had two positions left. I did get those replaced. And then this fall, I had two more positions of people leaving. One of them I did not replace. The other I have a temporary person from a temp organization doing that position. So we are always shifting what role we play and make sure that I do have a wonderful staff, as well as we have a wonderful partnership with several different colleges in the area. And pretty much everybody's taking on multiple roles is what's happening to make sure that everything runs properly.

I feel like the work's dwindling down some because we used to have tons of participants we were working with at one point. And now it's getting down to more manageable. So if more people leave, at this point, I won't be replacing anybody. We will just continue with what we have. The other thing we're doing is the people that will remain at the college, I've started pulling some people in and training them on how to do the quarterly reporting because they will have do that for us when we're gone. So I'm bringing people that don't normally work on the grant, training them some parts of the grant.

MS. TOPPIN: All right. Thank you so much, Nancy. And to everyone who has just shared, grantees, we appreciate your feedback. We know that you have much more you can share, as well as the other grantees who are participating in the chat. But for the sake of time, we want to go ahead and move along. And I want to thank you, everybody, for your participation today. I'm going to hand it over to Aaron to help close us out.

MR. LESON: Yeah. OK. No problem. You know, as we've shared some ideas today, and you've shared ideas that have been fantastic, it kind of leads us here before we do our final wrap-up with the general questions. We know questions have been posed that answers will be coming. Are there any other questions that you would like, to the best of our ability, to address while we're here on this webinar? If so, if you would type those questions in the main chat box, we will address those.

Also, while something may come up, just a remainder: Any of your technical assistance coaches, we're here for you. So if you have that – (inaudible) – to ask that, definitely reach out to your TA coach. As usual, we'll let you know what we know. And if not, we'll guide you in the right direction, as we all have what I would consider strong relationships with our grantees. And I don't see any questions coming in right away. So what I would like to do on our next slide – there's a quick poll that we would like to you answer. And I think it's going to pop up right there on your screen.

If you would just take a second and look over those and have your area – or if you're with other people, just decide which – choose a topic below from today's webinar that was most helpful. This does a few things for us. It allows us to continually mold and shape our planning to deliver what our grantees – you – need. It really does help us to continually refine – whether it be a webinar we address or on our monthly coaches call – that we can talk about it so we can disseminate the information that way. Let's just take a second and do that for us, that would be great. We appreciate it.

MS. TOPPIN: And if I could just jump in real quick, a comment I wanted to make. I was having my call with actually Memphis Fireworks this week. And we were talking about performance and how you address performance and during the no-cost extension. And they made a really good point. They said – they were talking about the performance – and once you are very close to achieving all your goals, it gets easier.

So my – not advise – but my encouragement is today: To the extent that you can achieve your grant outcomes that DOL is looking for you to achieve, the sooner the better; because as the grant winds down, if you've already met all your goals, and as staff transition, the program won't feel it as much. It won't impact it as much. So the sooner you make the grant goals, the better. And having said that, thank you Aaron. Just wanted to jump in their there and mention that. I thought that was worth sharing.

MR. LESON: Yeah. Perfect. Thank you. You're welcome.

MS. TOPPIN: I will go ahead and hand it over to Akeelah at DOL National Office.

AKEELAH HARRELL: Thank you, Kisha. We have a couple resources to share from today's webinar. The first one is the H-1B Ready to Work Grant wrap-up checklist.

This checklist should be used as a tool and does not supersede any grant requirement. And as usual, the Ready to Work community of practice – all follow-up TA products will be posted on the community of practice accordingly. And as always, you can contact the Ready to Work TA team via the National Office mailbox at: RTW@dol.gov.

So thank you for attending today's webinar. And on behalf of the Ready to Work team, I'd like to thank our facilitators and grantees for sharing their insight and expertise today. And in addition, thank you to the Ready to Work grantees for your participation in today's webinar and for your thoughtful questions and comments. And happy holidays, everyone. Thank you.

MS. TOPPIN: Thank you.

MR. VEHLOW: Thank you.

(END)