**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**Business Engagement for Successful Outcomes**

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JON VEHLOW: Again, if you haven't already done so, if you're just joining us, please make sure to introduce yourself in that welcome chat. Again, we'll have that chat up throughout today's webinar where you can type in your questions or comments at any time.

Welcome to "Business Engagement for Successful Outcomes." I'd like to kick things off to our moderator today, Amanda Poirier, regional TAA coordinator for Employment and Training Administration with the U.S. Department of Labor. Amanda?

AMANDA POIRIER: Thanks, Jon. Hello and welcome to today's webinar, Business Engagement for Successful Outcomes. My name is Amanda Poirier and I'm the trade lead in the Northeast and Caribbean regions. I'm here with Susan Worden who is the supervisory program analyst in the Office of Trade Adjustment Assistance.

I'm very excited about today's webinar and eager to share the best practices from Oregon, New Hampshire, and Vermont. Today we have several objectives, including our shared common goal of reemployment of trade-affected workers; increasing impact to achieve our common goal through employer engagement; exploring options to leverage case management funds to develop and fulfill a business engagement strategy; and to learn ways to increase partnerships to achieve reemployment for trade-affected workers.

This is part of a two-part webinar series. The previous webinar entitled "Guiding and Coaching Trade-Affected Workers" occurred last Tuesday. Susan will discuss the connection between the two webinars.

With that, Susan?

SUSAN WORDEN: Thanks, Amanda. As noted in the Guiding and Coaching Trade-Affected webinar last week, there's a significant overlap between that webinar and this webinar today, including the fact that they both fit under the umbrella term used in both TAA at the TAACCCT grant program world as part of the navigator model, which is a specific staffing strategy.

The previous webinar was centered around how to support workers more exclusively. This webinar is focused on how to engage businesses proactively and strategically to ensure that the job that individuals are being trained for are the right training and the right jobs based on employer demand. Amanda?

MS. POIRIER: Thanks, Susan. Before we move forward, let's talk about what you think are some values of business engagement; is it transactional, situational, reactive, proactive, across the business cycle, is it all of the above? Please enter in your thoughts now in the chat.

OK. Great. I see people are entering in their thoughts. Fantastic. It looks like a lot of people are saying it's proactive – great – and across the business cycle. All right. I think we have a winner on proactive. OK. All right. Thanks, Jon.

Now we can move back to the next slide. Typically we have some data slides here that discusses the importance of value of particular presentation in terms outcomes. We leverage the data because we believe in database decisions. This presentation is different in that the importance of business is more obvious and inherent in the work that we do.

This quote was chosen because we if we as a system start at the end, the job of a trade-affected worker, then it's appropriate that the workforce system, including trade, must have a solid business engagement strategy. If anything, it might be the most important strategy that we as a system can have.

Given the demographics of the population served, typically older population with much less education, it might be even more critical for the workforce system to advocate for the trade-affected workers and ensure that the time spent training is the right training based on employer demand and is connected to the labor market needs. Everyone saying that this business engagement needs to be proactive is right on.

As discussed, in previous TAA webinars, we continue to look at ways to optimize service delivery by leveraging case management funds to benefit trade-affected workers. In line with that, do you think case management funds can be leveraged to support business engagement strategies and activities on behalf of trade-affected workers? I would like you all to take a moment to please enter in your thoughts in the chat – well, not in the chat, but you could do that too – but in the poll.

Great. Thanks, everyone, for putting that in. As you continue to update, please vote yes or no or, of course, you can choose to abstain too.

In general, case management funds can be used to support business engagement strategies for trade-affected workers. Please contact your ETA regional office if you have specific questions on next steps in leveraging case management funds for this purpose.

OK. Onto the next slide, at the end we also have a panel on best practice presentations. Here are some panel questions that you'll have an opportunity to vote on at the end of the presentation to guide me in terms of which questions to ask the panelists. If at any point you have questions, please enter them into the chat and we will respond to the questions in the chat and at the end of the presentation as well.

This presentation is different from many of the best practice webinars. So far it's not TAA specific, but that does not preclude you from taking these best practices and leveraging them in the TAA program. I hope that this webinar provides some ideas of discussion points that ETA can provide further technical assistance on. We want to be active partners, so please reach out to individuals on this webinar and your regional TAA coordinator for further discussion on opportunities to engage businesses and develop strategic business engagement strategies.

Again, please keep these panel questions in mind, and at the end we will vote on them to determine which ones will be selected.

Now I'm going to turn it over to two great folks in Oregon, Laura Lausmann and David White. Laura Lausmann is the Oregon TAA liaison to the 17 independent community colleges and private career schools in her state. Laura works with the Oregon TAA leadership team and college administration to facilitate a positive solution when trade-impacted students experience challenges in education due to profit misalignment.

Laura has worked for the Oregon Employment Department for 12 years, 11 of those in various roles in TAA. Laura also brings and employer's perspective from her previous work life, having co-owned a grocery outlet store for 16 years, managing a team of 30.

David earned his degree in speech communication and psychology from the University of Alabama. He served as an associate director of instruction for BCTI Technical School and career services director for Pioneer Pacific College. Overseeing job placement and employer outreach, David joined Oregon Employment Department in Trade Act in 2016 in the trade regional business services pilot program.

Currently, David is working as a Trade Act Navigator for the Portland Metro Tri-County area and is one of eight navigators throughout the state of Oregon.

Now I'd like to turn it over to Laura to continue the presentation. Thanks, Laura.

LAURA LAUSMANN: Thank you, Amanda. Our navigator positions in Oregon began as a pilot, but it didn't take long for our program and our leadership to see that the return on investment was substantial. Although we are still seeing trade activity in our state, our economy is currently stable, but it is still a really busy time in our program. While navigators have many roles, business engagement is braided into everything they do.

Navigators work with employers throughout their entire business cycle and right now is a really important time. Currently, they are meeting with employers to build those relationships so that when the economy does take a downturn, employers know that they have a point of contact to turn to. If trade is not a contributing factor, our navigators help guide them to the services and partners that employers may need. In a few minutes, David will share an overview of how Trade Act navigators engage in this work.

Business engagement in Oregon also happens on campus. Our connections to industry within our community colleges is often a leveraged relationship, but at times it can also result in a direct trade and employer connection. We attend quarterly meetings with career pathway and career technical education faculty and provide input on what our participants and TAA staff are experiencing in the real-time labor market.

There can at times be a slight misalignment between the business' current needs and educational certificates and degrees. Feedback is always welcomed and provides the college an opportunity to review this with their industry advisory boards.

On campuses, our TAA navigators connect with cooperative work experience and career center staff for job placement opportunities. They meet with instructors and advisers when information is needed for a combined employer classroom training plan. This is just another way that navigators leverage those community college industry connections.

Now David will share more on the business engagement and our navigator roles.

DAVID WHITE: All right. Thanks, Laura. In the regards to employer relationships, participant placement, and employer services, we all know the relationship between employers and job seekers is largely symbiotic. Therefore, navigators have embraced working this dynamic through proactive employee engagement, or intentionality with that.

Labor and employer connections are vital to the success of our program and participant outcomes. Connectivity with employers increases our ability to get participants into better-paying positions with higher career trajectories. While serving the participant, though, job development is something we do simultaneously and we help do that to help the employer's long-term business needs as well.

Navigators conduct employer engagement through face-to-face meetings with the intention of job development on behalf of our trade job-ready participant. The benefit to this is that we find out incredible information about the employer and their company, and that can be helpful in a number of ways.

Job development is usually conducted through a scheduled site visit, but also, to a lesser extent, at career fairs, partner meetings, or networking gatherings. It can be done anywhere, but, ideally, it's done on-site. At site meetings we get to know the employer, their needs, their hiring practices, by conducting an in-depth interview with them in the ideal environment: the workplace.

We get to really listen to them, find out about their hiring challenges, what the company culture is like, what products or services they offer, and, as importantly, what problems they see on the horizon for themselves and local industry partners.

Navigators work both with and for these two connected partnerships between the TAA participant and the employer in an attempt to create the successful win-win outcome. Our immediate goal is to have the participant hired by the employer. However, a larger and wider goal in employer engagement is to help the employer get into a position of hiring more of our TAA participants. That's where employer services come into play, including rapid response.

A thing about employer services and rapid response, before the navigator position, Trading Oregon was involved with Rapid Response but was brought in when there was an apparent connection to trade. Now, with the Trade Act Navigator position in place, navigators are engaged with every Rapid Response event, asking additional questions to help us identify if trade was a contributing factor where at first glance it may not have been apparent.

Because the information that navigators get firsthand from the employer, they are in an ideal position to educate and provide valuable layoff aversion information services that could help a struggling company before they begin to run into financial problems.

It's this business outreach, the business outreach sessions between the navigator and the employer, where we can bring solutions that are available through our lined partner network services, like Workforce Board, Title I, America Job Centers, and, in our area, Northwest Trade Adjustment, service that include Rapid Response, Layoff Aversion, WorkShare, Trade for Firms, and WOTC, the Work Opportunity Tax Credit. In this way, this is how the Trade Act Navigator role accomplishes these two goals of participant placement and business relationship business engagement.

An example of the successful outcome of business engagement with job development and with an OJT participant; I had a relationship with an employer, but it wasn't a trade-related one in terms of business engagement, but I reached out to the employer and my goal was to get my Trade participants hired. They were an advanced manufacturing firm in the Portland Metro area and when I went to do a site visit, sat down with the employer, I got to understand a little bit about their struggles in hiring.

They had plenty of applicants. They had plenty of applicants that met the educational models, but with every applicant they had, they realized because of the complex next year of the position, they would have had to have spent a lot of money training them.

What I said was that I had three participants who basically could fit most of their requirements of the job, but not all of them, so we decided to redo the job posting and then I supplied my three Trade Act participants to the position for interviews. They decided to hire the one candidate that had the least amount of education but the most experience.

Within that, before they were hired we selected the participant. We came up with a skills gap that we were to address through on-the-job training that included both in-house training and classroom training, and then we put that together. I helped them design that, put it together into the form an OJT application training plan, and we got the participant in the job with the training plan.

The training plan went for 52 weeks. At the end of it they hired the – well, they did hire the participant full-time and now he's making his Trade-related job that was impacted with $69,000, he's making $80,000 and he doesn't have an advanced degree. That's an example of cooperation.

MS. LAUSMANN: We are also working hard to build our connections through apprenticeships. The picture you see is of an invitation we received from apprenticeship coordinators across our state. Our Trade Act navigators attend these quarterly meetings to connect with the coordinators to learn more about their programs, open enrollment periods, and minimum requirements of applicants.

Each JATC program can look very different, and this information helps affected workers and case managers determine the best path into apprenticeship, which could include a pre-apprenticeship program. With a better understanding of the minimum requirements, our case managers assist workers, complete application forms to give those workers the best chance of being selected in these programs.

We recently have been able to support six affected workers during their apprenticeship training and we are excited to continue our work opening up these opportunities for those we serve.

MS. POIRIER: Thank you Laura and David for sharing your best practice. We really appreciate it.

Now I'm going to introduce Susan Huard and Lynn Szymanski. Susan Huard was appointed President of Manchester Community College in 2010 after serving as dean of learning and student development for 12 years at Quinebaug Valley Community College in Danielson Connecticut.

Dr. Huard has decades of higher education experience as both a senior administrator and faculty member. She's been involved with area businesses and the creation of many workforce programs, and has recently been honored by the New Hampshire Business Review as one of New Hampshire's 200 most influential business leaders.

Lynn Szymanski currently manages corporate training at Great Bay Community College in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Prior to this he managed two rounds of TAACCCT grants at NHTI Concord's Community College. Before coming to CCSNH, Lynn worked at a Boston-based consulting firm, implementing a variety of educational improvement initiatives, including K-12 and district turnaround, teacher and leader professional development reforms, and community engagement.

I'm going to turn it over to Susan Huard.

SUSAN HUARD: Thanks, Susan. We're going to talk about how we do business here in New Hampshire. New Hampshire literally only has six large businesses, and most of the businesses in our state are in the small and medium category, so we have to focus on ways to bring people together in order to create training programs that can serve a larger number of people.

One of the challenges for us is a very low unemployment rate; it's under 2.5 percent. When we bring businesses together, they see themselves as competitors, and our challenge, in fact, is to make them into collaborators. As you can see from the graphic of the state, we have seven community colleges and we are spread throughout the state.

How do we do this? Well, we look for ways to bring businesses into the learning process because we need their information. We begin by inviting employers into the classroom. It depends upon the employer.

In some cases they are comfortable wandering around a lab and just engaging with students. In other cases they prefer a short but formal presentation where they talk to an entire class of students about what their business does. Still other cases we're able to invite them in for a specific activity, like reviewing portfolios for our graphic design students or coming to a mock interview when our advanced manufacturing students are ready to move on.

Beyond those initial activities in the classroom, we learn and we engage with some of our partners in reviewing our curriculum. Again, depending upon the business we're talking about, we may give them a chance to review some specific assignments and comment back to us on how these would prepare people for their businesses. In other cases we show them the entire curriculum and ask them for feedback.

We find that some people are very interested in talking about the entire curriculum, and those are the businesses that we recruit for our advisory boards. We really are looking for people who can help us, not only by commenting on the curriculum but because they have a larger view of their industry and they have a greater opportunity to offer internships to students.

Still, another way that we bring folks in is by creating celebratory events. We may bring people together to celebrate a particular student achievement or we may ask our partners, whom we saw learning champions, to come in and bring their friends so we can celebrate an achievement within the industry when our students are hired.

Finally, one of the places that some businesses are most comfortable is offering us their expertise. We find that people with content knowledge make wonderful add-on faculty members as long as we partner them with an educator. What we're really trying to do is to have them share their knowledge and we will share our expertise as educators.

Now I'm going to turn this over to my colleague, Lynn Szymanski to talk about other strategies.

LYNN SZYMANSKI: I'm going to give some examples of ways that we connect with businesses. At Great Bay Community College where I currently work, we partner with the chamber of commerce and city economic development department to cohost a bimonthly manufacturing roundtable. We invite local manufacturers to campus for lunch that is sponsored by a local back where they can then formally get together and discuss issues currently affecting their businesses.

In addition to the relaxed atmosphere of the event, we often have guest speakers and discussions around specific themes. At our last meeting, our topic was tapping into the nontraditional workforce. We had an employer that hired people with special abilities and we invited a substance abuse counselor who discussed ways to support workers in recovery.

Another way is we partner with the Manufacturing Extension Partnership, which is a nationwide network of centers linked through the U.S. Department of Commerce to support manufacturing. Our partnership involves participating in Manufacturing Week, which is a time when we open our engineering technology and manufacturing labs to the public. Employers use this as an opportunity to come to campus to see what we're doing.

For a number of years we held a career fair during Manufacturing Week. We set up recruiting tables up and down the hallway of the engineering building so the students didn't have to go anywhere to talk to an employer. They were literally bumping into them during the event with resumes in hand.

This was successful in three ways. First, the employers could see the labs and the equipment that the students train on; second, employers could talk with faculty about curriculum; and, third, and in my mind the impactful, was that students were more confident talking to employers because they were in an environment that was familiar and comfortable.

Our programs are well-established, so in many departments we have long-standing relationships with employers. For example, at our Concord College NHTI in their information technology department students are required to find an internship during their final semester. They're responsible for writing up a learning agreement with the employer and the department faculty works closely with the business to ensure that the agreement is being upheld. Usually these students get hired after graduation and then the business follows up the next year looking for more interns.

Having close relationships with businesses requires constantly getting input on their needs and getting feedback about our graduates. The primary vehicle for that is our industry advisory boards. Departments have these advisory boards that meet at least once a year, sometimes more frequently. They're made up of both industry and faculty.

These meetings help faculty to hone curriculum and stay up to date on the state-of-the-art equipment and software. It was a meeting like this at NHTI in the IT department where they were getting feedback that their graduates had really great technical skills, but they were lacking in communication and soft skills. We were getting this feedback during our TAACCCT grant. For the grant we had a deliverable to create a lattice program and we were having trouble meeting it.

We were looking for examples, trying to get – we were approaching other department to help us develop a program with no support and we were close to not meeting this deliverable when the IT department had mentioned that he wanted to strengthen communication skills based on feedback from the advisory board, so we worked with an English professor who specializes in mindful communication to develop a four-course certificate that was to be embedded in the Associate degree program for IT so when they graduate, not only do they have the Associate degree but they have the certificate in mindful communications as well.

As far as partnerships, as I mentioned at the roundtable that we had last week, the state director of economic development attended, and in addition to other professional organizations, like the MEP, which I mentioned, we partner with the local human resource association, the supply chain organization, national health careers association, and others that I'll let Susan discuss.

DR. HUARD: two other partnerships that we wanted to talk about briefly were our college advisory committees. Much of what we've spoken about are our industry advisory committees. Those are specific, like one on advanced manufacturing, one on electrical technology, and so on. But colleges need an advisory committee that brings together people from multiple occupations. We draw the people who are members of the advisory committee for the college from all of the industry committees.

We're looking for people who have an interest in the college as a larger entity and have a strong personal network. Combined with that are the New Hampshire Sector Partnership initiative. This is a program that includes the five major registries in New Hampshire: advanced manufacturing, healthcare, hospitality, and construction, and information technology. In every case we've identified champions who have brought together their networks along with the college so that we have an effective partnership that allows us to create vibrant curriculum as needed.

Finally, all of these partnerships have led to a whole series of apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships. We found that what is key for us is having an effective business coordinator. There's a lot of paperwork connected with apprenticeships, but when we send the business coordinator to help the company to fill out the paperwork and determine what their needs are, we experience great success.

Thank you. Back to Amanda.

MS. POIRIER: Thank you so much for your presentation, Susan, and Lynn. There's a lot to digest there and I hope that everybody took copious notes.

Next up we have Tiffany Keune, who is the associate dean of workforce education at the Community College of Vermont. Tiffany was a grant manager for TAACCCT one and four and oversaw several awards for TAACCCT two and three. Tiffany's work in corporate training and workforce development includes curriculum design, business outreach, workshop facilitation, course instruction, and instructor training.

She also works with trainers, teachers, graduates, and undergraduate students to improve instructional practices and assessment strategies. She speaks at various conferences and has designed and delivered workshops with the National Workforce Conference, Antioch New England Graduate School, Vermont Career and Technical Education Conference, educating the whole student conference and various staff and faculty conferences statewide.

Tiffany holds a BA from Castleton University and an MS from Antioch New England Graduate School, and serves on the Board of Vermont Adult Learning, and Girls on the Run Vermont.

With that, I'll turn it over to Tiffany. Thank you, Tiffany.

TIFFANY KEUNE: OK. Thank you so much, Amanda, and hello everyone from a very snowy today Vermont. Happy to talk to everybody.

I'm going to take you through just a few of the pieces that we have done in Vermont. Many of these started through our various TAACCCT grants. As Amanda mentioned, we've been involved in all four TAACCCT grants, two as grantees and the other two as sub-grantees. Happy to have all of these initiatives that have carried on past TAACCCT.

Just a little overview of community college of Vermont, we only have one community college in the state of Vermont, but we have 12 locations throughout the state. Our average class size is 13. This stays the same even in workforce classes.

We try to keep all of our class sizes very low. We have about 975 classes per semester. Our online and hybrid courses are over 200 and in fall of 2018 we had 5,844 students enrolled in that semester. Our average age student is 27. We tend to be a little higher on the workforce side than that, and over half of our students are first-generation.

Just some of the strategies that we've been using and that really started with our TAACCCT grant, one of the biggest strategies was hiring targeted staff. You've heard a lot of that with the Navigators. For us, we decided at the community college that we really needed staffing specifically focused on workforce efforts and business engagement. This little quad that you see has our business and community outreach manager which I'll talk about a little bit more specifically, as that is really the crux of our work with business engagement.

Our project manager workforce that helps to both kind of navigate the waters between our workforce efforts and academic efforts – and you'll see we have a lot of crossover there. And then a program assistant of workforce that can help build courses, work with faculty and students, and do all of that administrative stuff that we need done in the college.

This business and community outreach manager was started through our TAACCCT grant and it really was this idea of having a comprehensive and innovative approach to business outreach. Since we are a statewide organization, we have to be able to meet business needs everywhere in the state, no matter the industry, no matter the region. We need to be able to have somebody who has the skillset that can balance between all of those different industries and look at it as a full innovative strategy for the state.

We also need to be bringing in industry-recognized credentials, which IRCs are important to the state of Vermont and which ones can we leverage with different industries. Like New Hampshire, we do not have very many large businesses, so we're working with lots of small businesses in lots of small communities. This person also works heavily in collaborating both with those external partners and businesses and organizations, but also internally with staff across the state.

Another one of our strategies at CCV is to blend credit and noncredit offerings. We really want to have the ability to meet the needs of business no matter what those needs are, so customized workshops, whether they be for 4 hours, 8 hours, 16 hours, and credit bearing offerings are really important to us. Credit is able to open the door to funding both through traditional financial aid but also helps persistence along a career pathway and college pathway if somebody has early credit attainment. It also helps to align with the tuition remission strategies of our business partners to allow them to pay for those trainings.

This is just a specific example for you. All of this credit and noncredit example and how you can kind of patch all of these different pieces together and have these options for businesses. In customer service we have both noncredit workshops. We go into businesses and do even a four-hour training.

If they're looking for something very specific – there might be a phone customer service training somebody is looking for; we will do that. We also have credit bearings, of course, in customer service, so people can earn three credits on any customer service and then have that embedded into their college-level programs. Then we also have options for industry-recognized credentials in customer service. We're able to lend all of those pieces together.

We can work with businesses on what works best for them and work with students on what works best for them, but also give the option for an industry credential that can be carried across state lines.

You heard mentioned apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship where definitely a large part of what we're doing now is one of our business strategies. Many of the programs developed through TAACCCT over time have become apprenticeships and so we're really proud to have those programs still going. Our TAACCCT one grant had a medical assisting degree that has become an apprenticeship today and TAACCCT four had a production technician credential that became an apprenticeship also.

The apprenticeship as a strategy is just vital in working with workforce for many reasons. You can see here on the slide just a few of those things listed out: highly-skilled employees; much lower turnover rates, as you likely know, people who apprentice at businesses tend to stay there in very high numbers; increasing productivity; lowering the cost of recruitment; increasing safety in the workplace; the training is highly customized to the employer as we work with each employer as the sponsor of apprenticeship to make sure that those on-the-job training competencies fit what they need for their workplace; enhances employer retention; increases stable and predictable pipeline of qualified workers.

For us here, I mean, this apprenticeship strategy is very different from other workforce strategies in that apprenticeship does have that requirement of wages from day one, there is a relationship immediately with the business. Our state is a state-level apprenticeship, so we work through our state apprenticeship council on approving those apprenticeships. When we do that, working with employers on either upscaling current incumbent workers or hiring new workers, regardless of that pathway of new or existing employees, there has to be that employment relationship.

In addition, those wages must increase with skill increase. That can be decided upon by the employer what is that competency, is it an industry credential, is it a course, is it a certain level of competency, and at that they increase wages. We're seeing a lot of really incredible wage increases through apprenticeship and now we can, of course, see them because we are sponsoring apprenticeship.

The learning component is very important as well, connecting the education work simultaneously and earn-while-you-learn model and on-the-job training and job-related instruction combined.

Also, there needs to be an industry-recognized credential in all of those pieces, and we have that in all of our apprenticeships.

These are just those components that I laid out, some of those pieces already. The industry-recognized credential, the importance of business involvement, a structured on-the-job training with competencies, related instruction tied to those competencies, and then rewards for skill gains from the employer to the apprenticeship.

Pre-apprenticeship is a really important strategy that we are using as a grow-your-own model with businesses. It's also being used as a pipeline of new workers. This example that I'm giving you here is a grow-your-own model for local hospitals that can take current LNAs [ph] into their pre-apprenticeship program which allows them to take all of the structured nursing prerequisites and then, in turn, to a nursing apprenticeship when they've met all those prerequisites.

Finally, CCV has become a sponsor of apprenticeship, which is a really great move for our small businesses. We are the ones that outline the apprenticeship while working with businesses. We're the ones that get it approved through the state and then we can sign on employers into the apprenticeship, and we can change it by up to 20 percent without re-approval process, so we can have lots of small businesses signed onto one apprenticeship instead of them having to make their own apprenticeship work for them.

We've moved that way with medical assisting, production technician, and pharmacy technician, and we're the ones registering apprentices and following along on their OJT and working with the businesses directly, giving them just more leeway, really, in adding apprentices to their workforce without the heavy lift of administration. Thank you.

MS. POIRIER: Thank you so much, Tiffany.

Now I'm going to introduce Danielle Calaway. Also, too, please, folks, if you want to enter any questions into the chat, feel free at any point in time during the presentation. Danielle is the project manager for outreach and recruitment for the Strengthening Working Families Initiative in collaboration with manufacturers and community organizations. She helps connect Vermonters with no-cost training opportunities.

Previously, Danielle coordinated the state ability initiatives at the University of Vermont Medical Center, a national leader in green healthcare. She also has five years of experience as an instructor, including teaching English in South Korea and professional writing at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. Danielle earned her BA in history from Allegheny College and her MA in professional writing from UMass Dartmouth.

In her free time she enjoys spending time with her cat, reading classical literature, and traveling. Thanks, Danielle.

DANIELLE CALAWAY: Thank you for the introduction. Today I'm going to tell you a little bit about our employee engagement strategies at Vermont Technical College.

Just to give you a quick snapshot of what we have to offer at Vermont Tech, we offer career-focused educational opportunities. We have industry-influenced curriculum and we let the results speak for themselves. Our 2018 graduating class achieved a 98 percent placement rate career-wise, which is really exciting. All of our programs are hands-on and graduates from our program see pretty high salaries. We really try to work with employers to make sure that the trainings we are offering are relevant and also that we are setting up our students to achieve success.

To give you a quick snapshot of Vermont, which I think is similar to a situation that my counterpart in New Hampshire was discussing, in Vermont we also have a really low unemployment rate. We have – (inaudible), but regardless of business struggle, we have a stagnant population; folks are aging; we have been seeing a lot of out-of-state migration; and also Vermont is small but we are rural, spread out, insufficient public transportation, that sort of thing, so it can be really difficult for folks to access the training or reach the jobs that they need. Again, (we have always ?) the skills gap as well. Employers are saying that people that are hiring don't have the skills that are needed. That's where Vermont Tech tries to come in and try to alleviate some of those workforce challenges.

Our continuing education and workforce development department, we try to support our employers as well as our jobseekers. We want to help get workers the needs, the skills they need to support our businesses, and then help our students obtain well-paying jobs while also supporting our employers. We partner with different businesses throughout Vermont, as well as various state agencies.

The grant I support is called Strengthening Working Families Initiative, and this is just another branch of our continuing education and professional development strategies to kind of meet those workforce needs and support students throughout the state. This grant provides free training to families, as well as other supports like transportation and flat tops, that sort of thing, to help try to remove any barriers to training.

In particular, we are working with field of advanced manufacturing which is an industry that needs skilled workers in our state. We see it as an opportunity to support a traditionally underserved population, as well as an opportunity to continue nurturing our employer relationships. We see that's a mutually beneficial opportunity between employers and families.

As I mentioned on specifically supporting folks entering into advanced manufacturing, our curriculum has been industry-influenced a couple of decades ago. Vermont Tech formed a relationship with GE Aviation and we worked with them to develop a Bachelor's degree in manufacturing. We later sourced from a consortium of smaller manufacturers to make sure that we're getting that buy-in and that feedback from a wider range of our businesses.

We also rely on feedback from the State of Vermont, Vermont Talent Pipeline, and other groups to influence which trainings that we are offering. The trainings that we offer, we try to meet various needs of different pathways, stackable credentials. We have pathways that can lead to certificates, Associate degrees and Bachelor's. We also offer apprenticeships in advanced manufacturing and industrial maintenance.

For the grant that I'm supporting, at a minimum, our classes need to offer industry-recognized credentials, so, again, just trying to making sure have an eye on making sure that we're getting those skills that our employees are looking for. We try to work with newer employers to make sure our classes are friendly to their schedules, especially if we have a cohort of incumbent workers, we want to try to be as flexible as we can be.

Within the grant that I support, again, it's just a slice of our continuing education for professional development pie. We're leaning on some of our existing partnerships and we're really lucky in Vermont to have some of those long-standing relationships. We try to communicate regularly, directly, and via various workforce collaborations, like our Workforce Advancement Board and Regional Economic Development Commission. We try to tailor offerings to meet business needs.

Also, the most successful employer partners we have are also really engaging with us as well. They will take time to visit our classes; they'll offer tours to our students; and they'll participate in our on-campus career fairs, as well as other events, like our annual Manufacturing Day, which is sponsored by our local chamber of commerce.

We also find successful employers who demonstrate support for upskilling their employees and who incentivize professional development. For example, we've had folks earn promotions after completing our training, and this is really useful for encouraging those outside of manufacturing to see the value in training, especially at the time when employees are willing to hire untrained employees. So, we really appreciate working with employers who really demonstrate that they value that upskilling and making sure that their employers are as prepared as they can be.

We also rely on a variety of community partners to reach employers and to collaborate on solutions through upskilling and attracting new people to skills as advanced manufacturing through our department, the Department of Labor, we work through various staffing agencies throughout the state, occupational rehab. We also, for our particular grant, we really lean on parent/child centers to try to reach folks who might be thinking new career routes, and that's a really great outlet.

Vermont adult learning is a basic ed group that is based in Vermont and they have proven to be a really useful referral partner in helping get folks into the training that we need, which hopefully we'll be able to connect it with our employer partners.

I'm all set. Thank you for listening.

MS. POIRIER: Thank you, Danielle. That was great.

Now we're going to move it over to our panel conversation, which includes your vote. Please vote on the question that you would like to discuss and we'll pick the top questions to ask the panelists. Also, in the meantime, I just want to say some high points from the presentation.

Generally speaking, everyone had some really great relationships and strong partnerships with businesses. The development of models that yield a job that's in a demand occupation and career pathway, and helping individuals make decisions in trainings that align with business needs.

Those are all done through either facilitation of a business engagement type specialist, and, really, a lot of this stuff is transferable; it could be in the TAA program, it could be in WIOA Title I. It's really a universal best practice, all with different presenters, so thank you so much for taking the time to present today.

Thank you everybody for providing some feedback. It looks like we can start. We'll start with the first question: what was the first step you took to engaging employers? If I can turn it over to Laura to answer that question.

MS. LAUSMANN: Thanks, Amanda. That's a great question. I think in Oregon, one of the most important things is that our Navigators, because we're an aligned partner in our American Job Centers, they work closely with business services and other partners that have that employee engagement, and they really, first and foremost, kind of, they each built and aligned with their toolboxes.

Working with those partners to give high-level – each partner has a high-level understanding of all of the services and they bring contact information; no matter who goes out to talk to that employer, not to overwhelm them with all of that information but to be able to have the confidence to at least speak to trade even if they're not trade, and to get a point of contact back to that employer if that need is there was really important.

Then just one more note is that our navigators and those partners that are doing that employer engagement really collaborate at the local level to figure out does one of them have a pre-existing, well-established relationship with the employer; and if that's the case, because they have a toolbox, we're going to honor that relationship and that person will go, but we also leverage that relationship. So, honor but leverage our partners and employer engagement is how I would (add that ?).

MS. POIRIER: Thanks, Laura. Susan and Lynn, any thoughts on your first tape you took to engaging employers?

MS. SZYMANSKI: Sometimes, I mean, as I said earlier, a lot of our relationships are very long-standing, but we're also interested in making new relationships with startup companies or with companies that relocate to our state. Sometimes in these instances we'll just use a job board, like Indeed, and search for roles that our students might get after graduation, such as network associate or CNC operator, and then we can find a company there that's looking for those roles and reach out to them.

DR. HUARD: We also take advantage of the employers that we already have pre-existing relationships with because they seem to know the new companies that appear in their industry, and so we will ask for help being introduced to the new company.

MS. POIRIER: Great. Thank you both. Tiffany, what do you think, what was your step you took in engaging employers?

MS. KEUNE: Definitely when I think back to TAACCCT, it was based on getting employers involved in the programmatic piece, so having them give input into the building of program: what did they want to see, what types of skillset did they need to have, having them on steering committees and advisory boards for those programs was really important from the beginning. I still think today we're still doing that same mode.

If we have something new or we're talking to employers, is getting their input at the start of the process so that we can be sure that their voice is heard throughout the building of whatever program we are moving towards.

MS. POIRIER: That's great. Thanks, Tiffany. Danielle, what was the first step you took?

MS. CALAWAY: Yes. I am fortunate. I've only been here about six months, but I was fortunate to develop or to inherit some really great partnerships that they had previously (enforced ?) through various workforce development projects, but we continue to get involved with new companies with Agency Commerce, the Department of Labor, the Vermont Talent Pipeline, and various regional economic development boards. Also, in my time, a lot of this has been kind of hitting the payment and going out and meeting one-on-one with employers and hearing their stories, and learning about what their challenges and needs are, and trying to identify ways so we can work together.

MS. POIRIER: Thanks, Danielle. That's great. Interestingly, with the panel, it seems like the votes came in one, two, three, so we're going to start with the next question. What are the barriers to engaging employers? I'll turn it back to Laura and David.

MS. LAUSMANN: Hi, Amanda. Yes. Things that come to mind for barriers to engage an employer is – I think it's been a challenge for both employers and for that have served them for years. They're busy. I think often, no matter whether it's education, state, local, county, federal government, we are government and so they wonder how long this is going to take; are we going to add burden to them as opposed to help them through processes.

For us, we really talked about making sure that they understand that our navigators are that point of contact, and so in the message that provide them is that services that we, especially with trade, let us use these services, work with you as an off-boarding package for your workers, and then just really being there, I think, showing them that we're going to walk the walk, that we're going to be beside them is really important, and that we are adding value, not adding burden.

MS. POIRIER: That's great. Thank you, Laura. Lynn and Susan?

MS. SZYMANSKI: I would echo what Laura said about employers being very busy, and when they have an issue that could be solved by training, they want that issue fixed right away and they don't really understand about how adults learn and they don't realize that sometimes it requires repetition and continued engagement for really deep learning, so you have to educate them about that.

DR. HUARD: I would also say that if we are serving one other competitors, they are reluctant sometimes to participate because they don't want any of their trade secrets out. Initially, three years ago when we began working with robotics, we couldn't find companies in New Hampshire that were using robots except we knew that they existed. But they didn't want people to know that that was their edge, and so sometimes we'd run into a situation where an employer perceives that by opening up and talking with us about training, that they're giving away some of their trade secrets.

MS. POIRIER: Thank you both. That's a great point. Tiffany, what were your barriers to engaging employers?

MS. KEUNE: Again, I have to echo the fatigue of employers. They're very busy and they get asked to come to many things, many events, give a lot of feedback. That is a difficult one. Trying to keep to those one-on-one conversations and be available at the time when they are available. I think the old days of advisory boards where lots of people could come at once might be shifting and being able to get that feedback from them when it works for them is really important.

Low unemployment is also bit of a barrier. If people aren't in need of training, then it's a little harder to show that training is really important for their current workers.

MS. POIRIER: That's a great point. Thank you. Danielle, any barriers to engaging employers from your perspective?

MS. CALAWAY: Yes. I mean, I think I have to echo what has already been said. Employers are usually supportive, but really busy. Again, as Tiffany mentioned, a low unemployment rate makes things difficult. Within the context of the grant that I support, we have some limits on how many incumbents that we're able to train, and that's really difficult in a low unemployment rate situation and we really would like to be focusing on upskilling. But, yes, kind of the same things that everyone else has been saying.

MS. POIRIER: Great. Thanks, Danielle. The next question is: what is the key to developing strong business partnerships? I'll turn it over to Laura and David to answer that first question again.

MR. WHITE: Great. Thank you. I can answer that. At least from my perspective, I think of it as a three-part engagement to build that. One is genuine concern and knowledge of the business. A lot of times if we're trying to engage an employer we should spend the time to think about what they do, what they're about before we go into that kind of engagement. That concern for the business also ties into what was said before about confidentiality and also time. Employers don't have a lot of time. They do get concerned about their business. That's what they live, eat, and breathe, so we try to address that through this genuine concern and knowledge for them.

Also, secondly, it would be transparency. We don't want to obfuscate skate our program, we don't want to use jargon, hide an agenda. We're actually trying to get people hired. That's why we're there, so we put that forward in that we make that as clear and transparent as possible. Also, if we come up with a solution, those solutions as well are spelled out, outlined, and communicated clearly with the employer so that there's no guessing, there's no confusion about that, and we make sure that their needs are taken care and through our transparency.

Then, finally, follow-through. A lot of times we get into situations where we can't provide the employer with what they want. We can provide them for the most part with what they need if we're clear with that, but we have to be willing to do the steps if we can't give them what they want, then to answer that question: if you don't have what I want, what do you have? That's where we go with the follow-through and we give them what we have, and we make that as complete, clear, and to the point as possible without wasting their time or ours.

That's what I think.

MS. POIRIER: That's great. Thanks, David. Susan and Lynn, what do you guys think?

MS. SZYMANSKI: I would say all the points that David made really fall under the umbrella of exceptional customer service. I think that's what we try to provide. We try to work at a faster pace maybe than we normally do in academia. We try to match the pace of business. I think we also try to speak the language of business, and when we are describing the trainings that we're trying to provide, we try not to use a lot of academic language but use language that they can identify with.

DR. HUARD: I would add that we have to do what we say we're going to do. Sometimes academics could go in a different direction, but if we've committed to doing something, we need to do it.

Then the other piece is we need to make it as easy for the business as we can. If that means that we're going to carry more of the burden to do paperwork or to do research and so on, we need to do that. Just echoing what David and Laura and Lynn have said, they are very busy, and so if we want their business, we need to accommodate them.

MS. POIRIER: That's great feedback. It sounds like the key is developing trust. Tiffany, what do you think is the key to developing strong business partnerships?

MS. KEUNE: I do think the trust piece is really vital in a small state like Vermont. I mean, these people are also your neighbors and you're going to see them at the grocery store and you're going to be next to them at the stoplight. It's really important to, as everybody has said, deliver what you say you're going to deliver. I think for us, the very first important thing is listening.

What problem are we trying to solve, not going in with a set of solutions until we know that there is something that we can help with, and then finding out what that thing is, really designing that solution to meet the business and employee needs, making sure if employees can't be released during worktime, how are we going to get around that; is there some kind of technology we can use; can we be innovative and flexible in our offerings in order to be sure that it meets both the employer and the employee needs?

But building that over the long term, being willing to sit back down and find out how it went, what could we do, a continuous improvement strategy for a longer-term relationship I think is vital.

MS. POIRIER: Thanks, Tiffany. That's great. Danielle, what do you think is the key to developing strong business partnerships?

MS. CALAWAY: Yes. I think just communicating regularly and making sure that we're acknowledging employer needs. Again, to echo what has already been said, customizing training on the terms of the content to make sure it's relevant to what they're looking for.

Are there opportunities for us to choose a location that's going to be more helpful for them; how can we make their schedules work for employees; and also showing the return on investments and ensuring that employees understand the value of what we have to offer and indeed making sure that what we have to offer is valuable.

MS. POIRIER: That's great. Thanks, Danielle. It sounds like trust, innovation, being flexible to the employer's needs, making sure that our service is of value all seem like really great points in order to have a strong business partnership.

I'm going to take a quick break from the panel and ask and answer a question from folks out there listening. Is anyone aware of tools that are being used to assess soft skills as a function of either job placement or training? I'm going to turn it over to Susan and Lynn to answer that question.

DR. HUARD: Lynn, will you begin?

MS. SZYMANSKI: Sure. We have a program here called WorkReady New Hampshire, which is a tuition-free workforce development program tailored to meet the needs of jobseekers and career builders. The WorkReady program provides assessment and instruction and credentialing in key skill areas identified by employers as essential to workplace success. At the end, they are in two national league recognized credentials that they can and to their resume called the WorkKeys assessment. That's in three different areas. They're soft skills, mathematics, and graphic literacy.

DR. HUARD: We've had this program for about three years now. We do in partnership with our Employment Security Department so they will specifically recommend to folks who've lost their job that they do the program, and we have about a 70 percent success rate in getting people reemployed based upon the information, some of which is skills. We'd be happy to speak with somebody offline further about it.

MS. POIRIER: Thank you both. Susan Worden, do you want to talk about our previous best practice webinar too that's on the community practice?

MS. WORDEN: Sure. At the end of this webinar we're going to have a slide where we talk about related resources. We did a collaboration with the Virginia Department of Adult Ed and they have a best practice known as PluggedIn Virginia. The focus is intensively on soft skills as a core component of all of their training cohorts, which serendipitously also involve business engagements. I heartedly encourage you to explore that resource because I think it'd be useful.

Thanks, Amanda.

MS. POIRIER: Great. Thanks, Susan. Now we're going to move on to the next panel question, how as a training provider, do you work with employers to determine training needs and what's the secret? I'm going to turn it over to Susan and Lynn to answer that question.

MS. SZYMANSKI: Many times a company will call us saying that they need one thing, but, actually, when you meet with them and really listen to them, you realize that they might actually need something else and they might be describing symptoms of an issue and hoping to cure those symptoms, but, really, there's a systematic issue that needs to be addressed and you have to work with them to help them understand that the symptoms will disappear if you take this more systematic road.

DR. HUARD: I agree with Lynn's perspective.

MS. POIRIER: Great. Thank you. Tiffany, as a training provider, how do you work with employers to determine training needs?

MS. KEUNE: We have a lot of different things, but we do a needs assessment process, like I'm sure most people do. When somebody reaches out to us and says that they have a certain need or they're – usually it's, “I'm facing this problem,” and so we go and we sit down with them and we have a conversation about the scope of the problem, what's really needing to be solved. We really like to see the job descriptions of the people that will be served in any kind of training to find out what the skillset is they really do need. Really, I think that start of that conversation is then when we come back and try to figure out what would be best for serving them.

There are times when people know exactly what they need and they say, “People need Excel, and will you guys come in and do Excel training,” and so we're able then to just meet that need very quickly. But in other cases it takes some real deep diving into finding out what's going on and trying to figure out what solution would best fit.

MS. POIRIER: Thanks, Tiffany. That was great. Danielle, what's the secret from your perspective?

MS. CALAWAY: Yes. I mean, I guess the only other thing I'd like to add is that we're really lucky to have really excellent instructors and faculty here at Vermont Tech, a lot of them with industry experience. Today has proven useful in helping filling what competencies an employer might need to see a good program that works for their participants.

MS. POIRIER: Great. Thank you. I think we have time for all the panel questions, so I'm going to queue up the last one. How have you been successful in articulating and developing apprenticeships and, again, what's the secret for that? I'll turn it over to Laura and David to kick it off.

MS. LAUSMANN: Hey, Amanda. I think we'll – for us we do have an apprenticeship coordinator within our agency, so we work for the Oregon Employment Department in Oregon. That does a lot of great work and has had a lot of great grants. I can't speak too specifically to the articulating and developing, but, really, for us it's about, from the trade program perspective it's just about connecting with all of those that do, just to make sure that we have a really full understanding of the program so that we can help those participants meet those requirements.

MS. POIRIER: That's a great answer, Laura, because I think that that's kind of part of the key to success is making sure that you're aligned with the folks that do have the knowledge and the skillsets to making sure that we are working with them.

MS. LAUSMANN: Absolutely.

MS. POIRIER: Thank you. Susan and Lynn, what are your thoughts?

MS. SZYMANSKI: One way is that we emphasize that the investment will pay off with higher retention. In such a tight labor market, companies are really doing all they can to keep their incumbent workers, as well as persuade those applicants that are coming through their door that this is a company that cares about them and their future.

DR. HUARD: I would add patience is a critical piece of this because it takes a while to put together an apprenticeship, particularly if you're doing it in a less traditional area, like, for instance, in the area of the medical and health care. We just celebrated last Monday the introduction of our medical billing apprenticeship program.

It's taken three years to work with employers to set something up that they feel is beneficial so that they can see not only the pathway for themselves, but also for their employees. Critical to the whole venture is a business coordinator who speaks the same language and who is willing to take on much of the negotiation and the paperwork that's connected with establishing the apprenticeship with the Department of Labor.

Once one of them is in place, it really flows very quickly. Three years ago we had our first medical assisting apprenticeship program, and at this point I think we have seven medical assisting apprenticeship programs operating in this state because somebody paved the way. There was an HR director in one of the larger healthcare programs that was interested in it and was willing to work through all of the nuances.

Sometimes companies need help understanding that there is an initial wage that goes to the apprentice and that over time and as they hit certain biomarkers the wage has to increase. If it's a small company, just keeping track of things like that can be a challenge. So, the more structure that you as the training provider can put in place, the more successful the apprenticeship.

MS. POIRIER: Great. Thank you. Tiffany, I know that you have some really good thoughts on this as well.

MS. KEUNE: We do. We're really excited about apprenticeship. I think the biggest piece in the development is to have the employer be the driver of apprenticeship. Even if the college is the sponsor, the employer has to be the one to say this is what's important to me and here are the pieces that I need. Then as a sponsor, trying to get a large group of those same types of employers on board to a list of competencies and related instruction that will work for them.

In the case of our pharmacy tech program, CVS came to us and asked us to initiate that. In medical assisting, we were working with the hospital on a pipeline for medical assistants and already, in everything other than paper was apprenticeship, so having them be the first driver in that and then bring it statewide after that point, I think is really important.

Another big piece for us has been credits. Again, I can't say enough how important that credit pathway can be, both for funding and also for employers to use (tuition remission ?). We decided to stick with credit for all of those programs as they came into apprenticeship and that's been really helpful.

MS. POIRIER: Thank you so much, Tiffany. Danielle?

MS. CALAWAY: Yes. Here at Vermont Tech we're really lucky to have strong – (inaudible) – electrical program and we kind of used that model to branch out in manufacturing. As Tiffany noted, the employer relations of that sector is really important. We started with large companies, like GE, and we've since added on additional programs and are partnering with smaller companies to ensure that they're also going to benefit from everything that comes with apprenticeships.

We recently added licensed practical nursing with a couple of employers, so we're just continuing to add onto this model. Yes. Again, in time of low unemployment, it's important for employers to be innovative in creative to keep people and entice new staff.

MS. POIRIER: Thanks, Danielle, and thanks everybody for all your thoughts during the panel. They were all great resources and so I hope that folks are writing down some questions and getting ready to connect in other capacities.

Also, too, you're welcome to ask any questions now in the chat. Please feel free. Any question that you have, please pose it, or there's also the alternative where you could post your question in the TAA community for practice after the webinar or now, and/or join the community if you haven't joined yet. Please, feel free to continue the discussions there.

I just want to note that there is another webinar coming up and so please save the date on December 11, Seven Tips for Preparing Approval TAA Program Reserve Funding Requests. Please register – or save the date rather, not register yet. But, keep your eyes out for registration forthcoming.

I'm going to turn it over to Susan Worden to talk about some resources from Montana.

MS. WORDEN: Thanks, Amanda. Yes. Just want to note we noted in last week's webinar that TAACCCT grantees in Montana have leveraged their significant field experience to assemble a dynamic learning series of online modules that employ videos and other visual interfaces to walk you through many of the core components of the staffing roles discussed in this week's webinar on business engagement, including the topics that you see here, as well as last week's coaching and guiding trade-affected workers webinar.

Next slide. Here you see the actual links. This is a free online resource. A little bit was shared in last week's webinar. It truly is kind of a series of very dynamic interfaces. It's kind of a starter kit of kind of transferable components for starting up the type of staffing roles we've been talking about this week and last week for development in your own state. I heartedly encourage you to explore these resources. Back to you, Amanda.

MS. POIRIER: Thanks, Susan. We also have several other resources on the community, so please take a look. There's an OJT FAQ that was recently posted; apprenticeship contacts, the Virginia best practice model, as alluded to earlier; and an OJT best practice webinar that we had this year as well. Please take a look at those resources.

Also, too, here's our contact information. Please reach out to any of us. We would love to continue the conversation in regards to exploring ways to expand the model, leveraging case management funds through TAA, or figuring out other ways to provide solutions for businesses to make sure that we really are helping the participants find ways to obtain the right training that's the right fit for them that's based on industry demand.

Thank you everybody for your time today and for your attention. For all the presenters, we really appreciate it and I hope that everyone has a happy Thanksgiving.

MR. VEHLOW: All right. Thank you, Amanda. I just want to thank all of our participants and presenters.

(END)