**WorkforceGPS**

**ETA Cohort Event**

**TAA Performance Series: Measurable Skills Gains**

**Tuesday, March 24, 2020**

*Transcript by*

*Noble Transcription Services*

*Menifee, CA*

LAURA CASERTANO: Again, I want to welcome everyone to today's TAA Performance Series: Measureable Skill Gains" webinar. I'm going to turn things over to your moderator, Robert Hoekstra with the Office of Trade Adjustment Assistance. Robert, take it away.

ROBERT HOEKSTRA: Thank you very much.

Hi, everyone. It's great to see everyone on again. It looks like we have a very similar group to what we have had at the last couple of calls. If you're new, that's great. Obviously this is the last one in our TAA performance series, so if you have missed some of the prior ones I encourage you to look back at some of the prior recordings which detailed all the other measures that we have gone through. I hope everyone's doing all right with everything going on, and we're going to kick right off into this.

So we did do a quick poll at the beginning to see who's on. It looks like we are generally reporting staff – we've got a little bit higher reporting staff numbers than we have before, which is great. And if you haven't had the chance, click now. Fantastic.

All right. So today we're going to talk about the definition of measurable skills gains, we'll talk about how it's calculated; we're going to talk about some basic trends, current reporting, and our group. So it'll be very similar to the other ones. Today we're also going to be talking about some reporting difficulties as well.

So just a recap of the performance basics. We used five of the six primary indicators of performance. We don't use the employer measure in Trade; it's not part of our statute; and we are on the last one, measurable skills gains.

By statute we are required to do breakdowns of this not just based on what the high-level number is but also based on age, education, credential attainment, and some other indicators. So we are required by statute to do some breakdown.

We do reporting and we have a national-level target that we do for the Government Performance and Results Act – the GPRA – targets, but we don't negotiate specific state performance targets; we don't do statistical modeling; and we don't have any sanctioning mechanisms if you don't hit particular targets for Trade performance measures. But we do monitor it and we do make sure that if there seems to be an issue requiring technical assistance, that we do reach out so that we can make sure that we are getting appropriate numbers.

If you have any questions on that brief recap of performance reporting, I'm happy to take them. I know a lot of you have seen that a couple of times now, so I'm going to move on. But feel free to type anything into the chat. If you have any questions I'm happy to circle back.

All right. So our calculation of measurable skills gains, here's the statute. You can see it's "who received benefits under the Trade Adjustment Assistance Program who" – so we're looking at current participants. So a current participant is defined as having a 925 TAA benefit or service less than or equal to the query period. So if you're talking about, say, an FY 19 result, it would be before 9/30/19, and an exit date that's either blank or greater than the start. So the start of the fiscal year would be 10/1/18. That's how we would capture who is a current participant.

I will say this is slightly different from a lot of other programs because most of them use program entry 900, because their individual program flags don't include the data they started in that program.

So for example, if a participant came in and was served under a co-enrollment program – say, WIOA adult, WIOA dislocated worker – but didn't start Trade until part-way through their participation, it's possible that they would be counted in the denominator for one of those programs before they became a Trade participant; when for us it wouldn't count until they became a Trade participant. So just something to bear in mind, we do use 925, not 900 in the trade calculation.

It does require that the participant have training, so we're looking at 1811 and 1813 that are blank or greater than – so enrolled has to be blank or less than the start of the query period. Date completed can either be blank or greater. So you have to have that enrolled before you could have not completed yet, or you could have completed but completed within the query period.

And it doesn't apply to other reasons for exit, which is a slightly odd thing to put in because these are current participants; they might not have exited yet. But if they do have another reason for exit that's not .0 or a criminal offender, they will be excluded.

So for a positive outcome, we do count six types of measurable skills gains. Five of these are labeled as measurable skills gains in the PIRL; the one that's not is the secondary credential. And you can see each of these represents a date element. Secondary credential is where the credential type 1, 2, or 3 is equal to 1, which is a secondary credential and that date still falls within the query period.

I think that's relatively straightforward. You can see – we can jump into each one of these a little bit more, but the by definition of measurable skills gains include educational function level, the credential, postsecondary transcript or report card, secondary transcript or report card, training milestone, and skills progression.

The current spreadsheet for performance measures does handle the dates correctly. So if you look, measurable skills gains is on here, lines up with the participant data. So unlike the other measures which are based on exit cohorts, this one is going to be using the current participant cohort, and you can see those dates. And that spreadsheet's downloadable on our performance reporting page.

Any questions on the definition of measurable skills gains? Wait for just a minute and see if people – (inaudible).

Great. So we're going to talk a little bit about measurable skills gain reporting issues. This is based on the 9/30/19 data – (inaudible) – FY 19. I will say that we recently have had a chance to look at the Q1 data and I have been encouraged that there are a lot of improvements in this measure. So these numbers are slightly out of date, but if you kept something that's potentially wrong with your state, make sure that it has gotten fixed with the most recent quarter.

As you can see, there are nine states that are not reporting any measurable skills gains. That is probably partly because of transitions to the PIRL system and these elements were new. We didn't have them under TAPR, but still you need to get them added and get them reported. You can see the nine states here.

You'll also see a pretty major discrepancy by reporting type, and this is broken down by region. But you can see, for example, in certain regions like region four and region six, the number of postsecondary transcripts are incredibly high as compared to regions one, two, and three; whereas if you look at something like training milestones it's relatively even across.

That's something that we're digging into. Clearly some states are better at reporting certain measurable skills than others, and that's going to be a training point and something we'll probably end up looking at for (tandi ?) in the future year.

We also see a number of documentation delays with measurable skills gains, and you can see that here. The one quarter delay is not uncommon, so that we get a jump in measurable skills gains in the second quarter after the reporting. We do see a drop-off after that partly because of people exiting. But because of that one quarter delay, it skews our measurable skills gains results. And you can see these colors are actually based on what kind of measurable skills gains they got.

One of the biggest discrepancies is that there will be no measurable skills gain when there is a credential attained. Now, the secondary credential, as you can see, it's a very narrow bar, it's a very small portion of our participants. Because the secondary credential is part of the measurable skills gains calculation it is inherently 100 percent.

But the idea of measurable skills gain is to see how people are making progress in their training in order to get a credential. And so when we have only 57 percent of people getting a postsecondary credential but not having a measurable skills gain along the way, it leads us to believe that those measurable skills gains are not being documented.

It's possible that you could have no progress, no progress, no progress, and then a credential, but that credential would probably fall into one of the other measurable skills gains. So it still should be at least pretty close to 100 percent as soon as you get that credential. Plus, as a general rule, people don't go nothing, nothing, nothing, credential; they tend to have some progress; at least some sort of training benchmark or some other intermediate step that could be documented as measurable skills gain.

Any questions on the measurement issues or comments or complaints or worries?

So to be completely self-interested, this is – measurable skills gains hasn't really been a focus for Trade, but the interesting result is despite the fact that we have substantially higher credentialing results than – (inaudible) – program, we actually are lower on measurable skills gains because it's not as well-documented. And so it looks like Trade is not training people to the extent that some of the other programs are; so that's really going to become a push as we try and make it so that we are at least looking like we're training to the level that we are.

All right. So we're going to talk through some of the results here. So overall, measurable skills gains trend, great news, it is going up; and as mentioned, in the first quarter we did see a pretty big – it's leveling off now but we saw an increase even over this. So that's great news; we are fixing this problem.

Kelly, I do see your question about having co-enrolled participants with WIOA. So if – it all depends on whether you are reporting that on the PIRL. So if you're reporting, say, a joint PIRL or if you are capturing that measurable skills gains information that WIOA is reporting in the TAA-only PIRL, then it will improve our rates, so that's great news.

Obviously part of that is some people submit separate PIRLs, and even if something's documented over on WIOA it needs to flow over into whatever generates the Trade PIRL. So that's something else to check, is you might find that it's not a matter of it not getting documented on that side; it's a matter of it not flowing over.

Here's the measurable skills gains by region, which has an interesting breakdown. I'm going to give lots of props to region four, who's been great at reporting measurable skills gains. But you do see some significant discrepancies here. Part of this as we started looking at our data for administrative collection of states, a lot of this has to do with how our data – the IT systems are.

So obviously, if you haven't been updating your IT system, then you may not have built in the appropriate measures or appropriate workflows in order to capture those measurable skills gains, and that may be a lot of the story of what's going on here.

Good news. Since there is relative gender parity between measurable skills gains – so we're not seeing any major differences as seen in some of our prior presentations, there are some big differences in certain employment outcomes and there are also some big differences in training rates. But because the denominator on measurable skills gains requires them to be in training, it looks like relative parity in the gender breakdowns for this measure.

So Roxanne, that's a good point, that if they got a measurable skills gain in – so if there was a measurable skills gains in August it would count in the Trade but it would not count in WIOA, because it would be counting after the end of the program year in WIOA and it would be counted in Trade.

But just remember, we both pull based on the most recent – based on the data for the quarter we're in, and you're updating the most recent date. It's really just a matter of whether it gets counted in the period. So you shouldn't – if you do have any kind of regular measurable skills gains you might have some fall slightly before the period or slightly after the period depending whether you're talking the beginning or end of the fiscal year or beginning or end of the program year.

But they still should end up relatively even unless there's some reason why the skills gains are always happening on a certain time of the year. So that August one would count in the September file, so it should be high enough. Now, it wouldn't count in the next year, so you may see that gain counted in a different year between WIOA and Trade, but it wouldn't necessarily not count.

We do see some differences in measurable skills gains by participation. This is one of the few places where advanced education seems to be a good thing. You saw in a lot of the other performance measures that our bachelors and beyond had relatively lower performance outcomes partly because we know that some of the systems aren't designed to focus on them; and we know that that's a smaller portion of our participant base.

But we do see here that they do have higher measurable skills gains. Now, part of that might be a documentation difference and part of that might be just that the types of schools that they're being enrolled in are better than – more easily documented on those measurable skills gains.

We do see – as you know, Trade is below WIOA, and as a result, co-enrollment between them is beneficial. So obviously if you co-enroll, we have a better chance of documentation. As we saw in some of the prior analysis, the training rates are actually higher in Trade, so this is definitely a documentation gap. It's not that we actually have fewer gains in Trade. So hopefully this will become at least a little closer as we improve our measurable skills gains reporting.

Rapid Response, it's kind of an interesting breakdown here. The Rapid Response is slightly lower measurable skills gains than those who do not receive Rapid Response. We think that this is actually a little misleading because it depends on the route people come in to your One-Stop center.

So if you're doing Rapid Response and they're coming in, some of them are getting served and having very short-term trainings; whereas people who don't receive Rapid Response may only be coming in to seek those longer-term trainings, which are more likely to get good documentation on a measurable skills gains. But it's an interesting breakdown.

If you guys have thoughts on a different reason why this might be true, I'd love to hear it. On the bright side, the vast majority of our participants do receive Rapid Response, and so this discrepancy at some point will go away when we get to 100 percent Rapid Response reporting.

Here it is by service category. The received credential, like I mentioned before, should be pretty close to 100 percent, but the good news is it is the highest. It's also interesting to see we have a very small portion of participants who are reporting that they were in training and had a measurable skills gain, although they are not reported as in training on the PIRL.

This is hypothetically possible if they were in training that was not paid for by the program; but as you can see, it's a very small portion of the population. I guess I'll take the good news in that some of those measurable skills gains are still being documented, so that's great to see.

Obviously the further in the training you get, the more likely you are to get a measurable skills gain. The portion of participants who are completed but didn't have it in their IEP to have a credential, hopefully we'll minimize them to zero as we make sure that credentials get included in training plans. So yeah, I think that's overall not super-surprising.

All right. I wanted to get some thoughts and see what you guys thought of on measurable skills gain, how is reporting going; are you finding any particular difficulties? Is there confusion about the workflow on measurable skills gains or do you have other reasons why you think that Trade might be having some lower results than some of the other programs on measurable skills gains? (Pause.)

That's a great question – (inaudible) – about the – limits the number of training milestones that can be reported per quarter or per year. The short answer is no. Training milestones have to do with a certain amount of education. So for example, I think it's – (inaudible) – a semester, although don't quote me on that because I'd have to go back and look at the guidance.

So there's outer limit on how much you can do that from a practical standpoint, but not from a reporting standpoint. And for the most part, we're just looking for whether it's occurred in the last year. And so even if there is a single measurable skills gain within that year it should count. So you shouldn't be running into any major hurdles for that kind of completion rate. Great question, though.

Yeah. So Maureen points out that sometimes it's a little complicated to know which measurable skills gain to count it as. So for example, it's a little confusing on what a skills progression versus a training milestone is.

My short answer is that a measurable skills gain can also count as both. So I think that there isn't going to be a lot of questioning if you count it as one or the other, and that might explain how we have such differing reporting in certain categories in some states. So some states may look at something and say, well, that looks like a skills progression to me, and that one – and another state may look at it and say that's a training milestone.

I guess our primary focus is making sure it gets documented as something, because obviously the measurable skills gain measure doesn't actually care which one it is. So obviously it's an interesting way to break it down, and that is a really good point, and the differences in how states probably interpret it, but just making sure it gets documented as one of those is going to be the priority.

So Karen, that's a really good point about staff needing to know how much they need to have that gain in order to have that gain as far as the GPA. There is no guidance about needing a certain GPA as long as they're making progress. So obviously if they are not passing the class, that does not count; but if they do pass, that should be sufficient. But that's a really good training point. It's something that we should address better.

Melissa, that's a really good question about training benchmarks. So a benchmark – as everyone should know in Trade – are fairly important. Not only do we use them just as our normal progress check-in for seeing if participants are making the progress they need to in training; but also it's important to maintain eligibility for completion PRA.

I will say, though, a benchmark is a little bit different than a measurable skills gain because a benchmark just says you are currently making the appropriate progress, and it might not account for, for example, it being a full semester's worth of progress. And so not all benchmarks will count as measurable skills gains because it's not meeting that word "measureable" if it's not over a particular threshold.

But I will say that as a general rule, if you guys are doing regular benchmarks on your training, that's a really great time to evaluate whether it's enough to go look at that measurable skills gain threshold and get that documented.

Karen, I must admit, I'm not quite sure what that means, but I'd love to hear more.

Marilyn, I must admit, I'm not sure I'm understanding your question – (inaudible). If you could possibly rephrase that, I'd love to answer that question but I admit I don't think I understand it.

Oh. Karen I just understood that that is the grade, so yes. If you get a D and still pass, you still get a measurable skills gain. The idea is you still learn something if you did enough to pass. (Pause.)

So I'm just going to wait a minute. I see a couple people are typing and I'd love to get some other questions.

So Timmy, the question about (TODI ?) is a great question. We only start new measures at the beginning of the fiscal year, so you won't see anything popping up mid-year. I will say that this probably won't even make it on next year. We have in mind a couple of other things that might take priority over measurable skills gains documentation.

But this is a really great time to make sure that those things are being documented. I'm particularly looking over at the nine states that aren't documenting any measurable skills gains. That'd be really great to see some documentation. And if you're seeing a big difference – or if you're seeing a lot of people with credentials that don't have any measurable skills gains, that's definitely something to look at as well.

"Do you know the average length of TAA training?" So yes, we do know the average length of TAA training. I can pull it up right now. This is actually one of the measures that we are required to report in our annual report. So if you're ever curious you can go on the Trade website to "About Us" and click on the most recent annual report. I believe it's about 438 days, but let me double-check. One moment. (Pause.)

Yeah. So it hovers around 400 days, so it's a little over a year is the average training for Trade.

Yeah. There's a lot of variation in that. Obviously Trade is a lot longer – has a lot – the opportunity for much longer trainings than a lot of other programs. It generally is capped at 130 weeks, which is your TRA lengths, so you're not going to get anything substantially over that. But you do have a lot of people going in for close to a full two years as they go back to school for getting a new degree or something like that.

So Marilyn, thank you for rephrasing your question. That is a really great question. The short answer is that the calculation doesn't care which measurable skills gain it is. It just says which out of the six categories are there any of those dates within the year. So if you have two that happen at the same time, it would just count as one, irrelevant of which version it is.

In some of the charts I did I broke it down so that you could see the differences between the various measurable skills gains; at which point it actually would have counted in both. So you should see – so when you're looking back at the chart that we've gone through – so for example, this breakdown, I'm going to flip back in the charts for everybody's benefit –

This one where it's was broken down by type, this actually includes in both. So if they had more than one gain you would actually see it counted in both places here. But for the most part – but for the actual performance calculation it is indifferent to what kind of gain it is, and they don't do a breakdown like that. This is just helpful for analysis.

All right. Those were some really great questions. I appreciate everyone jumping in. I'm happy to take any other ones as people think of them.

Some reminders and some resources here at the end as we wrap this up. Here's the Trade website, our reporting page; we do publish data broken down by state and reporter. And we have some additional resources here on performance reporting and including things like the TEGLs that list out the specific requirements for the measures themselves as well as the Trade-specific tweaks. So make sure you take a look at those resources.

I have a second page of resources here which includes our TA community. So if you have questions about how these operate I highly encourage people to use the discussion forum on the TA community page on WorkforceGPS.

I will also say that we do have a number of upcoming events – (inaudible) – spring schedule – (inaudible). So if you didn't get that, feel free to reach out to me to get a copy of that – (inaudible) – noteworthy is in two days we have our second (TODI ?) AMA, so that's a great time to ask some questions about these reporting issues.

And then we should, at the end of next month, have the rescheduled version of the initial results for the administrative collection of states, so look forward to that as well. That's on the 23rd of April. I apologize for rescheduling that. I just needed a little more time to dig into the data.

Last call for questions; otherwise you're welcome to reach out to me here, and that's everything for the webinar. I will say if you wait one minute we're going to ask you to fill out a quick poll on how this went.

(END)