**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**America's Promise: Promising Practices for Participant Retention and Job Placement**

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GRACE MCCALL: All right. And welcome to "America's Promise Grants: Promising Practices for Participant Retention and Job Placement. And again, if you haven't already done so or if you're just joining us, please introduce yourself in that welcome chat. We'll have that chat up throughout today's webinar where you can type in your questions or comments at any time.

And so, without further ado, I'd like to turn things over to our moderator today, Gregory Scheib, workforce analyst U.S. Department of Labor Division of Strategic Investments Employment and Training Administration. Greg?

GREGORY SCHEIB: Thanks. Great. It's nice to be with all of you today. I hope you're having a great afternoon or great morning depending on where you're calling in from. Anyway, yeah. I think you're going to find today's webinar quite interesting. Participant retention and job placement is in some ways probably some of the hardest parts of any grant, right? The training part, the training is easy, right, easy to train. But getting people to stay in and getting folks jobs at the end can also be one of the trickiest parts and I think we've got a good day set up for you.

We've got two of our TA coaches are going to be facilitating today, Kelly Middleton-Banks with the National Association of Workforce Boards and Mike Laidlaw with Hi Impact Partners. They're going to be leading our discussions today. Two of your colleagues are with us to talk about their experiences with retention and job placement. Amy Meyer, the grants director from the United Way of Central Iowa, and Amanda Duncan, the grants manager with the Workforce Alliance of South Central Kansas.

So anyway, I think it'll be a lot of fun. We really encourage you to write any questions that you have along the way in the welcome chat as we go and we will try to address those as we go. And at this point, I am going to hand it over to Mike to take you through the day.

MIKE LAIDLAW: Thank you, Greg. And again, like Greg said, welcome. We appreciate you guys staying with us. Today's objectives, we have four main objectives. One, provide strategies to overcome participant retention and job placement challenges. Two, to share how to use performance data to develop retention strategies. Three, to provide effective strategies to leverage partnerships to increase participant retention and job placements. And our fourth is to share tips on how to leverage existing resources, internal and external resources, to strengthen participant retention and job placement.

Today's agenda. We've already welcomed you. Again, welcome. We're going to have a panel discussion with Amy and Amanda and then we're going to have Q&A from our grantees. We're going to ask the grantees to share their questions. As a matter of fact, you don't have to wait until then. We encourage you to put your questions in the chat box so we can respond to those accordingly and then we'll provide you guys with strategies and tips. And then we'll have a wrap-up where we'll provide you with some information for how to get additional information on these two topics. Thank you.

KELLY MIDDLETON-BANKS: Hi. Yes. And this is Kelly Middleton-Banks and we have our first grantee polling question for you. Which program area is currently your main focus? The options here are participant retention, partnership retention, training retention and completion and job placement. So take a second to answer the question and I see a couple responses coming in. Some people are at that placement. There's a few at training and retention as well as there's folks at participant retention, training retention and completion, so that's great. We are excited that you all are moving through your grant cycle and thank you for inquiring about the poll questions.

So moving on to the next slide. Again, our panel today is Amy Meyer, AP grant director from United Way of Central Iowa and Amanda Duncan, AP grant director from Workforce Alliance South Central Kansas. And we want to take a second to allow both of them to introduce themselves. I'll start off with Amy. Would you mind introducing yourself and your project?

AMY MEYER: Yeah. So I'm Amy Meyer. I'm the program manager for Central Iowa health force is what we call it. We are under the United Way of Central Iowa and we are kind of a workforce development branch of United Way that we fall under. So our original goal was to serve 380 clients by the end of 2020. It's looking like we'll be closer to 500, so we've been able to kind of leverage some resources there and help more people than we originally planned, which is awesome.

These are our goals of 93 percent completing a training. We're at about 85 percent have completed. Of people no longer in training, about 85 of them have successfully completed it. So we're not quite at 93, but that's a pretty high goal. I didn't write that part, so yeah. We're still doing well there. And then, 80 percent, we had a goal of 80 percent obtaining employment in healthcare. Right now, we're at about 60 percent, so some room to grow there, but we're still pretty happy with our results.

So yeah. Our targeted populations are probably similar to yours, people with criminal backgrounds, minorities, yeah, specifically refugees and immigrants, people with disabilities. And we've been able to really hit those targets, so that's been cool to see. And we're in healthcare. I didn't mention that, so yeah. Most of our, all of our clients are working towards entering healthcare. So most are CNAs and RNs, but we have some smaller programs as well. But yeah. So everyone is looking to get into healthcare.

MS. MIDDLETON-BANKS: Great. Thank you so much, Amy. And now I'll ask for Amanda to introduce herself and the project.

AMANDA DUNCAN: Yeah. Hello. We're with the Workforce Alliance of South Central Kansas located in Wichita, Kansas and our program is focused on advance manufacturing. Just for those of you who might not be aware, Wichita is one of five major aviation hubs worldwide and we are home to manufacturers across the entire aviation spectrum, including commercial, general aviation and military aviation.

And so, that's really a dominant force in our area. The grant focuses on all advanced manufacturing, but aviation to date has accounted for about 70 percent within that area. And one of our primary partners, Spirit AeroSystems is s 14-year-old company that divested from the building company. And so, we produce, there's about 12,500 employees in Wichita working for Spirit that produced components for Boeing and some other major suppliers.

So our goal was to serve 1,070 individuals through this program and the completion and employment numbers from earning a credential, those are based off of our WIOA common measures because we are on the workforce board for the Wichita region. And so, just so you know, to date, we have enrolled 521 individuals in training programs, so we're right on target for our grant plan.

But we've actually had some better outcomes than we had anticipated, so of those we have an 89.4 successful completion and credential rate and 95 percent of our individuals have entered employment with the average wage of $16.50 an hour. Very similar to Amy, we are serving the unemployed, underemployed and long-term unemployed. We do have a small focus on incumbent workers and then we are targeting some of those same underrepresented groups.

MS. MIDDLETON-BANKS: Great. Thank you so much, Amanda, for that. And thank you, Amy, again for giving some background about both of your projects. Now I will turn it over to Mike, who will start off the questions for our panel.

MR. LAIDLAW: Thanks, Kelly. Amy and Amanda, I'm going to ask you guys the same questions, but some of the questions are going to be two-part questions so I'll just make sure I clarify part A and B. My first question is for Amy. Amy, can you describe the economic climate in Central Iowa surrounding employment and how does it impact your placement strategy?

MS. MEYER: Yeah. So I'm sure we're all kind of dealing with low unemployment, but here in Iowa it is especially low. It's about 2.4 percent. And so, even on top of that, there's always a high demand for CNAs and RNs and that's especially true now. So that kind of low unemployment rate makes our employers very motivated to consider people that maybe they wouldn't have considered if that unemployment rate was higher.

So for that reason, I think we've really been able to hit our targets as far as serving underrepresented populations. So 70 percent of our clients are minorities, 40 percent are refugees and immigrants, 13 percent have a criminal background, and then mostly everyone is not financially stable, which is what United Way defines as 250 percent of poverty.

So I think that kind of affected our strategy in that we knew that we really could work hard to target those populations because we knew that employers, I don't want to use the word desperate, but they are very motivated to hire people who maybe their English isn't as good or have a felony on their record, who maybe they wouldn't have considered if that unemployment rate was a little bit higher.

So we have employers who actually go on the last day of our CNA class just to try to recruit people, which I think is really telling of the kind of environment that we're working in right now.

MR. LAIDLAW: Wow. Thanks, Amy. Amanda, can you share with us the state of employment in Wichita, Kansas?

MS. DUNCAN: Yeah. So aviation employment is typically cyclical, but Wichita primarily was devastated following the great recession, where we lost more than 30,000 jobs so we've been in a mode of rebuilding. But very similar to the situation in Iowa, we have low unemployment and we're a low population state. So, as the employers are building back their businesses, there's been a very high need for workforce.

We're also faced with probably something similar that many of you around the country are faced with, the aging workforce, that silver tsunami of individuals who will be retiring, the baby boomers who are beginning to exit the workplace. Particularly with some of our large employers in Wichita and the manufacturers, the average age in some of these companies is in the mid-50s.

So the need for just the replacement workers is high paired with the fact that, following the recession, many employers invested in technology, so there was a different skill set needed as they hired new workers. There's many examples here of Wichita's individuals walking out of high school and walking right into a plant, you know, in the last 20 and 30 years and that's no longer the case. An unskilled individual is very unlikely to get hired in an advanced manufacturing job in Wichita.

That is paired with some of our major commercial aviation companies announced in addition to the replacement workers, a need for 1,000 new hires in 2017, 1,400 new hires in 2018, and then General Aviation just the last month has announced 1,000 new workers in their field as well. So that, the growth mode going on here in Wichita and the need for skilled workers is very real and the training for these workers that it takes.

We have great training partners here in Wichita, but sometimes it can take up to 10 weeks for somebody to go through that class. There was a disconnect between employers needing people and people being ready to go to work.

MR. LAIDLAW: Thanks, Amanda. My next question is a two-part question. Amy, I'm going to ask you first what were your original retention participant strategies? And then the second portion, what were your original job placement strategies? So let's start with the participant retention strategies.

MS. MEYER: Yeah. So I think that we are always kind of planned on having a very hands-on approach. We really were going to be as well-connected to these clients as we could and so I think that that continues from retention all the way into job development as far as not just sending out job openings or anything like that. We really always prefer them to be onsite with us working one-on-one. And by applying to jobs together, I think we've had a lot better luck than, again, when they're working on it on their own.

So we work on a resume, talk about goals, and we prefer that to be, again, very hands-on. And that's especially important I think in healthcare. There's a lot of jargon. These job postings, especially for English language learners, you know, they have a lot of jargon in them, different position names. It's not something that they can do on their own, so through training all the way through job placement, we've been able to kind of have that hands-on approach as well as hands-on with the employer side.

So we follow up with employers after an application gets sent out. Hey. I just sent you this applicant. Should be a great fit. That kind of thing just to build that relationship with the employers. So if they need anything, they're going to call us and then that person isn't going to just, you know, come up against a conflict and not have a solution because we're there. They're working with them. So I would say that's probably the biggest thing as far as strategy that we've been finding a lot of success with.

MR. LAIDLAW: Thanks, Amy. Amanda, what were your original participant retention strategies and then what were your original job placement strategies?

MS. DUNCAN: Prior to receiving the America's Promise Grant, we did not have a good method in place, so we used this grant as an opportunity to go above and beyond that. Many companies in our area would require at least two years of experience to even be considered for a job interview, and so they weren't having luck finding candidates and candidates were getting discouraged because they didn't have that experience. They weren't able to break through into the job.

So we worked with our local provider, Wichita State University Technical College or WSU Tech, and through programs that they were able to develop in partnership with the employers, there was a process to guarantee an interview for any individual who went through that training program. And so, that was a first step into a better relationship with the employers and job seekers seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. They were going to take the staff training program that would get their foot in the door at the company without that two years of experience.

However, that, we were finding that that wasn't enough. And so, through the America's Promise Grant, we were able to develop a new method that, and I can speak to the challenges a little bit later, of why we needed to do this. But we were able to work with the technical college and imbed the training program onsite at the employer so that the individuals were going through the training program and they were hired by the company at the same time.

So they were earning a wage and also earning their college attester or certificate of completion in doing that concurrently because we found that the original guaranteed interview after training was not enough to actually get people placed into jobs.

MR. LAIDLAW: Was it difficult convincing the employer to or the college to actually conduct the training there because then, by doing that, it also familiarized the participants with the work environment, so that went a long way too I imagine. How did you deal that?

MS. DUNCAN: Yeah. It was a joint process and really it was driven by the employer. They were the ones who were requesting it. They weren't seeing enough individuals coming through the program and being able to be job-ready or there were other issues. And so, and also, they're on far opposite ends of town. Our major employer is on the south side of town. The college is in the far northeast and it was difficult for people to get back and forth, you know, going to school for so many hours a day, then driving quite a distance and then, you know, coming on to the plant and working.

And so, we took an additional I think two months from our implementation, from planning to implementation when we first got the grant because there were a lot of moving pieces that we had to figure out between the employer, the technical college, making sure the Kansas Board of Regents signed off on the fact that the training was going to be taking place at the employer site, but it was still earning college credits for Wichita area, what was then Wichita Air Technical College. Now they're known as WSU tech.

And so, there were a lot of moving pieces, but once we got it in place, it really went very smoothly and the front door for the program was our workforce centers, AJC.

And so, that provided some consistency in using the workforce center to be able to be the point for the individuals as they came in and got enrolled into the program, took their work piece test, some of those instances, filled out paperwork. They filled out the paperwork to enroll at the technical college onsite with our AJC staff and the case manager's program and then they report it to school at their place of work if that makes sense.

MR. LAIDLAW: It does. Thanks, Amanda.

MS. MIDDLETON-BANKS: And Amanda, I have a question for you, this is Kelly, from the participants. Could you just clarify what type of onsite training, if this was considered an apprenticeship? And then also, could you give an example, providing the type of credentials that were obtained during this training?

MS. DUNCAN: Yeah. The credentials that are taught onsite, we have three different technical certificates that the participants earn between five and eight college credit hours and they do result in a certificate of completion from the college. And so, there are imbedded instructors from the college onsite at the employer's location and instead of going into the lab, perhaps at the technical college they would do sheet metal riveting, they rivet on the employer's materials or they learn inspection on the employer's materials.

But they do earn a credential and I believe it's eight credit hours on, you know, through the technical college, but the classroom is actually onsite at the employer's location.

MS. MIDDLETON-BANKS: And just a follow-up to that, Amanda, it is not considered an apprenticeship, correct?

MS. DUNCAN: No. It is not considered an apprenticeship. We had first looked at going down that pathway, but the involving the labor union onsite at the employer's facility would have taken too long to set that up based on the needs of the employer and the timing of the grant. And so, there wasn’t as much agreement with the labor union to register the program and so we just set it up as just the traditional classroom training earning the college credit hours and technical certificate from the credentialing body of the college.

MS. MIDDLETON-BANKS: Great. Thank you so much.

MR. LAIDLAW: Thanks, Amanda. And thanks, everyone, for those great follow-up questions. Amy, what challenges – this is another two-part question. What challenges did you encounter with participant retention and how did you overcome those challenges?

MS. MEYER: Yeah. So one of the most common problems that we faced is just when the original plan, what that client originally came in here to do, just doesn't work out for one reason or the other. So you know, they come in and they want to be a nurse and they work really hard for, you know, getting that but they just can't get a high enough score to enter the program or we just kind of find out that their grades aren't going to be high enough. Or we have people who want to take their CNA, but their English isn't what it needs to be to get their CNA.

But I think how we've been able to overcome that as far as program retention is just to always have a plan B for them. Always have a way that we can still help them further their skill level, but maybe just not in the way that they thought. So for the example of nursing students who couldn't get a high enough test score to enter the nursing program at our local community college, we've had more than five then look at an LPN degree so that, you know, one a little bit lower than an RN as far as commitment.

And so, then we have another. Each step has another barrier, so you know, okay. We got them into LPN but there's a barrier for transportation. That's only offered about 40 miles out of town. How do we help with that? Then we are able to arrange a bus paid for by the community college to take those students there. And then, when none of those students had a valid driver's license so they couldn't drive the bus out of town, we helped pay for parking tickets to get them their license back.

So I think we just really always try to have that attitude of if we come up against something, we're going to try to find a solution to work for them so that they can get through that barrier. Or if that program just isn't working out for that person, we're going to try to find something that fits them a little bit better. So that is – sorry. Go ahead.

MR. LAIDLAW: Oh no. It sounds like you guys are really doing a lot of anticipation and preparation just in case, so thank you. Part two of the question is what challenges did you encounter with job placement and how did you overcome those challenges?

MS. MEYER: Okay. So yeah. I think that the challenge that we have for job placement sometimes had to do with relationships, the relationship they had built with that case manager. And originally, we had a case manager kind of help people through training and we had a case manager that helped people with job placement. Well, and then we had some staff turnover there.

So what we found, partly through looking at some timelines and some data and that kind of thing was that there was kind of a drop off period during that transfer and if they didn't, I think the main thing is we underestimated how important that relationship is with the case manager. And so, you know, once the training was over, they weren't as likely if they didn't already have that relationship. They were less likely to call back and try to do job development with us.

So we've been able to remedy that pretty well. For now, for our shorter-term training for something like a CNA, the client will have one case manager from start to finish. So whether they're in training or out of training, they have that same case manager building that relationship during training so that during the job placement phase, they're a lot more likely to be reaching out for help.

And then for the longer-term trainings like an RN, we do have multiple people who will come into their life a little bit, but we do a lot better job with overlap. So we make sure that while one, before they're about to be transitioned to somebody else who's going to help them with licensure and job placement, they've already met that person several times by the time that happens. So we try to really do more of a warm transition so that, warm handoff, so that they know who that person is. They know that there's a team behind them working to help them and then they're a lot more likely to stay in contact, to do job development and just make sure that they're successful.

MR. LAIDLAW: Thanks. So it sounds like familiarity and consistency really helped with retention there.

MS. MEYER: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. LAIDLAW: Maintaining that relationship. Thanks, Amy. Amanda, same questions in Wichita. What challenges did you encounter with participant retention and how did you overcome those challenges?

MS. DUNCAN: So as I mentioned before, we had an existing training program at the technical college, the same certificate program that's now offered onsite, embedded at the employer. It was a longer course and so individuals were having difficulty completing the entire length of the course and not being able to work during that time period because it was a full, like 7:00 a.m. to like 4:00 p.m. for 10 weeks.

And so, there were individuals who either couldn't commit to taking the whole training program or they would drop out through the program. And then, another component is that it was expensive and not a lot of individuals qualified for Pell Grant, so they weren't able to afford it. Take the time of work, you know, maybe leaving their minimum wage job to take this training program with the hopes of completing and then being guaranteed an interview, so that's an issue that we had.

So by embedding the program with the employer, number one, it shortened to five and a half weeks as opposed to eight. Number two, the individual doesn't have to worry about working a second job during the time period or, you know, working in the evening or having to quit a job and having no income because they're earning wages from the employer during that time period. So that kind of addressed both of those things together for the participants who were going through the America's Promise pilot project.

MR. LAIDLAW: Thank you. What challenges did you encounter with job placement and how did you overcome those challenges?

MS. DUNCAN: Sure. So there's two that I'll highlight. Under the previous model before the America's Promise grant, individuals were enrolling in the training program through the technical college. They would successfully complete an interview with the employer through the guaranteed interview offer. However, they would not be able to pass the employer's contingency.

So there are three main contingencies that the employer, well there's four. Having the working test and earning a bronze at least in (TRC ?). The second one is passing a drug screen. The third is a background check and with this particular employer, they can have no felonies in the last seven years due to the defense contracts that the employer has in place. And then they, there's a physical that they also have to take to be able to do, you know, it's a physical job. They're standing. They're lifting. There are things in place that the individual has to pass a rigorous physical.

So we were having individuals and the bigger issues were that weren't able to pass the background check. They wouldn't divulge to us or to the technical college that they had a felony on their record and then it would come out, you know, once they got the job offer or were interviewing with the company. And so, then we have a trained person who's not able to, you know, take the job because they don't meet the employer's requirements. And then of course, not passing the drug screen is pretty common across, no matter where you are in the United States. And then the physical that the company does, individuals have 30 days to take that physical and they could retake it if they don't pass, but there are some individuals who just aren't prepared for the physicality of the job.

And so, we've been able to modify that because we, the company now pays for those contingencies to be done on the front end and we're very transparent with the job seeker about what would be required of them. And we have partnerships with other employers, particularly within the supply chain for Spirit. So you know, like the tier two and tier three suppliers, machine shops, etc. that have a much more second chance-friendly environment for individuals who have a felony or perhaps they are not as rigorous or physical on the job.

So it might be doing small part assembly, painting, something like that where maybe they're sitting down at a work station or maybe they don't have to lift things, you know, heavier things. So we're able to refer those individuals to other opportunities if we know that they're not going to meet the demands for Spirit. The drug test issue is, you know, common across those individuals, so if someone can't pass the drug screen for Spirit, they're not going to pass it for another company. But we're just, we're very transparent with them on the front end that this is what the job entails.

Another issue that I want to address is that training was happening during the day time and then individuals would be offered a job on second or third shift so that they were not prepared for that or they might accept the job and then voluntarily terminate or quit the job within the first week because they weren't able to adjust to the second or third shift lifestyle. They had issues with transportation.

Our public transit in Wichita stops at 11:00 p.m. and so they might not be able to get, they could get to work but they couldn't get home, or they might have issues with childcare. So we worked with the company again on transparency and communication that they know at the beginning they're coming in for a second shift job. They know their work day will start at 3:00 p.m. or they know that it's a weekend shift job, that they might work four 10s Thursday through Sunday.

And so, being very transparent and not having the expectation that oh, I'm in training from 7:00 to 3:00 so that means I'm going to get hired at the job and work 7:00 to 3:00 Monday through Friday only.

And so, those were two big issues that had pretty simple fixes of communicating up front. We still have people that say, well I can't work second shift. So then we just talk to them about, well this isn't the company for you, but we have other companies that they will start you on first shift and you'll need to be at work at 6:00 a.m. and that maybe works better for them. So just those two issues in and of itself has made a huge difference to the number of people that we're able to place.

MR. LAIDLAW: Thanks, Amanda. This is not one of the questions that we were supposed to ask, but this is a sort of follow-up. I had a call with another grantee this morning and we're experiencing retention issues with a particular cohort and some were concerned that it may be family issues, whether it's transit and childcare or something else that's more, again, in the family area, not the course itself.

Are you guys doing anything special or different with respect to support services or establishing relationships with partners to help some of the participants who may be having challenges outside of the classroom?

MS. DUNCAN: This is Amanda. Yes. We do a thorough intake with the individuals, you know, as they come to the workforce center as the point of entry. And so, we go over a thorough number of supportive services that either we can provide or referrals that we can make to partner agencies based on the needs of the participant they identify.

But we do a thorough assessment with them up front to talk about what barriers they may have or what issues that they need addressed before we even talk to them about getting in a training program. And so, that is something that we look for that holistically, you know, because it might be a family issue. It might be a transportation issue. It might be that they don't have adequate shoes or the work-appropriate clothing.

And so, those are things that we will address with them on the front end so if they need a pair of work boots before we can even, you know, consider them going into the training program, we're able to purchase those with our support service dollars. Or if they need assistance, you know, through some other state or local partners that we have for other social services, those are things that we identify on the front end and try to remediate those barriers before it even gets to the point that they're with the employer and the training partner.

MR. LAIDLAW: Thanks, Amanda. I know there's some participants who may be reluctant to share some of their personal challenges because they think it may impact their ability to be accepted into the grant. So Amy, what are you guys doing with respect to issues and obstacles outside of the classroom to ensure participant retention?

MS. MEYER: Yeah. So I mean, I definitely agree with Amanda that the more proactive you can be about it, the better, so yeah. So I think we try to ask a lot of those questions and phrase them a little bit differently than our kind of workforce development jargon because, you know, do you have any barriers and that doesn't mean the same thing to someone as it means to us. And so, asking more specific questions like if your child gets sick, who else can help you with that?

So trying to not just look at them as what problems they're going to face, but also what supports you have personally that are going to help. So for our CNA class, you're really not allowed to miss class, so first of all, to set that expectation from the beginning like this, you know, you have to be at every class. And then trying to break down okay, you know, who's going to help you if your car breaks down? Who's going to help you if your kid gets sick and can't go to day care? So yeah. Just being as proactive as possible I think.

But then on the other hand, it's just really supporting them as a person and not looking at them as just trying to get their data points. So you know, things come up that are really, you know, deal breakers for the program and we're going to continue to help them, even if something comes up that really means that they're not going to be able to complete their training.

You know, we've had a lot of, we've had multiple high-risk pregnancies that have, you know, meant that they couldn't continue or a family member getting very ill or things like that. So we're always there to help and say if you ever circle back and continue to need help or just want job development or whatever you need, we're not just trying to force them into a mold that might not be fitting their lifestyle at that moment.

MR. LAIDLAW: Thank you.

MS. DUNCAN: This is Amanda.

MR. LAIDLAW: I'm sorry. Go ahead.

MS. DUNCAN: I just wanted to jump back in and confirm what Amy mentioned is that we use the term what support system do you have, very similar to hers. And how are you going to be supported through this? And we do map out, you know, your training will be five weeks. That means it's going to be July 1st before you'll be done with training and talking through those expectations up front. But I agree with her as spinning it to what positives you have going on and then where is there a gap that we can fill in?

And we let them know, like we can help pay for your glasses, if you need to go to the dentist. They might not know when we just say, oh supportive services are available. They don't understand what that means, so when we give examples of if your electricity is about to be shut off, we can pay that for you one time. You know, and so then, I think they're more willing to share that because they didn't realize that that was available.

MR. LAIDLAW: That's great. Very useful information up front, so thank you, ladies. Now I'll turn it over to Kelly.

MS. MIDDLETON-BANKS: Thank you, Mike. And before we move to the next question, we do have some questions from the participants on the webinar. And so, Amy and Amanda, you know you touched a little bit on barriers and some of the ways to choose the help and support of the participants in the training program around that. But one of the questions we have is, were there any assessments or red flags that helped you determine someone who might not finish a training? And Amy, I'll direct the question to you first.

MS. MEYER: Yeah. So we kind of are always walking a line between putting up, you know, hoops to jump through just for the sake of hoops versus kind of trying to do an early assessment of how committed they are to the program. So the example of people who take CNA, they have to do a (two-part TB ?) test. And so, a lot of the, I mean we have a fair amount of people who call and say they're interested and then, you know, even come in to meet with us once but, and then we'll say okay. You just need to go get your (TB ?) test done and people who then fall off because of that. And I think it's just, we use it kind of as a litmus test to see if they're serious because if they're not willing to do that step, a lot of times it means they're not really ready for this.

And then the other kind of baseline that we try to look at is talking a lot about what their goals are. I mean there are people who are interested in getting training, especially free training, but maybe not interested in working in that field. So we do ask a lot of questions about what their work goals are because, you know, CNA is not the most glamourous job in the world and we want to make sure they understand what the job will look like and not just hey, I can get this free certificate.

We want to make sure that they really do want to work in that field or, you know, advance in other, to another healthcare position, but yeah. So those are some of the red flags that we see is just someone not really interested in doing that work. Or if they've never really worked full time without kind of having a reason, things like that as far as their willingness to work and commitment to the program.

MS. MIDDLETON-BANKS: Thanks, Amy. I appreciate that. And Amanda, were there any assessments or red flags that you, helped you determine someone may not finish the training program?

MS. DUNCAN: Very similar to Amy, we do have some of those things set up in the front that are like hoops that they have to jump through. But it's also that they have to be on time, so if they arrive late for the work keys test, then they're not allowed to test. So you know, that's measuring their punctuality. Or if they have to retest in an area, we make them go through an assessment online for remediation and they have to prove that they've gone and done that remediation before we just schedule them to retest. And so, those are some of the things.

But as I spoke to, working with the company to do the job offer before they begin training and put the contingencies on the front end of doing the background test and physical and drug screen, those are areas that obviously if they fail, if they fail the drug screen or background, you know, that's not something we can remediate.

But you know, letting them be able to retake the physical, so that is an indication. If they don't do those things or if they don't show up to do the drug test, then they're not able to move forward to get into the training program. So those are some things that we've done with the company and it's worked very well.

MS. MIDDLETON-BANKS: Great. Thank you. And Amanda, you touched on a little bit of the next question we have from the webinar participants. And that was when individuals fail tests, when you identify participants that are possibly failing in a cohort, you know, how have you, what measures have you taken to help with that? And you mentioned offering some time for them to retest, but you know, were there any other measures that you possibly implemented?

MS. DUNCAN: So yeah. I mean, we do work with them on the areas when they take the work keys test and they don't measure at the goal that's required, getting the bronze level for the employer. We do allow them to do the remediation. It's, we use Career Ready 101 and then they have to prove that they've done those modules and were able to go in and see their account to determine how long they spent in it and what score they got before we'll allow them to retest.

And then they're only allowed to test three times in a year. So that, we won't allow them to just keep retesting, you know, multiple times. They do only have to take the portion of the test that they might have scored low in, so they don't have to re-sit for the whole five-hour test. They could just take the math section again if that's where they have a low score. And so, we work with them and they could come in and work with their case manager. We have a skills bank computer where they can work one-on-one with one of our staff members if needed. And so, that's an area that we'll allow them.

Now, once they're in the actual training program, it's at the discretion of the training provider, WSU tech, and the employer if they allow them to repeat a module of the training or extend their training until they pick up a certain skill set. But we have had individuals who take longer than the five and a half weeks and the company does work with them if they're showing a good attitude.

They're still coming to work every day. They're willing, you know, to learn or to attempt, you know, make a second attempt at an area they might have previously been insufficient. So that certainly does happen, but it's more on a case-by-case and we don't advertise it widely because then I think multiple people would say, well I want a second chance even if they haven't put the effort in.

MS. MIDDLETON-BANKS: Great. Thank you so much. And just briefly, both Amy and Amanda, were there any commitment agreements that you possibly implemented for participants to kind of somewhat psychologically marry them to the completion process?

MS. MEYER: Yeah. So we have them sign an enrollment agreement. I mean, it's not binding in any way, but we actually even read it out to them in person and kind of highlight any things that are important to us. And just, it has a lot to do with just checking in with us and you know. I think a problem that a lot of us face is that because we're not providing the training, they don't, people don't quite understand how the program works. I mean and that's fair. We can't expect them to know the inner workings, but so say that we're supporting an apprenticeship training at an employer.

You know, they're thinking the employer is doing this, so we do do that enrollment agreement so that they know, you know, you're our client. We are committed to you. We are not just committed to you working at some job. We're committed to you over this whole life of it, no matter where you want to work. And so, yeah. We do do that enrollment agreement just so they can kind of understand a little bit better just kind of what it means to be our client and what we expect of them in order to be our client.

MS. DUNCAN: And this is Amanda. We do the same thing. We have a training agreement that we go over with them and outline the cost of the program that's being paid on their behalf. And so, I think sometimes when they see that dollar amount, like wow. This is a $3,000 program that I'm not having to pay anything to do, to enroll in.

It does sink in for them and it does include things like if they fail, they will not be able to, you know, or if they drop from the program or don't complete, they won't be able to receive another scholarship from us in a different program for at least I think it's a three year period. So they can't take one class, fail and decide oh, I don't want to build an airplane. I'd rather be a nurse. Now pay for me to be a nurse, you know. So there is an agreement that they have to sign with us before they're allowed to begin training.

MS. MEYER: Yeah. We don't put dollar amounts on there, but I think that's a great idea for them to really see the value of it.

MS. MIDDLETON-BANKS: Thank you so much, Amanda, Amy. And you know, thank you for answering some of those follow-up questions. We're running a little tight on time, so I'm going to move forward to the next question we have for the panel. And for those who didn't get a chance to participate in the April TA webinar, I highly recommend that you go to WorkforceGPS and check it out. It was extremely helpful and it was about data and data can be scary at times, but it's so useful and helpful. And so, I want to ask Amy first how did you use data to adjust your participant retention strategies?

MS. MEYER: So we actually have a third party involved in evaluating our data right now. And so, we are starting to kind of get some of those trends back, but you know, right when you're in the middle of a program, I think how we've been able to use data is just to really identify some pretty clear gaps as far as what's not working for students and what's causing them to drop out.

So for example, we had a cohort of English language learners who went to the community college to get their CNA and an entire class of them failed. And so, that’s maybe evaluating data is a fancy way of saying, hey. We noticed that there was a problem here and that we need to put something up. And so, part of that was providing another training or giving them another training provider. So we have really found that our community college is not the best at working with English language learners and so we were able to get them to a CNA and another, with another training provider.

But not everyone was even able to move to do that, so for some it was just that they weren't quite ready for the CNA test and the CNA training. I mean their English just wasn't what it needed to be. So we also offered them kind of a free CNA class working in partnership with the refugee services organization. And so, we thought that it was just a matter of that provider not working with them and not moving them to a CNA class with a different training provider.

But we thought, hey, I really just think that maybe their English just isn't what it needs to be. Then we were able to offer them another course and it's been pretty interesting now that we're further into the grant to see some of those people who did the pre-CNA and being able to do the CNA again with us and seeing them be a lot more successful at that point. So that's been kind of cool to see people who have kind of failed, would have been kind of marked as failing at the beginning, but able to keep working and come back and be a success.

MS. MIDDLETON-BANKS: Great. Thank you so much, Amy. And Amanda, we've had a chance to chat a little bit about data and your love for data. But would love for you to give a little insight on how you've used data to adjust your participant retention strategy.

MS. DUNCAN: Yeah. So get your pens out. So this is the best thing I'm going to say all day. Data drives every decision. Data drives every decision. So we use data on a daily basis. We are using a geographical solutions MIS for our participant tracking and reporting, but we also have a shared tracking sheet back and for with both our school, and our employer.

And so, we're requiring data that we know we'll eventually get from the wage reports and, you know, outcomes from there, that will be on their college transcripts. We are requiring that up front with these two providers, the school and the employer. And we are, because we are sending such large cohorts, we felt it was okay to ask from the beginning of the grant to say we're going to track data better to keep us on target. And so, we have a constant and ongoing conversation with our partners and we have weekly meetings.

And so, all of us just finished our quarterly report and just submitted those, but we don't wait for those quarterly reports to address the issues with the employers and we're also never surprised by the numbers that we get when our MIS gets out, our QPR because we're tracking that ongoing as it is. And so, using data has helped us identify where there have been key issues with employers. I can give examples, but I know we're running short on time, where we've needed to make a shift on what we're doing on the front end.

We've needed to make a shift in how we communicate to participants or how we're selling the program, you know, to get people interested in training. Even, you know about the job itself and what they'll be doing so that we don't have participants who self-select out of the program after they've been, you know, in the class for a week. So data drives every decision.

MS. MIDDLETON-BANKS: Thank you so much, Amanda. And Amanda, do you think you can give like a 30-second example about how you use the data to shift your strategy?

MS. DUNCAN: So yeah. We had an employer. Not the aviation company we talked about earlier, but we were finding that individuals were self-selecting out of the program and they were telling us that they were not expecting that the job could be so hard, like the work was harder than they anticipated.

And so, after we had a small number of those come across, we had a major meeting with the employer to re-vamp our entire intake process to have them, you know, thoroughly examined to rewrite the job description to say you will be working 16 hours a day. You will be working six days a week and further explain it's in hot and cold environment. You may be outdoors. You know, things related to the job. So that's one example.

The other one I kind of mentioned earlier was the people training on first shift and then getting a job on second shift and coming back and saying, hey, I trained on first shift. I want to work on first shift. So those are some examples of things that we've shifted and we've been able to do it very quickly and upfront because of the ongoing data sharing and communication with our partners.

MS. MIDDLETON-BANKS: Great. Thank you so much, Amanda and Amy, for answering that question. We are running pretty close to time and so we are going to skip the last question and hopefully, we'll be able to address some of that on the upcoming resource document around job placement and retention strategies. And we're going to move this down.

And as you see, there's some tips and strategies listed in the PowerPoint, so if you haven't, please download the PowerPoint presentation. And we're going to move back to Greg so he can give you some information about upcoming webinars and TA products. Greg?

MR. SCHEIB: Thank you so much and great discussion and thank you all for the great questions. Some really great information and I'm sure that both Amy and Amanda would be happy probably to contact you offline if you have more specific questions for them. And certainly, we can help with anything at out end.

Just a couple things we wanted to let you know about. In June, we are going to be doing some industry-specific round tables around sector partnerships. There's going to be one on healthcare, one on information technology and one on advanced manufacturing.

We are just getting the dates sort of sorted out now, but we will be sending out invites for those fairly soon, so keep an eye out for that. We're looking forward to having some very targeted discussions based on industries and the specific issues that you may have with those, working in those areas.

And finally, just the contact information is here. As you know, you can always contact AmericasPromise@dol.com and we've got Amy and Amanda's information up there if you'd like to reach out to them directly.

And really want to thank all of our speakers and our great facilitators today for a really wonderful discussion. And we'll go ahead and sign off for the afternoon, so thank you all very much.

(END)