**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**Managing Change to Maintain Grant Implementation Success**

**Monday, September 23, 2019**

*Transcript by*

*Noble Transcription Services*

*Menifee, CA*

GRACE CASERTANO: And welcome to today's webinar, "Managing Change to Maintain Grant Implementation Success."

So without further ado, I'd like to turn things over to our moderator today, Gregory Scheib, workforce analyst, United States Department of Labor, Division of Strategic Investments, Employment and Training Administration. Greg.

GREGORY SCHEIB: Thanks, Grace, and hello, everybody. It's really nice to be here with you all this afternoon. Really appreciate you all taking the time to join us for this webinar today.

We're getting ready and excited about the upcoming webinar that we will be doing in November, and with that in mind, this webinar on change management is going to really offer us a great opportunity to start thinking about how we're going to be approaching this final year of our America's Promise Grants.

So we've got two great facilitators today, and we also have two great speakers with Ron Painter and Jen Worth with us today. So I am just going to quickly turn it over to Kelly Middleton Banks and Jan Bray who are both TA coaches with the National Association of Workforce Boards. So, Kelly, if you want to take it away.

KELLY MIDDLETON BANKS: Hi. Thank you so much, Greg. Again, my name is Kelly Middleton Banks, and I am joined by Jan Bray. So, Jan, please say hello to the great people that are with us today.

JAN BRAY: It is my pleasure. Hello, everybody. Welcome, and glad you can join us on this webinar.

MS. BANKS: So today, as Greg mentioned, we have Ron Painter and Jen Worth presenting on the objectives that will be discussed are gain – gaining understanding of the drivers of change. They'll also be touching on strategies for addressing change and also learning how to evaluate progress and results of actions to address change.

We just went through the welcome. The presenters, Ron Painter and Jen Worth, will go overview – give an overview of change and the different drivers of change. We'll have an opportunity to have some grantee sharing. In the midst of that they'll share strategies and tips, and then we will wrap up this 60-minute webinar.

I'll turn it over to Jan Bray to introduce our presenters.

MS. BRAY: All right. It is my pleasure to do so. You have two of the most informative, experienced individuals, and they also are good friends. So this should be an interesting presentation.

We have as our presenters today Ron Painter who is the president and CEO of the National Association of Workforce Boards. Ron has been in that position for about 12 years. Don't tell me if I'm wrong, Ron, and has really led this organization through all the changes that we are seeing in the workforce and that the workforce boards are dealing with and the partnerships that they're engaged with.

And joining Ron today is Jen Worth, the senior vice president, Workforce and Economic Development for the American Association of Community Colleges. And Jen brings along with her a wealth of information and experience about how the education system has really evolved in order to meet the changing needs of the workplace.

So as we talk about change in this webinar, you have two highly experienced, motivated individuals to lead us through this discussion and this process. So at that point I'm going to turn it over to Ron and Jen to talk about their organizations.

JEN WORTH: Thank you, Jan. This is Jen Worth, everybody. It's a pleasure to join all of you today. Ron and I work quite well together, and we sit at the same sort of vantage point, getting the great opportunity to look across this entire country at many different kinds of institutions that care deeply about workforce and economic development.

We talked in preparation and decided that in each slide both he and I will reflect. I'll probably say a bit first, and then he will take a turn as we go through. And then we definitely want to leave time for you all to get your questions in at the end. So we'll go at a pretty good clip, but we're going to do this both visually, audibly, and then in a couple of other reference points to make sure that you get great content out of this and then know that we are here to serve you as you need as you move forward.

Quickly about AACC. The American Association of Community Colleges is a membership organization. We have a little over 1,000 members all across the country. They are all of your community colleges servicing more than 12 million students. We advocate for them.

We provide technical assistance, but I personally run a unit that is focused only on workforce and economic development, industry relationships with community colleges, and making certain that all of the teaching and learning that we do is relevant not just for employer use today but what's coming down the pipe.

With that I'll turn it over to Ron to do a quick overview of NAWB. Welcome, Ron.

RON PAINTER: All right. Thanks, Jen. It's always great to hang out with you, and I will give a shout out to Greg who he and I did some work together in Delaware. So it's great to be around the table.

As Jen mentioned, we hope to be helpful to you today. I think both of us have a – do have the sites across the country, but I think we've also both experienced a lot of potentially what you're going through, grants and grant management and changes when inside the grants.

Let me say very briefly that the National Association of Workforce Boards based here in Washington, DC, we represent the nation's over 500 local business-led workforce development boards. We provide a variety of services to then, including technical assistance, as we are doing today.

Do a lot of advocacy work. As you would imagine, we do that on the Hill. We do that with the administration, and we also do that with a number of other associations here in Washington, DC, always from the viewpoint of local workforce boards. We do work very closely with the policy makers in trying to expand and get the resources that the workforce development system really needs in order to do the work that it has to do.

So thanks. It's good to be here.

MS. WORTH: Thanks, Ron. Kelly, can you take us to the next one, please? Wonderful.

So Ron and I wanted to frame this up for you. It is well known that what initially starts as a concept in the mind of a bunch of leaders and/or a potential grant writer evolves into something very different, particularly in large, multi-faceted, multi-year, oftentimes multi-site location initiatives.

This work requires leadership that is comfortable dealing with continuous change. And as grants and projects start to evolve, edits need to happen. And as they start to wind down, a different set of challenges typically come into light. So we wanted to jump right into that, and with this conversation today acknowledge hard conversations that must happen.

We're going to give you some strategies and tips on what we've seen to be successful, as both AACC and NAWB have looked at the myriad of experiences across the country over the last several years across many, many different federal, foundation, or industry-driven initiatives.

So let's talk about some of the warning signs that signal these changes could be coming.

In your community you might see staff starting to transition out. You might see dollars getting smaller and fundraising becoming some of the primary focus – focuses of conversation, and that takes and detracts attention from the day-to-day work of being a productive partner in an initiative.

You might see that leaders start to feel initiative fatigue and start to turn their attention to other conversations or other priority areas that are just starting up. And you might also see some of the local shifts in your regional partnerships change in prioritization.

All of that said – oh, sorry. Ron, please.

MR. PAINTER: No. I was going to say I think, Jen, one of the things that is – I work with local boards and – local boards and boards statewide across the country. One of the things that we strongly believe in is that workforce development needs to be market-driven and business-led. And part of that is because we believe that some of the strongest signals coming, we should be looking ahead to emerging issues.

We need to be watching the trends, but some of what is going to happen in the course of a grant shouldn't be surprised, if, when you're sitting down and thinking about this at the beginning, you're also beginning to look at what kind of trends are going to impact the industries or what kind of trends have impacted the industries in your region, the main drivers to your region?

And then I think talking to them or hopefully the community colleges or the workforce boards for sure is talking to these businesses about what do they see as emerging issues? So you're also beginning to track what might be happening, what might be coming down the path – the pipe so it's not a surprise to you when something changes.

MS. WORTH: Absolutely. I couldn't agree with you more, and I think the reason that this conversation was framed for us is because many of the people that are on this call are looking for ways for us to help them strategize about that forward powerful visioning to make sure that they best position their work and it's persisting after the potential project end and is more sustainable.

So I think what we had talked about was acknowledging that sometimes these hard conversations have to happen and getting from sort of what I think happens, what another person think happens, but into the middle, the truth. We need to assess situations clearly and objectively, and it takes hard work. So you need to be focused.

But if you think about all the time and energy that you have put into your work for this initiative related to America's Promise or any other federal investment activities, you have a lot at stake. And we really want you to have those conversations with your partners but also with us because they manage – or they matter immensely.

Ron, anything else you want to say on this because I really liked your remarks? I think we could ask Kelly to go to the next one, though.

MR. PAINTER: We can.

MS. WORTH: OK.

MR. PAINTER: So I also think what's really critical is that whoever is responsible for the grant, I think this is where we start talking about the people involved in the situation because you're working with a number of different partners. And I think one of the things that I have learned over the course of time, maybe not always a good practitioner of it, is that whatever level of communication you think you have with everybody, triple it as you begin to experience changes and as things roll out.

There probably is no such thing as too much communication when you're in the process of change. People need to be reassured that what they're doing is important. They need to be reinforced that what this project is about is important to your region.

MS. WORTH: Absolutely. I completely agree with what Ron is saying. So when we see change impacting program management, we see people immediately start thinking about adjusting their roles and responsibilities.

Maybe you've started to see people that are in your own offices start to say, well, I'm going to take over this or start doing that. You might see people reinforcing the value and need for a program and having to feel like you need to justify your work. And also, you might see people starting to say, well, maybe we should stop spending on that because there's no purpose.

Instead of making reactive decisions, I think what Ron and I would like to see you do and what we recommend strongly is that you take a moment and you be quite thoughtful about your activities at this particular point because every edit and decision you make has the opportunity to really set you up for success or be a bit of a long-term challenge.

So in short, there are some things you should do, some things that really depend on your situation, and certainly, some very important things not to do. But we can go through some of those in a second.

Now, we have two different pieces of material we would recommend you consider purchasing and/or going and at least looking up online at some point. The first one is a book called "Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change." It's been put out by William Bridges, and that's a fantastic piece.

And in a moment we'll also start talking about some of the resources from the Center for Creative Leadership. You'll see some of those references as we go through the next few slides, but those are both good resources, if you prefer to read and follow up later.

So let's talk a little bit about some things that you obviously have to plan for. You can't predict the future, but you can certainly learn from strong practices. And as Ron just named, being authentic and tripling your conversation and communication, being transparent matters a lot. Don't necessarily focus on talking about the problems only. You have to find a unified solution.

So to his point, three times as much communication with all stakeholders really matters, and you shouldn't end conversations with them until you really give everybody air time to make sure that they agree to a unified plan to proceed. That has happened countless times.

You have a large consortium, and perhaps your lead entity is going to design all the solutions. That doesn't always work well. Ron and I have seen it countless times. A coordinated, incentivized approach that everyone agrees to really is required in order for forward motion. Ron, do you want to say anything about that?

MR. PAINTER: Yeah. I think it kind of leads into the next slide a little bit, Jen, when we talk about who should be involved in the solutions.

You mentioned the Center for Creative Leadership, and I happen to have had the opportunity to spend a week with the folks at CCL out in Colorado. And I think one of the things that has always stayed with me from that experience is the fact that I internally process. I'm not quick but I absorb what people are telling me and then I go through this process in my head and then I reach a decision.

And part of what I learned at CCL was it's really important to hear everybody, first of all, as Jen mentioned. But secondly, it's also important to walk through, especially with your staff, the people right around you, why you think the solution is the solution. And you want to be very open to that.

I mean, we know from quality management that people who do often have some pretty good suggestions about what works, what doesn't work, how to create better efficiencies. So I think to Jen's point earlier, you really need to be open to all kinds of input into what are potential solutions. But I think key is you hold or as the grant – the oversight for the grant, I mean, you hold the keys to what the purpose of this grant is. And I think that's something that you've really got to stick to.

MS. WORTH: I couldn't agree with you more, Ron.

So I have three things that I would say on this particular slide. The first is I think you all need to firm in your head and in your hearts and in your practice that you are the change managers. You need to own that dynamic because there needs to be a centralization for that. So you need to acknowledge that there needs to be a change manager for each one of your initiatives.

Second, don't presume this is going to be easy, and don't reassure them that this would be a cake walk. You will have to have that over conversation – or over – overloaded conversation. You will need to have dialogue with just about everybody again, almost like when you're starting up.

And then most – most importantly and probably third here is, when you acknowledge that you are the change manager, when you acknowledge that it won't be easy, you need to also focus on transparency. This isn't about the emotional reason why. This is actually about a functional task and moving forward in coordinated fashion. People will trust you if you assure them that there is change happening, but you're going to do it systematically and quite thoughtfully.

With that, I think we can move to the poll we have for you guys on the next slide.

So, Grace, can you talk everybody through what they're supposed to do functionally in order for this to respond?

MS. BRAY: Yeah. So this is Jan, and I'll just say too, if everybody – it should be up on your screen. And if you'll take a look, the question is, what change has created the biggest challenge? And just pick the one that best meets your answer to this.

Was it organizational change or partners and stakeholder, employers? And this is related to your – pretty much related to the America's Promise Grant. The employers that you've been partnering with? Funding, stakeholder funding, the grant funding, funding that's part of the grant? Which has generated the biggest challenge for you within your grant?

MS. WORTH: I think we'll give it another 15 seconds. If you can respond, great. If you can't, we can go with the summary of what's there.

MS. BRAY: Yeah. I know some of you are – have called in and could not get online. So it's not able to respond but –

MS. WORTH: No problem. So now, we're going to jump in on what we have here. So what I see on my screen for all of you – this is Jen – is that what change has created the biggest challenge? The majority of you are noting organizational. Some of you are noting funding. The other two opportunities were partners and stakeholders, but let's talk about organizational and funding.

First and foremost, I think we've hit on some of the strategies, which is you have to address the culture. People recognize that change is inevitable. You can't deny that it's a reality. It was always coming, but until you actually have to start thinking about who are the people still standing, what is the current budget situation, and what are your objectives and goals for the end of an initiative, we really can't get to a common set of steps to go forward.

I would equally say on funding that everybody goes after and scurries after grants or projects or opportunities, but as soon as the dollars start to dwindle, it is too late to figure out what happens next. You really have to embed sustainability planning in at the point that you actually put words on paper for the proposal.

I think Ron reflected on that a little bit earlier, but, Ron, you take over. Any other thoughts on organizational or funding challenges? We could do whole webinars just on those two alone.

MR. PAINTER: Yeah. So I think part of this Jen went a little bit in the earlier slide. Part of what popped up to me was the notion about integrity. You've applied for a grant. You've seen a need in your community. You've seen a need with your employer. So you applied for the grant. You got the grant. There's certain amount of integrity now accused to you because you're put in the position of having to advance the purpose of the grant.

I have a lot of respect for some folks that I could name but won't because I have twice inherited a project that was awarded to an organization, and because of organizational changes and a different view that the organization now took or a different direction, in a sense, the grant was orphaned because it didn't fit in with the strategic objective of the organization.

And they were actually able to negotiate. And I know the folks at DOL are cringing when I say this, but they were actually able to negotiate the – a move of the grant, and I think that's the extreme. But I think it speaks to you in terms of the integrity for your stakeholders. They're in it with you. They're in it with you for a reason. And how are you going to navigate that? And sometimes, as Jen mentioned earlier, it is not easy to navigate with new management.

I think the other thing I would mention with regard to funding is that I know that we all get in the – to the situation where a new grant comes up. There's a lot of pressure to get a new grant, but I do believe in the sustainability question for the grants. And having been a grant reviewer, I really pay attention to the sustainability.

If what you're getting the money for isn't to – isn't in part to figure out how do we streamline what we're currently doing or how do we change what we're currently doing or how do we advance what we're currently doing, then I question whether it all – what's happening with the grant. Are you really – in a sense, are you institutionalizing what you're learning?

Is there a part of this as both the formal evaluation but also the internal evaluation? What are you learning about what you do as a result of this grant that will sustain at least the effort, the initiative, and some of the work?

MS. WORTH: I think that's perfect. So I'll take us down to the next slide, which is things to do before we get essentially to things to not do. Again, we're just reaffirming here.

Share information, and then tell people again. Just constant and consistent communication really matters. In certain grants you might be overseeing multiple sort of subsidiary entities or other initiatives and partners. They might not speak the same language, but continuous connection matters. And again, as that systems change lead, people will be turning to you and queuing off of what you say. So make sure your messages are consistent, and that continuity will be a lot easier.

Second, acknowledge wins and losses with your team. Be transparent about it, but do not dwell in the negative only. The reality is this is a machine, and you all are working together, not supposed to be locking gears and fighting.

And then lastly, understand truly what matters for your stakeholders. By that, it feels a little bit like the first bullet, but what we meant when Ron and I put this deck together for you was that it is a new day. You are – in a three-year grant or in a four- or five-year initiative, if you have multiple years sort of organized together on larger agendas, year 2.5 in a three-year thing is a different set of dynamics.

People may be different. The markets might have changed. Sector innovations might have edited some of your programming. Make sure you're paying attention to Ron's point about what the industry needs now and make sure that your planning really does fit with that transparent talk.

Ron, what else would you like to add to the do slide before we get into the what not to do slide?

MR. PAINTER: Well, I think the other thing is to really make certain with your stakeholders that there is hard conversations before you go after the grant. I think we've all experienced being a "partner on a grant" only to have somebody win the grant and suddenly we have – we don't see us in there or suddenly it goes another direction or suddenly, we realize that we didn't really understand what was going to be involved.

I know that oftentimes you don't have a lot of time in order to get a grant application and submit it, but understanding what truly matters to your stakeholders – we've all had a grant that has gone south about halfway through it because one of the other partners gets sideways. And I think that we should learn the lesson of go through this before we start so we know what the core – what our core goals are, what the core values are. We know how this work fits into what the other organization is doing.

I worked for a county commissioner one time who always used to ask me, are we giving $5 to people to do a $20 job? In other words, are what we asking of an organization more than they can deliver? And I think that's an honest conversation that has to happen in the beginning.

MS. WORTH: That's right. So let's go to things not to do because these – this is some other scary space for many people as they start to think through change. And sometimes you can't control it. One of your partners may very well do this without your consideration.

But if you establish yourself as that manager, that hub of change, a couple of things that we've seen not work and not work really, really horribly well is the reality where sometimes when staff start to thin out, a smaller staff may say, it's okay. I'll take on more. I'll just do more of the tasks. Or, well, let's prove that we're even more efficient and more effective than ever before because we don't have to deal with this or that. We'll set even higher goals.

That usually doesn't work, and, in fact, you're only setting yourself up for more stress. You need to have that transparent dialogue and decide which things that you will want to have persist and focus on and which things you may have to acknowledge need to get slowed down and/or stopped if appropriate.

That's going to require conversations because, if you're getting funded to do these tasks, you're going to need to still complete them, but you may need to have different dialogues with your funder, your partner, and in particular anyone that you currently manage who might feel that stress.

Don't forget to uphold your values. This was a really good point that we've seen in just about every change management book and I've seen to be true. I'm sure Ron has as well. To be true, in every community that goes through change management, don't forget to uphold your values. By that we mean, if you value feedback, you can't tell your partners don't talk about that. Don't give us criticism over that. We're still – we're struggling. You have to allow space for that kind of dialogue.

Again, to Ron's point, you might feel like you're overcommunicating, but you will have more investment, more buy in, and more support for whatever you edit your work to be if everyone feels like you're rowing in the same direction. And we actually believe that transparency in conversation matters most.

Ron, did you want to say anything about those two before the last point?

MR. PAINTER: I was only laughing thinking meetings that I've been in where it's either been a state or the feds and they come in and I kind of have an idea what Jen may say about this project but I really didn't want to hear her say that to me. And so we all get into the room while the folks who awarded the grant are there, and all hell breaks loose.

I really suggest that, as uncomfortable as it is, you've got to have this – it goes back to this conversation. Got to have this conversation with staff and your stakeholders, if for no other reason than it gives you the opportunity to be able to manage the conversation that's going to happen when you sit down.

I always feel like, even if I don't know maybe what a solution is, I sure want to know what the problems are. I really want to know what we're facing because sooner or later we're going to have to deal with that. And I agree with Jen. Don't forget your values along the way.

This is a grant. It's a project that you're running, but your team might be together long before and long after this grant. Your organization is going to be around before and after this grant. Don't sacrifice the long term. You have to live in the community you're in. You have to work with the people in your community. Don't sacrifice your value in – for a short-term fix or a short-term patch that's really going to put you into a bind as you move forward.

MS. WORTH: This is Jen. I couldn't agree with Ron more. These things sound like they're simple but they're actually quite hard but once you start doing them as a form of practice, it will build the culture that is in your community that will allow you all to thrive. We've seen it happen.

So there's one more book I'll throw at all of you that like to go to the store and have something to thumb through. I'm not sure you can get it online, but it is called Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most. I asked one of our moderators to actually put it in the main chat for all of you. We will equally put the other two books in the chat as well, but this one, whether you use it for your spouse, your boss, your kids, your partners, we think that this is another good reference that really helps you get through some of those expectations and value setting statements.

The last not –

MR. PAINTER: And one of the things, Jen, that I've experienced that I know you have and others have, as you dread having this conversation, as you dread it, as you sweat it out, as you hang out at the bathroom the night before losing dinner, guess what. They probably know it's not working as well.

So I think, if it gets to that point the project's really going south, your partners know it is. So I think it's a good opportunity for everybody to get in the room and kind of clear the air, and maybe they're just looking for some help. Maybe they know it's going south, but they don't know what to do. And maybe you can help provide that solution.

MS. WORTH: Absolutely right.

And then the last bullet that we wanted to share with you – I'm sorry. Can we go back one slide?

The last bullet we wanted to share with you is that do not presume that you need to rebuild the project after the first initiative ends in the exact same image. Again, staying market responsive requires you to look at what the new day is, but you don't always have to design wildly new things every single opportunity you have.

(Inaudible) – 80 percent of the initiative – (inaudible) – and you need to tweak it or edit it, use that as an opportunity with that clear conversation with your partners to design something that really will fit for the tomorrow of your neighborhood and your regional economic development strategies.

Please do progress. Thank you. And then we did add a second book into the presenter chat so you guys can turn that into the main chat whenever you wish.

The next slide here that we're going to talk about is from that Center for Creative Leadership. So in addition to two publications, we are going to also give you reference to Center for Creative Leadership. It's a lovely entity. They talk about things like change endurance.

That is a tough word, but again, you're the change agent. You're the managers. Words like communicate, collaborate, commit have lots of details on that website on how, if you're struggling with one of those strands, you might shore up your relationships.

The educate about rumination versus resilience, it's a great phrase. Ruminating meaning thinking about the same thing over and over and over again. You can stay in that negative headspace, or you can get resilient, which means you still have hardships. You still have struggles and trials, but you're not going to dwell in those hardships. You're going to be solutions driven, and you're going to have a high-performance team that will work with you, communicate with you, and grow in the same direction that you all are achieving new ventures.

And then last but certainly not least, you need to manage yourself in and out of work and model the behaviors and the culture that you wish to see with your partners. It really does need to be a hub where you lead by example, and that's a tricky spot to be in when you have challenges with your relationships.

We hope you all have perfect ones, but in a few minutes we're going to get to having you tell us what your questions are. We won't name you or out you at all, but we will give you some strategies if you want to share a little bit about some of your challenges. And Ron and I would love to think those through with you. So start thinking about what you're willing to ask about now, regardless of your community, and we won't name where you are. But just think about those questions.

Ron, would you like to add anything to the change endurance slide?

MR. PAINTER: I think just if you ever have the opportunity to do the CCL – going through their experiences, it's going to be one of the hardest four days you spend, but it's very worthwhile. I think it's going to – it teaches you a lot about how you think, how you see things.

I do want to stress, Jen, that I think I've gotten better at managing staff in that, when staff is out on PTO, they are out on PTO. They may text me, but I have to have the discipline not to text them. Talk about the things that you're going to see coming up before they go out. Understand what's going on in the environment, but you really have to protect – you really got to protect your stress level and their stress level. Nothing good ever happens when you constantly are on alert.

MS. WORTH: Absolutely right. Could we go to the next slide? Embracing disruption. Thank you.

So again, CCL has a couple of these strategies. So in a highly disruptive environment, not just average change but when you really feel like everything is falling, it's always on fire, you are constantly spinning plates in the air, and you truly just can't keep up, there are mechanisms that they have laid out that help you keep that pace and pattern that Ron was talking about so that you don't freak out everybody else around you and that you can more thoughtfully and systematically address the issues at hand.

This is more sort of the crisis mode world. Think through things like POINT – praise, opportunities, issues, and new thinking. Talk about innovation and what people really have the capacity to do. You cannot necessarily expect everyone to contribute and manage and do at the exact same level. You want to give people stretches and goals but also – and be appreciative but also put pressure where it is appropriate.

And then lastly, make sure that you discern the difference between high potential and high professional, and develop your partners and your talent accordingly. Just because somebody is incredibly professional does not mean you can give them all of the responsibilities of a more seasoned employee that's been doing it for decades. You have to plan appropriately with your talent and groom them to eventually be those first responders.

Ron?

MR. PAINTER: I think the other thing, Jen, that I know you and I have chatted about this and we have learned, and that is that, now, you're in a position. You're the change agent. You're the grant management. I really think that you have to work really – at least I do – really work hard at making sure that it is okay for people to come in and have the tough conversation with you.

You may not like what they're saying. You may not welcome what they're saying. You may not be happy that another problem has landed on the table, but you've really got to work at making sure people understand your partners, your stakeholders, the people who work with you, for you, that it's okay for them to come in and have this conversation.

And again, it goes back to the whole issue of communication. Got to make sure that that door is open, and you got to make sure that they're able to tell you what isn't working because it's going to come back. It's going to raise its ugly head. So you got to make sure they have an opportunity, that the environment allows them to come in and give you that tough news. And –

MS. WORTH: Absolutely right. Safe space. Right.

MR. PAINTER: Yeah. We need – we know that we're going to – we're going to fail sometimes. We know that, and you got to give people the opportunity to talk about where they are because from that, I believe, comes innovation. You can collectively figure out where do we go from here.

MS. WORTH: I love that. Makes a lot of sense.

Well, I think we're about ready to turn into the next slide, which is it's time for you and your three-sentence challenges. We've probably in the one hour of giving you some slides and presenting to you and then also reading your questions couldn't take a one-page summary of your community. But we would welcome – frame up a question in a couple of sentences, and Ron and I will do our level best to respond and give you some guidance.

You do not need to name your exact community and out any of your partners. You can keep it generic, or if you feel comfortable, you can share as you wish. But we really stand ready to help you now and in the future be as successful as you possibly can, knowing that you really are in a moment of transitional opportunity or in first responder mode. We're here.

And while you all are entering those questions into the main chat, I think Kelly and Jan have actually lined up a couple of individuals around the country to potentially frame up the discussion. So, Kelly and Jan, we'll turn it back over to you.

MS. BRAY: OK. Thanks, Jen. This is Jan. Yeah. Because we know the America's Promise grantees, all of you have gone through change, whether it's from your partners, from within your institutions, whether it's staffing, the employers, funding. I mean, you've all experienced this change, and so we've asked two of the grantees who we know have been through significant episodes of change but are coming out the other side to share with everyone what their issues were and what they did to address the challenges.

So the first one, I hope he's still on the phone. He's up in Maine, and he doesn't have the best connection, although that's not where his school is, is Mason Bishop, who's the consortium coordinator for the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission. They cover three states and they have seen some very interesting transitions and changes within their grant.

So, Mason, if you're still on the phone, could you share what has been happening with your grant in your area? Mason might not be with us at the moment.

OK. Kelly, can I turn it over to you for the grantee that you have lined up?

MS. BANKS: Absolutely, Jan. Thank you. So as Jan mentioned, we've asked a few grantees to provide their insight and experience of change. We have Mary Anne Szczepanski from the Workforce Alliance South Central Kansas who will provide some insight on her experience of change from an employer and industry perspective. Mary Anne, are you there? Mary Anne?

MS. BRAY: All right. Mason's here. He's trying to get in and talk and so is Mary Anne. I don't know if we are having a problem with – we have to unmute them so that might be the problem.

So while we're trying to figure that out, Jen, one of the questions was, "Some partners have been outstanding and we wanted to continue working with them. Not so great. How do you move forward at the same time move out and then slightly (inaudible) from those who are – who are no longer cooperating or addressing the issues that need to be?"

MS. WORTH: I love that question. Thank you to the person who asked it. I empathize entirely. So having two strategies, because you can decide how to apply this one of two ways. I will offer these ideas.

Strategy number one is a bit – I don't want to use the word manipulative because that's too hard, but it is definitely nuanced in the sense that you may say, look. There's so many opportunities. There are so many relationships every single time. We can't all work on every single initiative. We think that for this particular initiative these constellation of partners makes the most sense. That's not to say we don't want to work with you on other things, but these ones would actually be the best use of time, talent, and dollars.

And that clear discussion puts boundaries around who will be sort of principally leading the effort as opposed to having everyone involved at all times. That's what a strategy number one, find a way to work them into other things because, clearly, they want to be there and work with you. They don't want to be excluded, but they clearly are not functioning because you are thinking that they are not an ideal fit.

The second option is to actually have a different kind of direct dialogue that says something is not working and that it is not – it is not personal by any stretch, but we want to figure out a different dynamic that will be more beneficial for the two of us. So in doing so, we probably need to have different people at the table, meaning, if it's you and me, maybe we need to pull in other people not you or not me or not both of us to think about what kind of relationship should we have going forward.

And that's a really tough talk. People will take that personally. So being more intentional is very much needed in that kind of an environment.

I think both strategies I have seen work, but the reality is, as Ron said earlier, these people, if they are in your community, particularly if you're in a mid-size or small or rural or remote community, are not going to go away just because this initiative isn't working out.

You're going to run into them in the grocery store. You're going to see them at the Chamber of Commerce meetings. They're going to be the ones invited to your economic development discussions for the community. They care. They want to make things work and work well. That's where the relational activities really, really matter most.

Ron, did you want to add anything to that?

MR. PAINTER: Well, I think that's great advice, Jen. I guess I would say, look. This – part of this goes back to the prenup. What was the conversation when you applied for the grant? I think – and again, not that I'm perfect at it, but I really think that's the time for some hard conversation.

Agreeing on how you're going to handle not only the work of the grant but what constitutes – what are the markers along the grant for success? And then I think putting in a mechanism around whatever you want to call it, review process, review, success review, whatever that is, and I think for that partner that isn't performing, to Jen's point, how can you make this a win for them? How can you give them an option to save – step from the grant?

Maybe – (inaudible) – maybe they've had leadership change. Maybe their board has changed direction. So I think you've always got to provide opportunity for people to get out. I think that has to be – (inaudible) – begin with.

MS. BRAY: All right. So let me – let me turn it (inaudible) since he's now unmuted, as is Mary Anne. Mason, you want to share with us what has – the challenge that's been in West Virginia and the steps that you have taken to address the challenges?

MASON BISHOP: Yes. Can you hear me okay, Jan?

MS. BRAY: Yes. Thank you, Mason.

MR. BISHOP: OK. Great. Thank you. And I'm sorry. I'm in an area of Maine very rural that has spotty cell phone service. So hopefully, I won't lose you.

I want to mention two quick things, one around sustainability. The – first, let me thank Jen and Ron for their really well thought out comments. One of the things working with TAACCCT grants and now America's Promise that I've seen that's a real key in terms of the issue of culture is how grant-funded projects are viewed by your community college leadership in the first place.

I think a real key determinant to the idea of sustainability revolves around whether your president and VPs are actively engaged in communicating with project management staff, if they view the grant – I like to say that I think grants should be viewed as entrepreneurial projects where you're looking for what policies, programs, and practices can we learn from through this entrepreneurial experience that we can then sustain into our larger course of how we do business ongoing at the community college?

And I think if you have that level of buy in right up front from presidents and VPs and constant communication, I think that's really when you can impact the idea of sustainability. And I – that's been a real difference maker from what I've seen in so many of these projects.

Projects where the community college leadership is not very engaged tend to end up, frankly, going away at the end of the grant period because there's been no real discussion of what have we learned. What can we use as a change management kind of technique? Again, I use the three Ps, policy, program, practice.

So one of the things we're doing with America's Promise with the three schools led by Eastern West Virginia Community Technical College and then Allegheny College in Maryland as a subrecipient and Dabney S. Lancaster Community College in Virginia as a subrecipient is we are having those conversations with community college leadership.

I was just on Thursday doing subrecipient monitoring down at Dabney Lancaster, and their AP220 project does report directly to one of their vice presidents, and they do have continual communication with their president. And so decisions around budget and program direction and partnership development has been – is directly supported by the president of the community college and the VPs.

And so it really lends a lot of credibility to the project management staff when they go out and try to initiative new partnerships or changes in direction or, frankly, then sustainability once the grant funds run out.

Secondly, specifically, I think what Jan wanted me to quickly talk about was most of us that are in atmosphere right now of low unemployment and high labor force participation, and that presents a number of challenges, frankly, as we look to get participants through our programs.

But we had a situation in the last number of months where Eastern and Allegany were directly impacted where a company Verso, paper products company, a long-term legacy type company in the area, was in the process of actually working with the two community colleges on utilizing apprenticeship as a tool through the AP220 grant to do more training. And this was all being driven locally through the local plant leadership.

Well, literally the day before we were supposed to meet with them, the national folks announced that that plant was closing. And over the course of the months, it actually became trade certified. So we, interestingly enough, went from an opportunity with a new employer partner to utilize more flexible apprenticeship options as well as registered apprenticeship to meet their workforce needs – we went from there to all of a sudden we've got a trade certified layoff and impacting hundreds of people in communities across western Maryland, southern Pennsylvania, and that part of West Virginia.

So what we did was immediately went into 180 degree, at least with regard to this situation – went from, oh, working with them on apprenticeship to working with the local economic development folks, the chambers, others to be at – and with the workforce development boards and workforce agencies in the states to work with them on opportunities to get retrained, so to speak, for laid off workers.

And it worked really well because what we did is we immediately – in my position, I immediately dealt with Allegany College and Eastern and said, let's have a collaborative approach to this across multiple states. And instead of sort of hit and miss, like what might normally happen, we had a consistent message, consistent outreach materials. Both partners – community college partners sat with the other partners in community meetings and rapid response.

And as a result, we've been really able to have a very, as I mentioned, consistent approach to dealing with a layoff situation which most of us aren't really used to in recent years as much as maybe 10 or 15 years ago when we had many more of these type of layoffs.

I know time is short, Jan. If there are further questions, I'd be more than willing to answer them, but that was really, our ability to adapt and our – and the grant really provided us with the relationships that we needed to be able to respond to this type of layoff in a much more meaningful way than I think we would have had the grant not been there and the relationships not been there.

MS. BRAY: Thank you, Mason. I know you've got such a story there, and I really do suggest and encourage anyone who wants to learn more about what they've done in West Virginia and address the issues to reach out to Mason directly because I know he'll share it with you. But they really have done a phenomenal job of pulling it together.

And, Mary Anne, I know you're online to share with your story, but we're about a minute to ending. And so we need to end this by 4:00 o'clock.

First of all, I want to thank Ron and Jen both. I mean, they're bringing their experience, their information. They're very practical in what they want to share with everyone, and if – again, if you have any questions that you want Jen and Ron to answer, if you'll type them into the chat box or even Mason, we will make sure they get those, and they will get back to you right away with their suggestions. And you can also contact them.

I think what was very important, what was said throughout their comments is to be thoughtful about what you're doing. We know change is going to happen. Just looking at emerging issues and trends, we know change is going to happen from the time we first think things through. So it's to be authentic. Have those hard conversations. Be very clear about what's to be done. Be authentic. Communicate with everyone and to design a coordinated approach and to take ownership of what you're trying to do and what needs to be done.

And we think that that is actually a good way. That's a broad overview of what Jen and Ron had to say and to move forward in terms of addressing those changes.

Kelly, you want – any last words you want to say before we wrap this up?

MS. BANKS: No. I think you've pretty much covered it all. I think also that Ron and Jen did an excellent job with giving different levels of how to address change and the tips and strategies.

Again, just to echo what Jan said, if you have any questions for Jen, for Ron, or for Mason, please feel free to put those in the chat message or e-mail the America's Promise inbox, and we'll make sure that we get those questions to you.

In addition to that, what you're seeing in front of you is the next upcoming event for the convening. So please save the date, which is November 13th through the 14th. And I believe in addition to that, you'll probably see some additional e-mails in the upcoming weeks with more information about the content as well as travel logistics.

MS. BRAY: All right. And, Mason, once again, thank you for sharing. And, Mary Anne, we apologize, but thank you for being willing to share.

MS. WORTH: Thanks, everybody.

MS. BRAY: Have a good day, everyone.

(END)