**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**Sustaining Employer Partnerships for Students' Long-Term Success**

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GRACE MCCALL: And welcome to "Sustaining Employer Partnerships for Students’

Long-Term Success." So now without further ado, I'd like to turn things over to our moderator today, Robin Fernkas, Division of Strategic Investments, Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor. Robin?

ROBIN FERNKAS: Thank you so much, Grace. And welcome, everybody. We're really delighted that you've joined us late in today or this afternoon. Looks like we've got about 40 percent of you who are from colleges, and about 36 percent of you from the workforce system, and the remainder from elsewhere.

As Grace said, I'm Robin. I'm from the U.S. Department of Labor. And I'd like to introduce my co-moderator for this series, Erin Berg, from the U.S. Department of Education. So you'll hear from – hi, Erin. Sorry. I was going to say we're going to hear from you more in a moment, but greetings.

So our three presenters today, who I will introduce shortly, have been involved with the U.S. Department of Labor's program called TAACCCT, which is the short name for the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training Program. It was a $2 billion investment that wrapped up in September of 2018, though many aspects, as you're going to hear today, do live on. And so the 700 TAACCCT-funded colleges developed nearly 2,700 new or revised programs of study, so that's curriculum for manufacturing or health care programs at many of these community colleges.

They also developed new ways of doing things like enhancing employer engagement. So you'll find resources about all of these innovations all free for your use on a website called Skillscommons.org. By some, it's been called a gold mine, and so we really encourage you to check it out if you haven't done so. Now, Erin, I'd like to turn the mic to you and hear a word from you.

ERIN BERG: Thanks, Robin. Thank you all for (involving ?) with this. We are really grateful to be partners with you all on TAACCCT and on Skills Commons. Just so everyone knows a little bit about me – I work in the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education as a community college program specialist. And in that role, I'm privileged to assist the nation's community colleges, students, and related workforce stakeholders. And in this role, I get to hear a lot about the amazing things that colleges are doing, but also as well as when they have challenges and they're looking for resources. And employer engagement is a big topic that we hear about in our office.

So I particularly liked working with my colleagues at the Department of Labor on Skills Commons and the series of webinars because it highlights really incredible models and case studies, templates, processes, lessons learned. They're all waiting for colleges and other workforce development stakeholders to find them and to make them their own. Today we'll hear about some great stories of how grantees at MiraCosta College and Chaffey College, both in California, have made some exciting things happen with respect to employer partnerships and how those colleges sustain them.

We'll also hear about the results from an Employer Perspective Study that brings in the viewpoints of a number of highly engaged employers. So you're in for a treat today. And with that, I'll turn it back over to Robin to give you a little more update and some polls.

MS. FERNKAS: Great. Thanks, Erin. So as many of you may or may not know, TAACCCT was authorized during the height of the recession. So we had high unemployment. We were challenged with the issue or retraining and reskilling the workforce as quickly as possible. So we needed to engage employers in ways that we may not have engaged them previously. And we needed to make sure that the training we were providing we were not doing so without knowing the people would find employment as a result of that training.

So DOL developed this conceptual framework that really shows that this movement for employer engagement from engaging employers as advisory partners really from moving to that to more hands-on involvement from the employers to strategic partners. And so this spectrum is really what we're going to focus on today.

So our presenters today, Dr. Sunita Cooke from MiraCosta College; Sandra Sisco, the Director of the InTech Center at Chaffey College; and Molly Scott, a senior research associate at the Urban Institute, are all going to discuss how they deepened their employer engagement through TAACCCT.

And also, from Molly, you're going to hear the findings about what we learned across TAACCCT programs through a study on employer engagement. So I'd like to start out by asking each of our panelists today a set of questions. And then we'll move into more of a conversation with the three of them.

So to start, I turn to you, Dr. Cooke. When we talk about the framework of employer engagement, how have your relationships with employers evolved over time? So can you describe for us where MiraCosta College was before you received the TAACCCT grant and where you are now?

SUNITA COOKE: Thanks, Robin, for asking. Can you hear me okay?

MS. FERNKAS: Yes.

DR. COOKE: OK. So before our TAACCCT grant, MiraCosta offered a variety of programming on the credit side and also on the not-for-credit side and the noncredit side. And in California, not-for-credit is a fee-based entity that is self-sustaining. Noncredit is subsidized by the state. So there's a little bit of a difference from California that you might see in other states. So prior to the TAACCCT grant, we were offering our not-for-credit courses at a variety of community sites in partnership with cities and that kind of thing.

The TAACCCT grant which we received was just about $3 million. And it allowed us in 2015, to really start a new partnership with a part of our district. The district that we serve is a coastal strip along the north part of San Diego County. And this grant allowed us to really bring a partnership together with the City of Carlsbad, MiraCosta College, and then of course, the Department of Labor TAACCCT grant.

And so the City of Carlsbad was not necessarily going to be front and center in supporting intensive training for high-skill, high-wage jobs. They're a very affluent part of our community, and felt that all of their young people were going on to wonderful universities and didn't need this kind of training.

Well, it turned out that this center began – and we opened it in March of 2015. And that center has just been really oversubscribed almost within six months of our opening this site, which is intensive training designed with and partnership with industry in a format that accelerates training and very much an intensive, all-day-long, five-days-a-week format and supports students with comprehensive student support including career planning, job placement, enrollment.

And the engagement of our partners really began traditionally as the previous five showed we used to certainly have advisory committees that met every semester. And we would tell them how wonderful we were and what our programs were doing for students.

And we would listen to their feedback. But that really then deepened through our Technology Career Institute and other efforts to really be about the employer being engaged in the development of the curriculum. So they're directly involved in the process of developing and delivering the new courses and the curriculum. Many times they are focused at work for the business and industry that are working with us in teaching some of the courses or components of the courses. And we've also done some really interesting things in that site that includes space for an incubator.

So we have business and industry present with us, making comments in the classroom, and talk to us about – talk to our students about what is expected in the workplace as they apply these skills in a work setting. And we've also had some unique opportunities to take internships or work-based learning and really modify those in a unique way.

And by that, I mean in San Diego County, we have some extremely small companies that we work with. So I would say that 90 percent of our businesses are small businesses. So we engage them one by one based on personal relationships.

And in this case, many of our small businesses that are startups or just kind of nascent and growing don't necessarily have the research and development budget to really do robust research and development. And so they've utilized our students and extended their learning outside the classroom.

Instead of interns going to their site, our students are actually dividing into groups and doing project-based study on internships that really expand the arm, the reach of the business' research and development arm. So projects that they didn't necessarily have the resources to develop into concepts, they're entrusting our instructors and students with helping them in expanding their reach.

So I think you can see the progression within just a four-year period in that particular site of really the traditional advisory committee to very direct hands-on engagement in curriculum development and delivery, and also then into the how can we turn an internship into an opportunity for more students?

MS. FERNKAS: Wow. It's really exciting to hear all that you've done, especially in such a short period of time and how you've become such an asset in your community, as I know you've always been. But this I'm sure for these businesses, particularly the small businesses, having that that research capacity and added help is I'm sure taking those partnerships a lot further than you had maybe even envisioned. I don't know.

DR. COOKE: I think so. I think so. Thank you.

MS. FERNKAS: Yeah. Well, Sandra, I want to turn to you and bring you into this conversation, because the InTech Center, you've also moved from having employers in an advisory role to having them as strategic partners that you've really sustained over time. So if you'd be willing to share how you were able to make the InTech Center sustainable and how you incorporated that into your planning, I think others would be really interested in hearing about that too.

SANDRA SISCO: Sure. Everyone hear me okay?

MS. FERNKAS: Yep. You sound good.

MS. SISCO: OK. Great. So the TAACCCT grant was instrumental in opening the doors on the facility that we exist in today. And so we also applied it as a regional consortium. And we have a total of 12 different partners in terms of community colleges and workforce development boards with the TAACCCT grant.

But I think one of the biggest parts of our success is that we actually had a private employer invest $1.9 million into making sure that we refurbished the building that we're in, which actually sits on the campus of that employer, which is California Steel Industries. And so that I think without the TAACCCT grant, we probably wouldn't – I know we would not be where we are today.

So prior to the TAACCCT grant, we did have a group of manufacturers and developed a Manufacturing Council of the Inland Empire. But by opening the doors and having high tech industrial, electrical, mechanical lab, pre-engineering, additive manufacturing, it really opened the door to partner with a whole slew of other employers that we have not partnered with in the past.

And so most of our programs are all – at this point, they are not for credit. Similar to what Dr. Sunny Cooke alluded to earlier. But we've realized that because we're at a whole new level in serving many, many more students in terms of sustainability, we've developed a four-pronged approach.

So we will continue to pursue grants and contracts, like we've done for over the last two decades, to deliver these short-term intensive training programs. In addition, we have converted some or part of our programs into noncredit or for credit, which will allow us to generate what's called FTES, full-time equivalent student, and will allow us for the first time ever to receive apportionment dollars or general funds from the state budget. And then we are starting to step up our game in employer fees. And in some cases, we're going to offer some of our classes in a community education environment, which is also a fee-based structure where individuals pay.

And then lastly but not least, we're developing a corporate affiliate program where employers can partner with us and make donations through the Chaffey College Foundation. Or they can sponsor a cohort of students. Or they can purchase equipment. So there are various different ways that they can support the work that we do here at InTech.

MS. FERNKAS: Great, Sandra. I'm sorry. I was still on mute here. I apologize. Anyway, that's really helpful. And I think, also, as you were speaking, thinking about this role definitely of taking something to scale – which you guys have been able to do – but then thinking about how other colleges might be able to replicate what you've been doing. And I don't know if you want to just speak very briefly to the replication aspect of this for other colleges, because I think as I understand it, you're helping other colleges do that too.

MS. SISCO: Yes. So we in the Inland Empire Region, it's a vast geographically sprawled region. And so many of the employers we were supporting are located in an area called the High Desert, which in terms of miles, it's not that far from here. But you have to go through a path. And any time there's weather, whether it's wind or rain or snow, a lot of times there's fires because of the wind up in that region. It creates a really big burden for any trainee to travel, to come to training here at the InTech Center.

So actually our partners from County of San Bernardino Workforce Development Department really approached us and asked if we would entertain the idea of helping the High Desert to stand up in InTech. But let me not go down that rabbit hole.

Let me tell you what happened ultimately is we just started to work directly with our partners from Victor Valley and helped them to identify which curriculum the employers were in most need of up in that area. So they're basically replicating our labs. The center itself is going to be replicated on a much smaller scale to start.

And then they did receive also a building where someone has committed a building as well up in that area. And so we're replicating some of our programs, our labs. We're sharing curriculum. And right now we're actually sharing some funding to help them get that off the ground and get that started up there.

MS. FERNKAS: Great. Well, thanks. I really think that that's exciting work that you're doing. And I do think others are going to benefit from this, so thank you for sharing that.

I'd like now to turn to you, Molly. And as you've listened to these examples from Mira Costa County and Chaffey, what stands out for you that reflects some of the key findings from the Employer Perspective Study?

MOLLY SCOTT: Oh, wow. There's a lot of overlap with the kinds of things that they're talking about. Let me tell folks just a little bit about the Employer Perspective Study. All of the colleges that participated in TAACCCT shared information about their employer partners, including the range of different roles that they played.

And what we did is we selected all of the employers that had played the most roles and the most varied roles. So how is that different from the traditional advisory groups? Well, it goes well beyond just participating in a group and giving input like some of my colleagues have already talked about.

It means taking an active part in work-based learning. It means providing stipends for participants. It includes lending materials or other expertise, blending their staff to participate in activities. Right?

So it's a more active kind of collaboration in a lot of different ways. So we spoke to 41 different employers that had strong relationships with their college partners. And we learned a lot of really interest things. And so I think the first thing that I'd like to talk about is that strong relationships are really diverse. There is no one particular type of diverse relationship. What does that mean? Well, we spoke to 41 employers overall.

And the length of those relationships varied really widely, for example. Twenty-one of the employers had relationships that only lasted a few years, one to three years. And then you had others that have lasted decades and gone through many different phases and iteration. You had some of these partnerships – actually 29 of the 41 focused on one single educational program. But there were others where they had partnered successfully on two, three, even four different specific educational programs in collaboration with the college.

In terms of staffing, almost two-thirds of the relationships were ones where you had multiple people on the employer's staff who were collaborating actively with different people at the college. And that could include human resources people. It could include plant managers. It could include the CEO or other leadership. But a lot of these had multiple people. Although, some of them just had one. Sometimes with a small business, the person in charge really has their fingers in everything. And having that relationship with that single person really made the difference.

And in terms of the amount of financial buy-in of employers, we actually found that very few are making the kinds of contributions that the Intech Center got. Only five documented making really substantial financial contributions to the effort. And only about seven were helping the college actively apply for grants.

But one of the things that was actually really interesting and an opportunity is that all of the employers were eager to see the collaboration continue, and often just didn't really know what the college's plans were for financial sustainability. So there's a lot of willingness there and a lot of opportunity to engage employers in that conversation because a lot of them have a real vested interest in seeing things continue.

So whether it be helping with grants, as Sandra was saying, opening the door to employer fees for some of the services or making direct contributions to infrastructure, other things that could be really helpful.

The other thing I want to note about the variation is that at the very beginning, we saw this continuum of advisory to strategic partners. That may or may not be linear. We saw a lot of variation in terms of a level of communication, a level of involvement fluctuating over time, and probably even more when you have really long-term relationships, because they'll go through phases. And that's part of being a natural ebb and flow of those relationships. So how do these relationships develop?

We found in a study that most of the time the relationships are the strong relationships with employers were ones where the college initiated. The college went to the business, said, hey, what are the challenges that you're dealing with? How can we help you with that? These are the kinds of things we have to offer. And employers really value our colleges literally meeting them where they are. And both Dr. Cooke and Sandra were talking about this earlier – going to manufacturing council meetings or other industry association, other community events or groups where businesses are involved, going directly to their offices and spending the time to get to know them in the environment where they already are. They really highly value that.

The other thing that really stood out was the importance of having up-to-date facilities and the chance to shape programs in ways that align with their priorities. The InTech Center is a great example of up-to-date facilities. And that meant so much to the employers that they were willing to put in as well.

Particularly in manufacturing, you have businesses that are really looking for that state-of-the-art technology. And partnering with a college is a great opportunity for them to do that, particularly I think as folks have mentioned, smaller employers that really just don't have the capacity to do that.

The other thing is having industry-savvy college staff that are really oriented toward the business of the client, people who already understand how the business works really intimately. And can really help do that tailoring to meet employer needs. And then the last thing I want to talk about a little bit is what the value of these relationships are to employers. So it mentioned things that attract them, like the industry-savvy staff or the state-of-the-art facilities. When they think about measuring the value to their business, they mostly think about it in terms of new hires or reduced time for onboarding or retention, things like that.

But one of the things that was really interesting is that really none of the businesses that we spoke to were looking for hard ROI numbers. Most of the businesses that were opting to collaborate with colleges, it was because their business culture led them to do so. A lot of them had a really good sense of civic involvement as well.

They're not necessarily taking these measures like new hires, reduced time for onboarding, retention, weighing it against the cost of their involvement, and monetizing them and doing an ROI calculation. Most of the leaders of these businesses really wanted to be involved for a lot of different varied reasons. But I think that is sort of a challenge and an opportunity.

The challenge is that because that data is not being gathered systematically in these partnerships, it's really hard for the college to then take that information and share it with maybe some partners who might be more skeptical.

So the opportunity is to think about how colleges might be able to use these partnerships as an opportunity to start more actively building a business case that could help them expand partnerships more broadly. So those are just some of the punch lines from the study. It was really great to get the perspectives of business people on the ground. And they had so many very positive things to say about the relationships they've built with colleges through TAACCCT.

MS. FERNKAS: Thanks. Molly. I think that's really helpful. And I also think it's really validating to hear that a lot of the findings that you found through this survey really aligned with the promising and best practices that we heard from Dr. Cooke and Sandra. So I'd like to go back and ask a couple of follow-up questions.

Sandra, I know in listening to your example that some might be a little discouraged by this highly-developed partnership and think, wow. How could we ever get there? But maybe you could talk a little bit about where did you plant seeds earlier on that helped get you to this point?

And I think also going back to Molly's point about the value, I think Dr. Cooke talked a little bit about the value of the relationship to the employers. But I do think as you have developed these more sophisticated relationships, maybe both of you – Sandra and Dr. Cooke – can address that, too, in terms of are you measuring value today?

And if so, how do you express that value that you're offering to these employers? So I know that was a multi-prong question, but if you can start with what seeds did you plant earlier, and then kind of where you are today in terms of measuring the value, that would be helpful.

MS. SISCO: OK. Sure. This is Sandra. Would you like me to go first?

MS. FERNKAS: Sure. Yes.

MS. SISCO: OK. All right. Thank you. So in terms of planting the seeds early on, I think that it's always a good approach to go for the low-hanging fruit.

So in our particular case, it was that there was this huge need and a huge demand in one particular occupation that had a tremendous shortage. And so that was the industrial electrical technician. The shortage wasn't just here – it was actually nationwide. And this particular employer or group of employers we were working with would sometimes have to go out of country to even recruit the talent that they were looking for.

Part of the problem that they were experiencing, as well as all the manufacturers, is that they were looking for folks that did not exist. And what I mean by that is they wanted a certain set of skills, plus a minimum of two years' of experience. So the market was so tight and still continues to be and it actually has gotten even worse. Those people are working. And then one employer is poaching from the other employer. And so these employees are jumping around for an extra dollar or two an hour.

So what happened back around 2014, the employer – in a conversation actually that our faculty person was having with one major employer – they were talking about, oh, woe is us. We have this big issue. And then the faculty person said, well, I have oodles of people graduating out of my program that say they can't get a job because everyone's requiring a minimum of one to two years' of experience. And it was kind of like the peanut butter and the chocolate came together and this beautiful piece of candy was birthed, which was, let's give the folks who don't have any work experience a chance. And let's try it and let's see what happens.

And so that is where we started. And we kind of by accident stumbled across a really, really good solution in convincing the employer they need to give these trainees a try.

And then fast forward a few years, we happened to get some funding recently so that we could expedite and fill this workforce pipeline even more quickly and get more employers convinced that this is what they need to be doing. We had a grant from a private foundation that allowed us to pay these individuals a paid internship at $15 an hour. We are the employer record. And so it's a super low risk for an employer to try before they buy.

And then we've attached that training into a Registered Apprenticeship Program. So they're hiring folks now more at an entry level. And then we're getting them their basic skills. And then once they're hired permanently, some, not all, because not all employers are bought into this strategy of a registered apprenticeship. So it's really, that was a long story to say, start with the low-hanging fruit. Identify those employers that have the biggest need. And the last thing I wanted to add was, come to the table with resources. That's one thing we've always been really good at doing here.

We've partnered with the County of San Bernardino Workforce Development Board. We know how to ask funding to try out these kind of like pilot these programs. We worked with the State of California Employment Training Panel. We know how to get dollars to do incumbent worker training, pay for the training. So once they hire them, now we have funds to do additional training with these individuals. So really important when you start talking to business about all these resources you have on their behalf, the doors come flying wide open.

The last thing is in terms of measuring value. That is definitely a bit more challenging. And after the WDI Conference that we were all at and that presentation and Molly's report really kind of motivated us and inspired us to go at this again.

So calculating ROI, return on investment, on training projects is a bit laborious. So you have to start the planning of that prior to the start of training. And you have to have somebody commit it on the employer side, as well as the college's side to be committed to that process. And so we're attending webinars recently on how to go about doing that.

And what we're finding is for your large, large, large employers, they have the resources and the time that they can commit to doing that and investing in that process. But it is really a hard stretch to do that with our small-to medium-size employers. But what we've committed to here at InTech just recently is we're going to pilot an ROI model with one training project. And then we'll evaluate it from that point.

But many times for us, because we're doing recruitment of the trainees, we're placing them into the training program, and then we place them into employment, we can quickly identify for an employer just on the front end the recruitment and then the placement. They normally pay recruiters fees to recruit trainee or individuals. And then they usually pay placement fees from temp agencies. So if we were just going to wrap our model or use that as a model, we can always justify a huge ROI on the front end and the back end. But there's a lot more area of opportunity there that we need to look at.

MS. FERNKAS: That's really insightful. And I appreciate you sharing all of that. I think, Dr. Cooke, as we turn back to Mira Costa County, if you could also talk about – you talked about where you were at the beginning where you are now with TAACCCT. But some of what we learned from the employer study was that it was really important to have senior leadership personally engaged with the employers.

And so maybe if you could address that as the community college president, how much of your time and investment did it take to bring these employers to the table? And like, Sandra, are you all able to measure any of that value? I think she was saying it's really a challenge with these smaller employers and you're working with a majority of small employers. So if you could share some insights about that, that would be helpful.

DR. COOKE: Sure. First, I want to say that we, for our Technology Career Institute, we have just an extraordinary executive director, Linda Kurokawa, who is really the face of MiraCosta College for many of those in business and industry. And so as Sandra said, there are some wins that Linda had achieved over her years in this work. And that has gotten many of our industry partners to be her champions. And there's hardly anybody in the community that really doesn't know who she is or the work that she does. So that's really helpful in having those folks even serve as ambassadors for your program.

So we have seven publicly-elected members of our board of trustees. All of them know the work that we do through this Technology Career Institute. They know enough about it to when they're out in the community and listening to folks and talking to folks to connect with Linda if it's appropriate. And I try to do the same. So my job is really to connect many times at the level of the CEO or vice president of HR or something like that.

And I think MiraCosta because of the robust and comprehensive services that we offer, from the short-term intensive training all the way through the certificates and degrees that traditional community colleges offer and now to bachelor's degrees, there are five bachelor's degrees that you can get on MiraCosta 's campus.

One, through the work that we do, and others through partnerships. And so the people see us as that kind of comprehensive workforce developer. And so when I'm out in the community, many times people have heard enough about something that we do that they'll approach me. And then I saw a question come through about getting different departments that need to be involved in an employer engagement effort together to work effectively.

And I think that truly is a challenge. So when a contact comes to me, I need to discern enough about what their need is to get them to a level of the college. That might be a dean. It might be a vice president. It might be Linda herself, and to get them to a place where all their needs can be met.

So if they need internships, our foundation has actually a business roundtable advisory that is an advisory to me about workforce. And through that membership and access, the foundation provides concierge-level service to help them find interns when they are in need. So they kind of hold their hand and go through the process of advertising and getting the appropriate interns to the business. So we offer a variety of services to the company. And I think they really appreciate that, because I think we all understand one business does not want to talk to six people at a college to have their needs met. So that sense of a comprehensive approach is critical.

And I think that MiraCosta has a terrific reputation with our economic development corporation, the North San Diego County one and the San Diego regional EDC. They bring folks to us and they tout the work that we do so that they serve as connectors and ambassadors for us as well. So I guess the reiteration of that is those contacts need to happen at multiple levels. And everyone that's out in the community needs to represent what the college can do for an individual.

And I think as Sandra said, the quick wins, the easy, the low-hanging fruit, but also those employers that have been impacted by the development curriculum, the graduates that we've produced. You know that you're successful when a company comes to – Linda has folks that always say to her annually, I want to contribute to your work again. And certainly folks that also contribute equipment and are happy to help in any way possible and serve as ambassadors for her program.

MS. FERNKAS: And I think that – as we'll hear from Molly in a minute – I do think that that is really an indicator of that value of those repeat customers. And I think as you're saying, as they turn around and invest in your programs or offer equipment and things, it is a way of showing that they're investing in the partnership too. (Crosstalk.)

DR. COOKE: I think it is very important for us not to just go to businesses with our hands out, but to really extend that which we can offer that will address what keeps them up at night. And usually, that's recruitment and retention of talent. So I want to reiterate that point that Sandra made as well.

MS. FERNKAS: Yeah. Very well. Good point. So Molly, as we look back at the findings of the study, is there anything else that you found noteworthy or surprising that you may not have covered already that maybe would offer some lessons or advice for colleges that are trying to engage employers in this way?

MS. SCOTT: Yeah. I mean, one of the things that I thought might be interesting to add was I know it's really hard to reach out to small employers, because there are a lot of them. But we did find that the small employers are the ones that probably most value this working in community with others in their sector and being connected to others.

We definitely heard that in terms of the value to them. That's another reason why finding ways to reach out through industry associations or others can be really valuable, because some of those smaller businesses probably can be some of your very best partners and are really hungry for the kind of additional capacity that they can get by partnering with community colleges.

MS. SISCO: This is Sandra, if I can just piggyback one more thought on that. If there is not an industry council or association in your area for a particular need – it doesn't have to be an industry sector – it could be a particular occupation or a particular need – I would recommend starting your own. In the beginning, when we started Manufacturer's Council of the Inland Empire, it came together by a group of employers. But we, in fact, ended up taking that over and we ran that group. We sent out the invitations. We did the nameplates. We had one employer who primarily hosted it.

We tried to float or have different employers take turns. But it was hard when the group kept getting larger and larger. We would host it at Chaffey College. So that's another resource, like Dr. Cooke was referring to, that you can come to the table with and say, we're willing to do the work to pull the people together to convene and coordinate and do the meeting notes, and especially for small-, medium-size businesses. Again, they don't have the resources to do that work. Now all you have to do is find somebody, find one of your own resources to do that work, because it is work. It takes time, but well worth the effort.

MS. FERNKAS: So thank you, Sandra, for jumping back in. I really do think that you guys have covered the gamut here of what we were hoping to draw out from your various projects. And so I do see that several of the attendees from our webinar have posted some questions. So if we could pivot to their questions at this time, I'm going to invite my colleague, Erin, to field some of those or help ask each of you those questions.

MS. BERG: Thanks, Robin. And thank you, presenters, for enlightening us on the work that you've done with your TAACCCT grant and beyond. We're really hoping that the audience can take some of these nuggets and go to Skills Commons or get in touch with you if they're interested in learning more.

One of the questions that came through is that, how are these partnerships that you've developed through the TAACCCT grant or after the TAACCCT grant, how are they different than the traditional advisory committees or the way that you did things before TAACCCT? And that's circled Sunny and Sandra.

DR. COOKE: This is Sunny Cooke, and I would say I have worked in two states in three different college districts. And I have not seen the advisory committee model be a very in-depth way to engage employers.

For one thing, it's usually the one person that represents that company that shows up once a semester, and then maybe nobody else in the company knows that they're involved or that they're helping advise on the curriculum. So it's a "one person that shows up" kind of model rather than, as we've mentioned, that it's a multi-layered engagement potentially at the company, as well as at the college. So I think that's a difference.

I think that the ability for our Technology Career Institute really to engage employers has been on-the-ground level where it really makes a difference. In a couple of cases, we've worked with a large company to develop courses specifically for them and a different version of that course for another employer and so forth. So I think that it is multi-faceted, multi-layered as opposed to a single point of contact that shows up to a meeting now and then, and also is really work on the ground to meet the needs of that employer.

And Sandra talked about recruitment efforts that were very difficult. So it's really much more tailored or customized to what that particular business or industry partner needs as opposed to come show up for an advisory committee meeting now and then.

MS. SISCO: For Chaffey College Intech, I totally agree with Dr. Cooke. And I would like to add that because we're at a whole new level with having a regional training center, as I mentioned earlier, we have much bigger needs. And so equipment, staff time – we do convene more advisory groups than ever before. So they're more committed to showing up and giving their input. They're committed to bringing other employers to the table as well in that same industry or to advise on particular topics.

One of the beautiful things about partnering with California Steel Industries and being right here on their location on their site – however, you don't have to be on the site to partner in this way – is their employees moonlight with us. So we have people fresh from industry who are coming in and teaching some of our classes.

Another area that I have seen a tremendous increase in is that our employers are touting us in public forums. So in the Inland Empire – I'm not sure what it's like in other parts of the country – but there are so many convenings and so many meetings with workforce development people coming together and college folks coming together and county and state. And everyone is in this space.

And there are some of our partners who are at those meetings and they will continually bring up when others are in the community saying, well, nobody's doing this and that college is not doing that. And they will stand up and say, wait a minute. Chaffey College Intech is doing this. Or XYZ College is doing that. So they are our biggest marketing and champions and our voices at all those different meetings or at many meetings that we're not able to attend. And then, of course, the basic any time we need a letter of support for any grant, any type of in-kind match, that has also gone up in value and just in participation.

I'd like to add one last thing. So this morning I was on the phone with Amazon. They heard about us. They want to work with us too. They have 5,000 Amazonians in this region alone who qualify for their Career Choice Program. And again, it is because everything has been elevated from the Intech Center training up, reskilling, providing new career options, new, better-paying, in-demand career options for individuals that were getting that notoriety and recognition.

MS. BERG: Thank you both so much for those answers. We had another question about is there documentation available to show about doing this "getting the employers onboard" thing? And the answer is yes. On Skillscommons.org, there are some links, as well as JFF has some resources as well. And I believe that we are going to get the link posted somehow in one of the windows here for you all. And I'll go ahead and ask another question. How are you all working with your workforce boards to engage employers?

DR. COOKE: So this is Sunny Cooke. I'm on our workforce board. I have been for, I don't know, 12 years it seems like. It has some impact. And Sherm (ph) is one of the folks that is represented, as well as HR managers from our large employers. So it certainly is a place where those kinds of engagement opportunities can happen. And in San Diego right now, our Regional Economic Development Corporation is focused on inclusive economic development, which means we're growing our own workforce. We're not recruiting it. I mean, we have to do some of that also. We have to recruit some of that talent from elsewhere.

But because of the cost of living in San Diego and cost of living in Southern California in general, we are realizing we have to grow our own. And so this regional economic development corporation is really stepping up their efforts to get businesses to engage directly with colleges in this developmental workforce. And that means engaging with colleges and providing work-based related experiences and internships, engaging with colleges and showing the data on their workforce and who they're going to be hiring and what they need. And the third is direct investment – that means their money into college education related to high-demand sectors.

And so we've got several different levels – workforce investment board, but also our regional EDCs that are helping to engage employers with us. OK. So sorry. I got a little interruption here. So workforce development boards. OK. We have had a long-standing relationship with County of San Bernardino Workforce Development Board, where we went after funding to pay for some training for our manufacturers. We currently have an agreement right now where they send – we just launched two weeks ago a cohort of – they call it Youth with Multiple Barriers.

So in our case, we're taking any individuals from ages 18-24, and the county is funding each one with an individual training account agreement. And so there's just various different ways that they continually support us. And then recently, we're starting to develop a better relationship with Riverside County Workforce Development Board. We don't reside in their county, so that board has not been such a priority. But since Intech and the number of students that we're training, they're very interested in partnering with us.

MS. BERG: Well, thank you guys so much, Dr. Cooke, Sandra, Molly, for joining us today and presenting this information that you did at the Workforce Development Institute to this audience as well. I'm going to turn it back over to Robin to wrap us up.

MS. FERNKAS: Great. Thank you. And I did just want to also echo thanks for the presenters. We know that it's a very busy time, and to take an hour out of your time is really – we know it's very precious. And we appreciate your doing that. We also want to thank the audience for joining us today. And we hope that this has been helpful. As we end today's webinar, we did have some resources that we wanted to share with you as our guests. And as Dr. Cooke was saying, so we don't come to this empty-handed or with our hands out, we wanted to offer something to you.

So this webinar series, as you may know, it is part of a series that showcases strategies and resources that are from a broad interest to educational institutions, as well as our workforce organizations. If you can see on here, we have several resources that you can access through the link there on the slide. And this includes some of our briefs that our partners, Jobs for the Future, have helped us develop.

And one of those, the second one there, is called Effective Employer Engagement Strategies Showcase. This does include some of the examples that you've heard about today, as well as others, along with the Employer Perspectives Study that Molly shared the findings from.

So we hope this has been helpful and wish you a good rest of your day.

(END)