**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**Early Lessons from H-1B Scaling Apprenticeships through Sector Strategies Grantees**

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LAURA CASERTANO: With that I'm going to get myself right out of the way. I want to welcome everyone to today's webinar and I'm going to turn things over to your moderator today, Zodie Makonnen. She's a grant lead with the Scaling Apprenticeship through Sector-Based Strategies, Division of Strategic Investments, with the Employment and Training Administration. Zodie, take it away.

ZODIE MAKONNEN: Thank you so much, Laura. Good afternoon, everyone. As Laura said, my name is Zodie Makonnen. I work in the Division of Strategic Investments and I'm the grant lead for the Scaling Apprenticeship grants.

With me I have my colleague Ayreen Cadwallader, who is the grant lead for Apprenticeships: Closing the Skills Gap grants. We both welcome you to the "Lesson Learned" webinar for the H-1B CSG grantees, in partnership with the Scaling Apprenticeship grants.

Our esteemed presenters will share today some of their early lessons learned. We are hoping that you'll find some insights, some nuggets, that can be taken back and customized within your own CSG and SA grants.

Also with us today is Sue Rusch, who will be facilitating our session today. I'm going to turn it over to Sue now to get us started. Sue?

SUSAN RUSCH: Thank you, Zodie. Hi. As Zodie said, my name is Sue Rusch and I'm one of the technical assistance coaches for the Scaling Apprenticeship grant through Manhattan Strategy Group. And I will be your guide today, walking you through today's webinar. So let's get started.

We have a wonderful group of presenters from across the nation who will be speaking with us today. We'll start off with some introductions of our moderator and speakers. And we'll share a brief overview of the Closing the Skills Gap and Scaling Apprenticeship grants. And there are four questions that we'll be asking each of our presenters so we can gain some perspective on the grantee experience. And we'll learn about their innovative practices and, lastly, we'll provide you with some time for your questions throughout the webinar.

So let me introduce you to our talented speakers and teams. We have teams coming from New York, Indiana, Illinois, and Alabama.

Denise Zieske is our director of workforce development for the State University of New York – or SUNY – in the Office of Community Colleges and Education Pipeline. She develops and implements workforce programs and related initiatives for SUNY's colleges, and she supports SUNY's workforce efforts at the state and national level. She's coordinating activities to expand registered apprenticeships in New York State in multiple industries. And for this presentation she is focusing on advanced manufacturing.

We also have Dr. Geanie Umberger. And she's the director of the Purdue Cyber Apprenticeship Program, or PCAP. She got the opportunity to join the Purdue Polytechnic Institute, which is one of Purdue's 10 colleges, as the associate dean for engagement. In her engagement role she focused on the workforce development and industry relations, creating and enhancing ways Purdue engaged with employers. And their focus for this grant is cybersecurity.

We also have Audrey Webb and Lavon Nelson with us today. So Audrey is the project director for ALAMAP and has 10 years of higher education workforce development experience. With her experience at the community college level and working in advanced manufacturing, she's developing programs that will support their students, industries, and communities throughout Alabama. Alabama is focusing on advanced manufacturing for this grant.

And Lavon Nelson is the senior director for workforce development at the Illinois Community College Board. She works to ensure that community colleges and adult education are at the table when it comes their roles and voices in solving Illinois' workforce and economic issues. Her diverse experiences in the private sector, community college system, and public workforce sector bring a dose of reality to the issues with which she works. And the Illinois board is focusing on information technology.

Today's objectives are to provide some guidance and feedback from Scaling Apprenticeship grantees that have recently completed year one to the CSG grantees – the Closing the Skills Gap grantees. There are lessons learned at every stage of the grant, but especially in the beginning as you're learning the nuances of the grant, the requirements, and determining how you'll meet all your outlines objectives and align the partnerships.

So today we'll learn a little bit about what challenges CSG has already faced and get a glimpse of some of the experiences, challenges, and lessons learned by the SA – or Scaling Apprenticeship – grantees.

The grantees will provide some examples of creative solutions that meet the needs of businesses and provide benefit to employers, partners, and/or participants. And lastly, our presenters will share innovative practices adopted to accelerate the expansion of apprenticeship and/or improve on internal processes to advance their programs.

So now I'd like to hand this over to Zodie Makonnen, who will talk about the overall objectives for the Scaling Apprenticeship grant. Zodie?

MS. MAKONNEN: Thank you, Sue. So I wanted to give you a very brief overview of the Scaling Apprenticeship grants and kind of the overall objectives.

As you know, DOL awarded 23 grants in June 2019 to academic institutions and consortia and private sector partners. The goals of this SA grant is to accelerate the expansion of apprenticeships nationally to new industry sectors reliant on H-1B visas, using a sector-based approach within a single sector.

The SA grants have three sectors of focus: information technology and IT-related industries, advanced manufacturing, and health care.

Another aspect of the Scaling Apprenticeship grants that I'd like to point out is that pre-apprenticeships leading to apprenticeship are allowed under the Scaling Apprenticeship grant. For the Closing the Skills Gap grants, pre-apprenticeships are only allowed using leveraged funds.

I'll now turn it over to Ayreen to give us an overview of the CSG grants. Ayreen?

AYREEN CADWALLADER: Great. Thank you so much for that, Zodie. And definitely just wanted to introduce the Closing the Skills Gap grants to the Scaling Apprenticeship grants that we have on today's call.

The Department of Labor awarded in early of this year, in February, 28 grants for the Apprenticeship: Closing the Skills Gap grant program. These awards were issued to institutions of higher education; nonprofit trade, industry, and employer associations; labor unions; and labor management organizations. So we certainly have another group of grantees to add to the Scaling Apprenticeship grantees that are the lead applicants here.

And the goal was to increase apprenticeship opportunities for all Americans by expanding apprenticeships to industry sectors and occupations that traditionally have not deployed apprenticeships in these industries. And so these are H-1B industries of advanced manufacturing, health care, and information technology. And for CSG there was a specific focus on cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and other related topics.

We would like to hear from the CSG grantees to learn more about what has been your biggest challenge thus far in implementing your grant program? And there's options here that you can choose.

The poll should come up shortly, but the choices are: communicating information to your partner agencies, establishing data collection systems, comprehending partner selection complexities, introducing change to existing business practices or your program design, incorporating remote work and virtual learning components into program design, and other, which if you could please briefly describe that in the chat window.

And thank you for those of you that are selecting sort of what has been your biggest challenge thus far. And I am seeing that the data collection system is ranking high up there. We did have our performance reporting deadline last Friday, so this is certainly an area that we will also be able to talk about today. So I'm glad this has come up.

The other choice here is communicating to partner agencies, employers. That is certainly – as the grants are ramping up, this is the discussion point, right, with your partner agencies.

I am hearing from Terry (ph) and Ruth that their biggest challenge is due to the impact of COVID. And that is certainly an area of concern on our end as well. So certainly thank you and we will hear from some of our SA grantees that have shared some – that have some innovative practices on this.

Definitely continue to chime in the chat window. And please, if there's anything specific that you want to hear about today, please feel free to add this into the chat window as well.

And I can turn it back to Sue with that.

MS. RUSCH: Great. Thanks, Ayreen. Advance that slide. All right.

So during today's session we have four Scaling Apprenticeship speakers who will respond to questions as it relates to an innovative practice within their program. And these practices are unique and focus on different areas of the program, such as learning communities, developing job families within cybersecurity industry, mentoring in virtual learning, and developing a data collection system.

So as Ayreen has mentioned, I think we're going to be touching on some of that. And I'd like to just give you just a little bit of information on each of our presenters that we have today.

So Illinois will be speaking today. And they – Illinois Community College Board. And their program is called Customized Apprenticeship Program, or – so it's CAP-IT. So it's Customized Apprenticeship Program Information Technology. And their industry focus is information technology.

Their apprenticeship model is registered apprenticeship, unregistered apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship. We have some target information for them. They're targeting 1,728 participants and 842 apprentices.

And what we're going to talk about today is the practice. And ICCB developed an online learning community and training series for the college partners, after conducting a survey that identified technical assistance and professional development training needs. And so this little diagram is just kind of showing you how they have put it together. I know you can't probably read all the details, but it was just a really nice visual that we thought would be helpful to share.

Next we have Purdue University, and their program name is called Purdue Cyber Apprenticeship Program, or PCAP. Their industry focus, of course, is cybersecurity. And they're focusing on those registered apprenticeships with 5,000 participants and 5,000 apprentices.

So they will be talking to us today about how they have collaborated with the National Institute for Standards and Technology – or NIST – and the National Initiative for Cybersecurity Education and the U.S. Department of Defense installations in an effort to update the cybersecurity job family/series that allows the flexibility for cybersecurity positions, with that goal of increasing job retention and improving competitive wages for federal workers.

And this is all done in parallel. So it's not done doing it alone. I just wanted to share that one extra piece.

Next we have Alabama Community College. Their program is called ALAMAP, or Alabama Advanced Manufacturing Apprenticeship Program. And they are focusing on unregistered apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeship programs, targeting 5,000 participants and 25 (sic) apprentices.

And what they'll be talking to us today about is their mentorship program, where employer mentors provide support during this remote work and virtual learning opportunities. They're providing support networks for the students through enhanced virtual learning, strengthening relationships, and regular check-ins.

And lastly, we have the State University of New York, or SUNY. And their program is called New York College Apprenticeship Network, which is NYCAN. And their focus is advanced manufacturing with a focus on registered apprenticeship programs, unregistered apprenticeship programs, and pre-apprenticeship programs. They're looking to serve 3,500 participants and 3,200 apprentices.

The practice overall is all about data collection. As we heard a little bit earlier, that is a challenge for the CSG grantees, so reporting – they developed a reporting platform for partners and it includes a single location for all partners to enter their data, access relevant forms and documents, and is the tracking and reporting mechanism for SUNY.

So at this point we're going to start to dig into our four questions that we have. And we'll be asking each of our presenters to speak to that and to the practice that they have identified.

And so let's start with our first presenter, which is Illinois Community College Board. Can you tell us, Lavon, what do you know now that you wish you had known in your first 6 to 12 months, or that you had known earlier in the grant?

LAVON NELSON: Sure. Thanks, Sue. And hello, everyone. In Illinois apprenticeship – and the whole apprenticeship world – is very active, alive.

And so in this particular Scaling initiative, one of the points is that the importance of ongoing communication and how being able to respond – we have 10 community colleges that are delivering the initiative. And so understanding the importance of being able to communicate, understand, and respond quickly to their issues and concerns. And then the whole area of training/technical assistance with those colleges. So that's one thing.

Another is difficulty engaging the employers. And I'm sure that was really exacerbated by COVID. All of the community colleges in Illinois have business and industry centers, and so they are very familiar with working with employers and have active relationships with employers also through CTE and of course faculty and departments.

But with COVID, so many employers – as we all know – had so many other issues to deal with, they really have not been all that interested right now. So I'll talk later about what we're doing to strengthen our approach with the employer.

Managing data collection. I know on the question, many of you have that same issue. I think we wish we had known – I know we wish we had known how impactful the 89 elements were going to be on the work that we were doing and capturing them. We've developed a spreadsheet at this point, but we are looking at other options because if our program expands we cannot keep the same method that we have. So that was probably at the top.

And then a better sense of the national scaling expectations. As we move forward we are working with JFF and CompTIA around that. And so I think more information and more guidance on that we wish we would have had.

I think that's probably plenty at this point. I could go on, but those are the – I think our main points.

MS. RUSCH: Great. Thank you so much, Lavon. All right. Let's hear from our SUNY representative. This is Denise who's speaking about data collection. Just make sure you unmute your phone if you have not.

DENISE ZIESKE: Great. Thank you. We had similar issues that we saw in the list here as to what you guys are struggling with. And our items are – first one that we really struggled with was the PIRLs. And we just spent hours and hours digging into them, really trying to understand what each PIRL was, how they interacted with each other, and making sure that we really were capturing the data correctly for each of those items.

So shortly into the grant, a few months into, there was a webinar which helped a lot, gave some additional information about those PIRLs. However, we had already spent countless hours really trying to do that.

So what we did is we created a cheat sheet and we actually now have our own list of all the PIRLs and really have notes about which ones tie to each other, and notes about which can be blank and which ones we need to have filled out in a certain way if other items are filled out with a different code. So that item we refer to almost on a daily basis. It's been really, really a helpful resource for us.

You all mentioned development of the tracking and the database system. This too was one of our hugest challenges. We had no idea the length of time we were going to spend doing this when we applied for and started the grant. So we definitely did not build that time into our project plan.

Just to start with, before we even could start building it, we took two or three months to work with our SUNY IT security staff ensuring that the program that we chose was going to be able to be secured to collect and securely maintain personally identifiable information. So that was a big piece for us.

We chose a platform called Smartsheet. And the reason that we actually chose this program was that we have a partner agency that is having a similar grant. They had the first H-1B grant – the AAI grant – and this is the database that they chose to use. So it was really helpful for us in New York to have similar databases between different entities so we could share data.

So we've now spent over six months developing that platform. It's in really good shape but it's not finished. We're actually making edits to it again today. And we really feel that we're going to be continuing to make those edits for the next probably six months to even potentially a year as different things come up or some changes happen. We have a lot of electronic forms that we're using for the data collection and I'm going to show you a couple of those later.

So this grant and – this system was created specifically for this grant. We started from scratch. We accessed this blank database and now it is actually helping us for another grant as well. So at least it's having a dual purpose, which has been helpful for us.

The last item I just wanted to chat about was connecting with others. So I think these webinars are a really great resource, a way to kind of hear what other folks are doing. The other thing that we have now is that we have calls with other grantees; they're separated by sector. And that's, again, been a helpful way for us to connect and hear what other folks are going through and some of the things that they're doing.

But it would have been really nice for us to have that happening really early on as we were developing some of our forms and our processes, to hear how others are doing it so we weren't each creating it in a vacuum doing our own work.

And I'm going to turn it on to the next speaker.

MS. RUSCH: Great. And so now we'll hear from Audrey Webb from Alabama. And if you could just share with you know now that you wish you had known earlier in the grant.

AUDREY WEBB: OK. Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for joining us today. So mine similar for the first thing as the data collection. We actually chose this system in February, AGS Prime that's helping us with that data collection now. And that really has been so helpful, especially identifying the PIRLs and so forth. So that part, definitely we would have done that earlier on in the grant.

Also, equipment purchases. Due to COVID, as all of you know, we've had a lot of issues with getting our equipment. And of course, we couldn't really know that that was going to happen. But if there would have been a way that we could have started those purchases earlier, that would have been a lot of help also.

One of our main focuses – or one of our big focuses on our grant was going to be with incarcerated students in their work in those programs for our pre-apprenticeships. And just a month or so ago there was a report out that we could not use funds for incarcerated students, so that put a little damper on our project. But we refocused and are going to be helping with adult ed at our colleges for pre-apprenticeship. So real excited about that.

And then also, the IRAPs. When we wrote our grant, we had focused on the IRAPs and unregistered type apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships. And then as you know, IRAPs were going through their new system and then it was approved back in March, I believe, right? During COVID.

So we had refocused ours on registered apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeships, and unregistered apprenticeship. Our state is an SRE for registered apprenticeship, so they're working really closely with us to work on these advanced manufacturing apprenticeships.

MS. RUSCH: Awesome. That sounds great. Thank you so much, Audrey. And now we'll move on to Purdue University and Dr. Umberger.

GEANIE UMBERGER: Thank you. And greetings to everyone from Purdue. I probably thought a lot about the questions when Sue approached me about participating and some, I guess you could say, pearls of wisdom that we could go through and share. So I'm going to talk a little bit about the OPM questions, but also much broader, share some additional information.

And when you look at the bullets that we have on there, you really could through and break it down into four buckets: an issue of complexity, time, what I call institutional environment – OK, politics, what we all have – and life happens. And those are some things to really think about when you're looking at this. And it also touches on (PIA ?). So let's go through and kind of talk about this very globally.

When you first get your grant award – at least that's what I found – when you get started, you don't know what you don't know. And then when you get into there, that's when reality hits. And we're talking about the reality of, well, you've got different requirements. And you saw that statement in the grant that said, oh, and there may be some additional data collection points from the DOL. But it doesn't really quite hit. But then as you start learning about those things, you're like, oh, well, that's what that means.

So when you're working through all this, you need to have a little bit of fluidity to it. I think someone – one of the prior speakers had mentioned, well, we started with a spreadsheet and we've expanded. You need to have a little bit of fluidity. You need to be able to go through and kind of flex with it.

I also have to say is that we have a number of partners. We have FASTPORT, which is DOL intermediary, who's helping us in their – they had taught us quite a bit; as well as Dr. Carla Johnson, who's at NC State. And I think she's on the phone – shout-out to you, Carla – who has worked on a number of big grants as well. She's helping us with a lot of the data analysis and data collection aspects of it. So tremendous experience from both of them, so that helped us out greatly.

But when you're working through this and trying to get your contracts in place – and more importantly, if you're a big R1 institution – for instance, like Purdue, I know Arizona State, there's University of Cincinnati and NC State and others that I've seen on the call – you have some of the similar type of situation.

The community colleges, they're used to working with the apprenticeship world. Whereas a lot of the R1 institutions, this is our first rodeo, truly. So to come in and educate them and help them to understand how things are different, that takes some time. So what it comes down to is the complexity and the time that go and slow you down. And just be prepared for that and understand that that's there.

We've also talked about COVID. And I would say that when you're planning, yes, you can plan for COVID, but I think you should also just plan in general what if something happens to upend everything? And what's your plan B? Sometimes you don't know what it really is.

Now, with respect to partners, that's something I really wish I had known. When we wrote our grant, we walked in with some partners. I'm not going to mention who they are because it's just not appropriate.

But when we got started talking to our employers, we realized that these partners were not the right people to bring to the table. They were not going to go and help us to be successful and was not going to meet the needs of the companies. So we essentially parted ways, hopefully as friends.

That's what all grantees need to understand is that you really need to evaluate your partners. As the director of your program, you need to go through and make sure you guard that fiercely, that you're going through meeting the metrics and the commitments to the DOL that you have gone through and have put in place.

So it's important that you come in and evaluate and see, is this partner really living up to what you're needing them to live up so that you can go and get where you need to go? And that's something to really think about.

That's kind of my comments.

MS. RUSCH: Wonderful. Thank you so much.

MS. UMBERGER: And Sue, if I could get you to advance because my – (inaudible).

MS. RUSCH: I just did. No problem. Just want to open it up for some questions. I see there's lots of things happening in the chat box. And there was a question, "Does anyone recommend any other tracking and reporting systems?" Please just feel free to add what systems you're using, whether you are from that Scaling Apprenticeship grant or from the CSG. What are you starting to play with?

And we'll also just hear a little bit from some of our presenters as well to see what they're doing. I see some people are talking about Salesforce in here. Anyone else on the presenter side? Illinois, Alabama, Purdue, are you willing to share what systems – data collection system you're using?

MS. UMBERGER: At Purdue we have essentially an assortment, a collection of systems that we're using. We have a portal that I'll talk in a little bit that gets an initial component. We also are using Salesforce to go through and interact with and be able to track information for our employers. And then just kind of bringing everything together is what we do.

MS. RUSCH: OK.

MS. WEBB: In Alabama we're using AGS Prime. And it has been excellent. They tell all about the different PIRLs and help us with what we need specifically for our grant to capture. It's been really helpful for us.

MS. RUSCH: Wonderful. It looks like there's a lot of good feedback happening on the chat. So thank you all for sharing some information.

I'm going to ask just one more question for now, unless there is something else that we would like to – anyone else has to bring up. I think everything has been mostly around data collection. And I did see one question about recruiting partners and hearing more about that. And I believe we will be talking a little bit about that, especially during COVID, in some of the other slides, if I remember correctly. So I'm going to hold onto that question and we'll come back to that one.

Any other questions? (Pause.) OK. Let me ask one question to Lavon at Illinois. One person has for you is, "How did your team and program decide to come up with your practice? And this is the learning community.

MS. NELSON: How did we decide to come up with learning communities?

MS. RUSCH: Yeah. How did you come up with this idea of having training series?

MS. NELSON: OK. Well, we have that approach as a state already with quite a few things. For WIOA we have our WIOA Wednesday webinars and which act as sort of a learning community. We have other events in the workforce world that we handle in that way. And so it made a lot of sense to use something that individuals were familiar with.

It's also a good way to bring everyone together. It's all virtual, of course. And they're small. Since we only have 10 colleges, the groups are small and there can be a lot of interaction. They're led by – OK, and for the life of me – ICSPS out of Illinois State University, but I cannot remember the full – I'm embarrassed – name.

But anyway, there's a link in there to them at the back. But they have been extremely instrumental in helping us. We did a survey. As a matter of fact, we've done several surveys and are trying to slow down a little bit. But there was a survey asking for their needs. And then of course when COVID hit we realized we needed to provide some more technical assistance. And we consider learning communities part of the technical assistance to the colleges.

And then we did a COVID – to see how they were responding to COVID, et cetera. And out of all of that, several issues emerged, with one of the top ones being employer engagement. So that's where a lot of our focus has been. The data collection we're dealing with at the state level and then we have a pilot. So that's not really yet a learning community topic.

MS. RUSCH: OK. Thanks for sharing that.

MS. NELSON: If that's helpful to someone.

MS. RUSCH: Yeah. Thanks so much for sharing. And we will probably dig in, I believe, as we keep going. So keep your questions coming, everyone, and we will get to them, absolutely.

So our next question, "How have your efforts to engage employers or establish apprenticeships or recruit participants changed and evolved over the course of your grant thus far?" So we'll start this off with Alabama. And you have the mentoringship program. (Pause.) And Audrey, just so you know, you have to unmute.

MS. WEBB: I was. Thank you. (Chuckles.)

MS. RUSCH: You're welcome.

MS. WEBB: Imagine what you can do when you hit the mute button. So yes, we have worked really hard – I'm sure like the rest of you – with the transition due to COVID. Our schools and our workforce worked really hard to get everything transitioned over to virtual meetings, to virtual classes, and so forth.

So some of the things that we did to keep the students engaged was have virtual mentoring. Several of our industry partners even had to shut down for a couple of weeks, but the students continued to take their classes online. So we needed a way to keep them engaged with the industry partners also, and one way we did that was through Zoom and Teams and so forth, just checking in on the students, seeing how they were doing, and work on virtual labs.

Another thing that we did was to implement pre-apprenticeship. So several of our industry partners here in Alabama weren't necessarily able to get new apprentices for the fall. So they wanted to still work with us in hopes that in the spring they'll be able to hire those apprentices. So one thing that we did was implement some pre-apprenticeships, where the students could go ahead and take the instruction portion this fall to prepare them for the apprenticeship in the spring. So that's working really good.

And another way that we've tried to do this is with industry associations. So we've worked really close with NAM and MI with our (FANG ?) programs here in Alabama. They've helped us gain more partnerships so that the industry partners that were able to get apprentices for the fall, they could pause and get one next year. And the new companies could come on and take the student. So that way, our student enrollment could still stay up and continue to help our industry.

And then another thing that really our industry partners helped us a lot with was to put in incumbent workers. So they had a lot of great workers already working for them that maybe weren't being utilized to their best. So they were able to put those students into the apprenticeship so they could get an increase in their income and their college education.

MS. RUSCH: Wonderful. Wonderful. Yeah, working closely with those different targeted populations and industry groups are really helpful.

MS. WEBB: Yes, ma'am.

MS. RUSCH: All right. So let's now hear from Lavon Nelson and Illinois Community College about your learning communities. How have your efforts changed or evolved?

MS. NELSON: All right. Well, we've – in our case, I think change has been evolving. It has been evolvement, if I can get the word out. I'm sort of – I'm looking at this through the COVID lens because we're really still – we've been hit with a difficulty to engage employers.

So through this survey that I mentioned earlier, we've identified topics for the learning communities. And as I said, those are held once a month. And we – JFF as a partner has been very good about participating in those and assisting on providing support and information and ideas, et cetera. And for those of you that – JFF is shortened from Jobs for the Future. And so we've been working with them. And then as I said earlier the ICSPS, which is a link in the back.

But along with it – those are topical. They're around issues, like employer engagement, et cetera – support services, whatever the community college community has a need for. If something comes up, we can quickly adapt and add a learning community, change topics. We're not locked into anything. So it's very flexible.

But – (inaudible) – a need to add another element, which are operational quarterly meetings. And we just had that and I added a link to our PowerPoint to that also. The operational quarterly meeting is really an opportunity for nuts and bolts. And I'll talk about that later as a creative response. Some of these are duplicative, but they're creative and evolving, so anyway.

Coaching is another thing that's evolved. We did not have coaching originally but realized that there were some colleges that are really struggling with employer engagement. And then decided to build out coaching for all the colleges, and I'll talk about that later as a creative solution.

Through Jobs for the Future, they also offered – I called it a specialist, but I mean, Scott's a consultant in the sense that he works for JFF. Scott Ellsworth is working with us through JFF as a business specialist to work through the learning communities, offering information on the learning communities, and will also be involved in the coaching.

Operational meetings are mainly held by us at a board. So I think, as you can see, we've realized we had to put more communication tools. And these are all really communication tools. So communication tools to assist the colleges to be able to primarily engage employers.

We're doing pretty good – they're doing pretty good with recruitment of students and we're really going to work on that in our performance measures this year. But these are more strategic at this point.

MS. RUSCH: Wonderful. Thank you so much, Lavon. I'm excited to hear more from you. And now we have Purdue University and your OMB new job families for cybersecurity. If you can let us know how your efforts have been to engage employers or apprenticeships and how that's changed and evolved.

MS. UMBERGER: OK. Well, so let me get through and let's kind of – I guess you could say set the stage.

Prior to COVID, of course, we were doing great. A lot of companies were very interested in participating. And then of course, like with everybody, when COVID hit things changed. And what we found is that a lot of companies started laying people off, companies went radio silent. There may be a few that did go through and continued to talk, but at a much slower pace. Or if they did get back to you, it could be where they were like, well, we're going to talk to you in the future because right now we're trying to hunker down.

So an example of, I guess you could say, the slower pace is you really have to come in and look at the relationships. Who are in your backyard? And that's really what I go through and encourage grantees to look at because it's all about the relationships. You do need to continue to communicate, which is important.

But also, having those relationships or your – the home team, I guess you could say, also makes a big difference because essentially people will be more responsive. And that's the case with – we had a local – believe it or not, Indiana has a military base. We jokingly say, well, they've got a big, beautiful lake, so that's their waterfront coverage there. But all joking aside, we do work with them.

The problem is that being able to work with them, because of the new type of programming and the way the OMB is set up, is – or at least has been set up, and there are changes underway – there are problems with job family, job classification, that it is essentially all working.

And basically, how it works is that when you hire a person in, they look at your education and they kind of slate you – slot you into a different area. We had to work with OMB but also with NYS to provide information.

So it's again, you hit a roadblock you hit a hurdle; and rather than just going through and giving up, my advice is to go through and say, work with that employer. Because you've got that relationship with them, you're the home team. How can you come in and help them through various means, to go through and help them to be successful? And I'll go ahead and go to the – I guess you could say "the rest of the story," as Paul Harvey says, for those who are old like me.

Essentially (Crane ?) has gone through and signed on and they are officially one of our employers, somewhat through the efforts that we've done but also through other efforts that they had internal. So again, it's down to that relationship and how you can work through things and provide them the support that they need so that they can be successful.

MS. RUSCH: Wonderful. Thank you so much. OK. And now let's hear from Denise and the State University of New York. How have your efforts to engage employers or establish apprenticeships, recruit participants, changed or evolved so far?

MS. ZIESKE: So the pandemic did definitely change our strategy. We definitely had to kind of make some changes in the plans that we had as we were starting to move into in-person meetings. So really looking to do some of that outreach.

And we call things industry roundtable. So these are where we bring together folks, predominantly employers, but also some of our other partners together, to really kind of sell apprenticeship, being that first outreach position that we have with those folks.

So when COVID hit, we really did just no outreach for many months. And we figured the employers were really busy. Some were closed. Some were trying to determine how to operate with virtual employees while some were in place. So now that things are reopening, we're really starting to try and come back to that.

The one thing that we have now started is we started trying to do some of our recruitment events virtually. So it is starting to work for us. We have held two recently and we had over 40 participants at them, so that was really positive. However, while we had great attendance, there were not very many questions at the end. And what we really wish we had had the opportunity to have but we didn't, was informal conversations.

So if you're in-person, you can kind of go say, oh, hey, Joe, what did you think? What would have happened? How could we have continued to pursue this conversation? So it's the follow up that now we're struggling with on those virtual recruitment events. We're doing evals and then we'll start working with our colleges and our partners to reach out to them personally in any way that we can.

You heard in the last question some things about your partners. We really had a very, very strong partner that was in place prior to application, which has been extremely important to us. So we have monthly meetings with our lead partners. These again are virtual. We were hoping to have a few in-person, but I think this year they're going to be entirely virtual. And we have bimonthly meetings with all our partners.

So I'll give you a quick sense of who some of our partners are. We are an SA state, so we work very, very closely with the New York State Department of Labor. They are the ones that approve apprenticeships for us and they commit hours and hours of time to partnering with us. So they are a hugely important partner to us.

We have 30 community colleges across our state, so we work closely with them. And some of the changes that they had to change as we were looking at kind of what's been morphing and happening over the last several months is they've been converting to virtual. Obviously we're doing advanced manufacturing, which requires a lot of hands-on. So they've been looking at how they can do labs either virtually or now they're looking to do them socially distanced. So that's starting to open up again.

The other important thing that our community colleges have had to do to really work with our apprentices and the employers is if they have a class that's scheduled from 9:00 to noon Monday through Friday, well, that's not going to work real well for an apprentice because they're working during that time. So we've really needed to work with our employers and work with our colleges to look at schedules. Either have evening classes or have the employers be willing to give their employees some time off to come and do the classes that they have.

Another strong partner for us – I believe Alabama mentioned the industry associations – we have a manufacturing alliance. It has seven partners across the state. We work super closely with them. They are our group sponsor or intermediary. So they're an integral part of everything that we do.

And we also work very closely with our workforce development board. One of our workforce development boards is one that received that AAI grant that I mentioned earlier. They're the ones that put us on to Smartsheet. And they are helping us to coordinate and connect with our workforce development boards across the entire state.

So those are our lead partners. We also are working very closely with our community-based organizations. I saw a question about how we're supporting some of those other services – the support services – supportive services. And we're partnering with our community-based organizations on that.

We're also partnering closely with our chambers of commerce because they work very closely with employers, as do the economic developers in our state. So those are some of our other partners that we're connecting with as frequently as we can.

To really connect with them we had seven statewide meetings throughout May, June, and July, again held virtually. Great participation. And then all of those folks helped us to get the word out for those industry roundtables that I mentioned earlier.

You can see here a picture. We're about to launch a social media campaign. We are going to be purchasing some ads to really, again, target those employers. And our tagline is going to be "reimagine your workforce through apprenticeship." This image here is something that we're going to be providing to each of our 30 colleges and to our partners, asking them to put them in their newsletters, send it out in their email blasts, have them post again about their interactions with apprenticeship.

So our kick right now is we are really in an outreach mode. As things are starting to reopen, we need to get those employers on board.

So finally, the last thing I wanted to talk about was kind of again that engagement strategy, that outreach strategy. In our application we said that we were going to have 3 hubs at community colleges strategically placed across the state. We did do a – (inaudible) – proposal for that, but then so much had changed and we really realized that we need to change our strategy a little bit.

So we're now really going to focus, we think, on business development. We're going to do another call for proposals and ask our community colleges to jump on board to partner with our manufacturing alliance our Department of Labor team to really go out there and reach out to the employers, because they are the key. We can't have apprenticeships without them.

MS. RUSCH: Wonderful. Thank you so much. I just love hearing from all of you presenters about all the different partnerships and ways that you're trying to work on outreach and especially with all the challenges of the pandemic. So thank you for all of these efforts and for sharing this with all of us.

I just wanted to see, do we have any questions? I have noticed a couple things that are coming up. One of them is, "Are there ways to support partners with additional case management needs required for appropriate tracking?" Does anyone – any of our presenters, can you speak to that? (Pause.) Have you run into that, Denise?

MS. ZIESKE: Yeah. I'm actually going to talk on my next slide a little bit about some of the forms that we're using, which is a little bit in terms of the tracking. So I may address that in the next one.

But again, I think we're really partnering with so many people to provide those case management services through our colleges, to support services through our community-based organizations. And some of them are on the campus periodically or some our campuses have really close relationships to. But we're really relying on our data collection system to be able to track and document those services. And I'll touch on that in a minute.

MS. RUSCH: Great. Thank you so much. There is another question and I think it's about cash match. And I think I'm going to hold off on that one until the end, but I definitely want to touch base on that one as well.

So I'm going to move us on to our third question. So the third question is, what creative solutions did you develop to meet the needs of employers, partners, and/or participants? And so we're going to start with Denise over at SUNY.

MS. ZIESKE: Great. Thank you. So this one I wanted to talk a little bit about that data collection that everybody has brought up as a challenge. It was definitely a huge challenge for us.

And one of the things as I was preparing this presentation I realized, is that we had in our presentation talked about how we were going to work with our IR staff, so our tracking folks that are in our institutional research department. And we thought we were just going to be able to use what the colleges sent to us in terms of all their data, and it turns out that we were totally wrong.

So as soon as we got the award and saw all the PIRLs and everything that needed to be tracked, we needed to totally change our plan. And so one of the first things we did was a modification for how we were going to do tracking.

And again, we worked with our partners to identify Smartsheet; for us it's working well. And so I wanted to give – you can see here now – I realize it's very small, but I have provided – (inaudible) – at the end in the lessons learned PowerPoint there is a link to these two forms so you can see what they are.

These are the forms that we're using to get the data from all of our partners. Predominantly it's being completed by our community colleges who are the ones that are working directly with our participants, the employers, and offering the training.

So the tracking system that we do have – again, it started from scratch. We had nothing in place. We were using Google Forms for our sister grant, the one that is our match, and we knew that was not going to be sufficient for this at all. We weren't collecting very specific personally-identifiable information and Google Sheets is not secure. So we didn't feel comfortable using that.

So one thing that is being difficult is we're creating this. If we – we have for this grant, strictly advanced manufacturing. In general, for our other one we also support health care, IT, and some of those other sectors that were talked about earlier.

So we are co-mingling the data. And for that other grant we don't need nearly as much information. So we've had to duplicate and do double the amount of forms so that we are asking people for the data that we're not needing for the health care and IT. But this has allowed us to have a much better tracking system. So it's really nice that we have two different systems that we're using, combined into one.

You will note here – if you look here, you'll see that 1-2-9. One of the things that, because we have to report either through that comma-delimited of 1-comma-3-comma-2-comma, we needed to collect from our partners just strictly those numbers. But they certainly didn't know what a 1, a 2, or a 9 meant. So on every form we've had to do very specific directions explaining what all of these pieces mean.

So we did our first training today and we were very pleasantly surprised. We had very few questions. We don't know if that was just because we completely overwhelmed our audience or if they really need to get back and kind of dig into filling out the form.

So we have an intake form, which you see on the left. And then that is just to get that original information that we need on each participant. And then on the right you'll see the form that we used following a training.

In addition to those, we also have a form if somebody transitions from being a pre-apprentice to an apprentice, because there's additional information we need when that happens. And we have a support services form.

So this gets back to that other question. We have a form that one of our community-based organizations can fill out and say, you know, I met with Joe. I know he's an apprentice working with you. We were able to provide him to a bus pass so that he could more easily get to school and work.

So that's something that we want to be able to report as a service that we're offering those folks. And this is the way that we're using to capture that.

One of the things that we also realized is that we didn't want to just have the links to all these forms out open to everybody. So we've also created a secure webpage that now our partners have the access link to, so that they have a really good flow as to what all the forms are, when they use them, and they can access through that – access them through that secure page.

MS. RUSCH: And I would just add for Denise that we do have access to those. I think you shared the links for those so you can see the full application and their forms. But just please don't fill it out because that might screw up their data.

MS. ZIESKE: Yes. Thank you very much. That's exactly why we were told not to give it out to too many people. So I'm trusting you guys, but I thought it might be helpful to see.

MS. RUSCH: And that's at the end of our presentation. All right. So let's talk to Dr. Umberger and talk about your solutions. Go ahead.

MS. UMBERGR: OK. Well, thanks. I guess you could say the two things – (inaudible) – developed that we felt was important – and I guess it's really part of a much bigger strategy. And I really want to go through and say value propositions. And it really comes down to when you're talking to a company, what is the value proposition for what you're bringing to them?

And that's purely when it comes to business development. It's what universities do notoriously in the past, is go to the company, say, here's my stuff; what of my stuff do you want? You can't do that. Instead what you have to do is say, OK, how can we partner? And more importantly, I'm listening to you and what your needs are, Mr./Ms. Employer. So that's really what we did. Because of all my experience in industry-university relationships, taking all that feedback, and that's how I use it as the basis to go and develop PCAP.

And when you go through and think about PCAP, some of the things that we went to and we heard from companies that were complaining is like, well, it's great that you're going to do and we hire your studies, but how do I know what they really learned? Yeah, Purdue has a great reputation, but how do I know what we're getting? What do the students actually know?

We're tired of finishing school. And it was a large company that said that they'll hire kids from a university and they still have to spend two years training them. And they call it finishing school.

We need soft skills. We need them to have problem solving. How do we do these? So that's really what we did as part of the value proposition for the company, part of our creative solution that the grant – that our funding is helping to pay for.

So part of it is our PCAP portal, which not only is a way for companies and apprentices to come together and to find one another. Then once the apprentice is essentially taken on by the company, as the person goes through their various components of education, whatever it may be, we're helping to track that.

And our program is the first program in the United States for an apprenticeship that – registered apprenticeship that we go through and provide where you can get a badge – badges and/or certifications. You can go through and can get an associates, a bachelors, or a masters. It's all right there, kind of one-stop shop, which is also important for companies as well because it makes it easy for them.

And as the person's going through this, we're tracking the nice KSAs, which helps them to understand really – what is a person really learning? So they know what's going on there. And as well as the person sees it. They walk away with this really robust e-portfolio of things that they've learned, the skills that they've accomplished.

In addition to that, we also have the Leadership Academy that was developed here at Purdue. Our students here on campus, there are students who participate in it, roughly three months long. Pretty intensive. But it takes them through all the key leadership skills that a person needs to boost them to be truly effective in the area of cybersecurity, working on teams, going through and solving problems, all the leadership issues.

So we've developed these wraparound services, kind of like a concierge service that companies are not having to pay for. And that brings value to this, so that when we talk to them, we are explaining to them what is their value that they get from us. How does it give them that return on investment that the DOL is calculating? We're providing that additional value.

And that's really my advice to every single grantee out there. You're trying to go through, work with a company, explain what your return on investment. What is your value? How do you help them out? How do you go to make their life easy? You're the easy button – should be. So build that easy button for them. And that's really what I would go and say is what we've brought to the table.

MS. RUSCH: Wonderful. Thank you so much. And we will move on to our – Audrey Webb, who will speak about your creative solutions with the mentoring.

MS. WEBB: OK. Thank you. So one thing that we did that was really cool – and we've continued to do it this year too – is we partnered with the Alabama Technology Network and the University of Alabama (Council ?).

Mazda Toyota has just recently put a plant here in Alabama and they wanted to partner with our (FANG ?) program in that area and mentor several students. So we were trying to figure out how we were going to have the student do the on-the-job training and in school. In school was pretty easy because we already have colleges. But the on-the-job training was the challenge due to the fact they didn't have a plant yet.

So we partnered with these partnerships with UAH and ATM and they helped us develop a hands-on training program at a close-by community college that didn't have the (FANG ?) program but did have industrial automation. And they developed an industrial automation program there. They brought in some equipment for the students to use. They gave them a project to build a simulated assembly line. They just worked with them all the time.

They had people from Mazda Toyota working with the students, from UAH. We had just never seen anything quite like that in our system and it just was so great that they wanted to do it again this year.

So they have a few other students that they're mentoring at that college. And of course, they're getting ready to start training in the plant, so that'll be really good for those students.

We also transitioned to virtual labs here in COVID when our plants and our schools were shut down for a couple of months. And that worked out really good. We used a program called Amatrol; it's a lot for advanced manufacturing. It's got simulators, e-learning.

Other industries that use it too are gas and oil. So there's a lot of simulation to provide also if any of you guys are interested in that.

But the skill range for these virtual labs are from high school all the way up to a university level. So depending on where your apprentice is, there is simulations for them to get the hands-on when they can't get into the plant.

And actually, our students are coming back on campus now; they started this week. But we're still using these Amatrol systems for additional work for the students. And if we do have to step out again for a few weeks, we will have those options already set up.

I heard someone earlier talking about flexible labs and flexible times. The apprenticeships, as they were saying earlier, these students may work during the day when we're teaching classes. So one of the things that one of our colleges – partners is working on is flexible labs.

So they actually have the lab open all day, from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. Of course, an instructor can't stay that long, but we have lab assistants and so forth. And whenever the students get done with their job or their instruction is online, they can come to the lab – set up a time to come to the lab and work and do their hands-on portion.

And this has really helped with COVID because we can only have a certain number of students in the lab at one time. Most schools are trying to keep it at 5 or 10 students with social distancing. So with the flexible lab, it's a lot easier to split that up so students can get their hands-on parts of it.

MS. RUSCH: Wonderful. (Pause.) Sorry about that. All right. And let's hear now from Illinois and your creative solutions with the learning communities.

MS. NELSON: Well, OK. So I addressed some of these earlier because, although they were ways our program has evolved, they were also creative for us because we hadn't been doing them for this grant before. So I've already addressed coaching, but a little more information on that.

All colleges are assigned a coach. And we have a coordinator for the program at each college. So each college has a CAP-IT coordinator. We have two coaches; one is Dr. Rebecca Lake, who has (went ahead ?) apprenticeship work in Illinois through Harper College for several years. And so she – and then of course, Scott Ellsworth from JFF. And each of them will have five colleges.

They will work with them individually on their specific issues. But once again, as I said, one of the biggies is the employer engagement. But other issues as they come up, they will work with them one-on-one to come up with solutions.

The operational quarterly meetings, we will hold those at the end of each quarter. We did have a kickoff one, so the first quarter will have two. But we'll hold them at the end of each quarter. And you can think of them as a technical learning community rather than an issues-based learning community, if that helps.

And the reason for the end of the quarter, because if they are having any issues that particular quarter, we can catch them in time. But we can also get ready for the next quarter. So that timeframe right there will allow us to address both the ending of a quarter and the beginning of a quarter.

This next meeting we will be discussing PIRL definitions specific to some of the areas that they needed more information. We'll be working on performance measures, discussing performance measures. So there'll be much more technical rather than issues.

And special topics webinars come up as needed. Learning communities once a month, and you can go to the website and see some of what we've done already. And I think you can also see what's coming, but I'm not sure if that's up yet.

What we're also adding, though – what I wanted to add was we're going to be doing an industry roundtable on information technology, working on that. And I've heard others mention the industry roundtable, where we'll be bringing together information technology employers with some of our advisory committee and of course some of the other community colleges.

New activity that will not be out until September is our support services toolkit. This would be specific for participants. It would be for the colleges, but to be a creative solution to meet the needs of participants. We'll post that of course on another creative solution that we've put in place is a website. We do have a CAP-IT website and I believe I also put a link to that. So in a couple months if you want to go out and look at our website you should be able to access the support services toolkit.

We will also be having a dashboard beginning this first quarter where we will have our performance measures.

One other thing I didn't mention was that with – (inaudible) – data collection we have run a pilot because out policy and research department developed data collection Excel spreadsheet to track all the PIRLs. And we have a run a pilot with three schools to see how that is working, while we determine whether we are going to need something like an off-the-shelf package.

And then lastly, without taking too long, I was glad to hear someone mention the workforce development boards. Because the community colleges – there are 48 community colleges in Illinois. And because they are such a strong workforce force in each of their districts, they're heavily engaged with their workforce – their local workforce innovation boards.

Also, almost all community colleges house an adult education program, which is Title II of WIOA. And they also house the postsecondary CTE program. So because of that, they're brought to the WIOA table through adult ed as a core partner and CTE as a required partner.

And as a result of that, they are engaged with WIOA and have been meeting – many of them have continued meeting virtually with their WIOA partner to work on this piece of recruiting participants. And they also serve on their business employer services team and would be reaching out to employers through that also.

MS. RUSCH: Wonderful. Thank you so much.

MS. NELSON: (Inaudible.)

MS. RUSCH: Yeah. Thank you so much. I am going to move us on because we still have one more question to go.

MS. NELSON: I'm sorry.

MS. RUSCH: I'm going to skip the questions for – oh, no, no. You're fine. I'm going to skip the questions for now, but please keep adding your questions into the chat question box.

So last question for our presenters, "If you were able to start over now, how might you approach things a little differently?" And we'll start with Purdue University.

MS. UMBERGER: OK. I guess I would just say off the bat I would – we'd love to go through and have started with some different partners. And the reason why I say that is that, as I had mentioned earlier, we have multiple degree pathways and opportunities that a person can pursue.

And what I'm using is – it's a matrix approach as far as various educational partners. And I'd swap some of those out just because, again, they weren't going to be able to provide what I need, especially when you're thinking about some of my big partners that – like federal government and others that have very restrictive issues around accreditation and things like that that meets the OPM guidelines. And so I wish I had known that upfront.

And then of course just the other – realizing that COVID was going to happen and we could have gone through and perhaps made some adjustments. I don't know, maybe not, because we really didn't know what the impact would have been. But I guess you could say that's really what I would say, just to kind of keep things brief because I know we're probably running out of time. So I want to respect others to get a chance to speak.

MS. RUSCH: Great. Thank you. Yeah. Lots of lessons learned, especially with this COVID. That's kind of adding a whole other layer.

All right. And Alabama, how about you? What would you do differently?

MS. WEBB: OK. Well, I think one thing that we would have done is develop our procedures early on. We did work on them, but a lot of things changed, as y'all just mentioned about COVID and different regulations that came out.

Our state back in March was approved to be an SE state, so we're focusing a lot on registered apprenticeships now and things like that. So if we would have developed our procedures early on, knowing that we may have to make some changes.

And also, if we would have looked at pre-apprenticeships early on, I believe that would have – we did have it written in the grant, but I believe that would have helped somewhat in helping us during this time with COVID is to focus more on those.

Another thing is to expand our certifications. So as we're developing these pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeships, we had mainly focused on MSSC – the Manufacturing Skills Council – which is great and we need that and we're using it a lot. But we would have also added to that some NAMs and NCCER and other certifications that our manufacturing sponsors and industry partners are looking for.

MS. RUSCH: Wonderful. Thank you so much, Audrey. And Lavon, how about you? (Inaudible) – differently?

MS. NELSON: Well, to be brief then, we've already hit the upfront training with the community colleges. So I think we would be – (inaudible) – on that, just some more operational elements and work with them on employer engagement.

Work a little bit more with them on the program models just to make sure that – they're all a little different, but they follow that same chart that you saw earlier. So they're starting and stopping at different points along the way, but just to check in on that a little bit earlier.

Additionally, once again too on the pre-apprentice, we'd work with them a little earlier on pre-apprenticeship. Although that really hasn't been an issue in terms of getting pre-apprenticeship because we had that bridge at the beginning of the model and then we have the pre-apprenticeship and then to apprenticeship. But just do some early work with them on that.

The biggie would have been earlier awareness focused on the data collection. We're doing a spreadsheet and our policy and research people literally have to go in – because you know, you can't submit it with any errors. So when it comes to validation of all of the logistics of it, they're actually double-checking and making sure there are no errors. And so they are checking the validity between the if-then statement throughout the document so that it is being submitted with no errors.

MS. RUSCH: Great. Great. Thank you so much. And let's hear from Denise at SUNY and your PIRL data collection system.

MS. ZIESKE: Great. Thank you. And I think the biggest thing for us was that we didn't build a whole lot of planning time into our timeline. So we just were thinking that we were going to get started, we were going to start recruiting, start having apprentices at the beginning; and that didn't happen. So it really took a whole lot longer to hire than we thought it might.

And again, we talked already about the development of the collection system, which I know all of you are going through right now. And we were really hesitant to bring on a lot of people if we didn't feel that we could report that data accurately.

So again, we spent so much time really digging into the PIRLs because we were very concerned that if we didn't get things right in the beginning, trying to fix and correct that data after we'd already reported it would be a huge issue.

So you heard a little bit about uploading. And I hear you guys just did your first reports. We definitely struggled on our first report where we uploaded data. We went back and forth and back and forth many times. I think we only went back and forth four times our last report, so we're getting better. But even with us digging into all this, we still are missing some of those PIRL elements and not getting things quite right.

One of them – the thing that's very difficult, I think, is that we have to report – and I'm guessing that you do too – year/year/year (sic), month/month, day/day, which is not a normal time for people to provide us the data. They don't normally think of putting it that way. And we missed one of the dates and it was year/year/year (sic), day/day, month/month, so that one got rejected.

So again, I think really knowing and understanding that you have to scrutinize this data before you upload it was something really important.

And given all that, I see this actually ties to one of the questions in the chat as well, is we should have had much lower numbers in the beginning and then built up to our numbers a little bit later on. So we definitely missed our performance measure target for year one due to the timing that it was to put this together as well as COVID, because COVID apparently also made a big impact in what we were able to do.

One thing that we've really been looking for – but I think, again, I want to just give you guys a good warning on as you're looking at this – is making sure you have someone with really strong financial capabilities.

We are super lucky. Our State University of New York has what we call our Research Foundation and they are the entity that works on our behalf to apply for all grants. So they have experts in terms of finances and they have all of our tracking systems. So all of the finances – (inaudible). Whenever I have questions, I can talk through it with them. We work with them on the whole cost share and they've just been a huge resource for us that I don't know what I would have done had I been trying to tackle all of these pieces on my own.

And the last thing is don't be scared of using Zoom for events. Again, we really, when we started this, thought that we had to do everything in person and that we weren't going to be able to do things during this time of kind of pause. And we found that they actually are pretty effective for conversations and even some outreach.

Again, we're struggling with that follow up after the outreach. But getting people there to spread the word has been really helpful using Zoom.

So those are my last quick points.

MS. RUSCH: Wonderful. Yeah. And whether it's Zoom or WebEx or Adobe Connect, I'm sure they're all very similar. Great point.

All right. We do have a little bit of time for questions. I know that a number have come up and I hope that we can get to them all. Let me just look through.

Let me ask Purdue University, how about any – do you have any recommendations for how to best keep employers engaged if they're in a wait-and-see period due to COVID?

MS. UMBERGER: Yeah. I think we've – some others have touched on it. But it really comes down to the communications. If you've got someone who said, yeah, I'm interested but come back later on, periodically send emails. Go through and send maybe really cool reports that relate to your industry area, like if you're in manufacturing or whatever it may be. Just to keep that touchpoint going.

And then what I always would recommend is find out from them, well, when can I can get back? When do you think you'll be ready? Kind of give me a rough idea.

Like, I'm thinking of one employer right now who was ready to go and sign the dotted line. They were moving through the process and then COVID hit. And then they're like, well, OK, we'll come back; we'll, wait. And then I said, well, when is waiting? Well, I want to go and put it in my budget for next year. Well, when do you do your budget? Well, October. So great. We're going to have a conversation late September so we can make sure this is in your budget. That's the type of stuff you do.

So you kind of pull that information, build that relationship, and keep those touchpoints going is really what you've got to do.

MS. RUSCH: That's great information and great insight. Anyone else from our presenter team that would like to maybe touch on that question about keeping employers engaged or getting them back engaged? (Pause.)

I know it's definitely something that our Scaling Apprenticeship team has been struggling with. And so we're always open to ideas and hearing from everyone about what they're doing. So feel free to even – even if you do, someone in the audience, have some ideas, feel free to throw that in the main chat as well.

All right. Let me switch over to Lavon. We have a question about – and I know that Denise from New York also addressed this, but you might have some additional ideas for your annual apprentices targets and whether you're concerned about meeting performance measures?

MS. NELSON: Well, thanks. Yes, I would say we are concerned about meeting performance measures over the four years, particularly as long as the COVID pandemic is having the impact it's having.

So we started out with smaller numbers than we did – I think it was – was it Denise that said she wished they would have started out with smaller numbers? Someone had said that earlier. And so we did start out with smaller numbers and are building.

We're not too bad. Our total number for the four years of participants is 1,728, so we're much smaller than many of the entities that are on this call. But our apprentices are 800 – I think – and 42. So we have a long way to go with apprentices. Now, that's our four-year.

For year one we're at about 50 percent of what we were to be for our participants. However, we are nowhere near where we need to be for our apprentices. So yes, we are concerned because, essentially, the numbers just roll over into the next year.

So we are seeing that some of the colleges are – their numbers are really going up for next year because they did not come anywhere near to meeting this year. And primarily it is due to COVID.

For participants, not too bad; about 50 percent. But the others – apprenticeship, engaging employers, et cetera, hired – no, those are really rough and there is concern. So that's why I said early on we will be focusing on performance measures in our operational meeting and we will internally at ICCB be strategizing ways to work with the colleges on their performance measures. And that of course ties back into coaching, et cetera.

MS. RUSCH: OK. Wonderful. So I think I will just put our DOL leads on notice here and ask you all the questions about annual targets and performance measures. Do you have any input for us – for the audience, I should say?

MS. CADWALLADER: Yeah, thanks, Sue. This is Ayreen, everyone. And really, Lavon really presented some really great strategies on how they can keep performance targets to the forefront in the way their grants are managed. That's certainly a strategy that we would encourage everyone to keep on board.

But I did want to sort of share that the annual target is really a benchmark to help grantees get you towards your four-year period of performance. And so I know in our – in your applications we requested you to add the annual target numbers. However, those target numbers, again, we use them for the purposes of technical assistance. We use them to sort of gauge where grantees might be along the first year, second year of their grant.

And it is something that we work and we inform our FPOs that it's not necessarily a monitoring benchmark, these annual targets; really, the benchmark is the four-year – what you proposed to complete within the four-year grant period of performance.

So because of COVID, we are seeing a lot of concerns of grantees not being able to meet their first year target numbers. And again, like Lavon said, you can just roll it over and hopefully we still have the next three years to make this up. So we're not worried entirely as of yet. I think we're still very hopeful.

MS. RUSCH: Great. Thank you, Ayreen. Yeah. Luckily it's still pretty early on and we have time to make adjustments. So that's a good thing.

I'm going to ask one more question but it's going to have to be a brief response because we have just, like, a minute left. How have – and this is to any one of our presenters. How have the presenters or others approached data validation processes and ensuring DOL – (inaudible) – compliant documentation of data sources is in place?

I know that we did hear a little bit from New York already. But just wondering, any thoughts from any of our other presenters?

MS. UMBERGER: So for Purdue, we – I have a staff member who's dedicated – well, part of her time is dedicated to getting the data, making sure we hit all the different components and all the different elements.

We also have Dr. Carla Johnson who's our specialist on – (inaudible). And between the two of them, they go through and they make sure everything's right on spot. And then of course then myself and some other staff members will come back and verify and check things as well.

So we put a lot of double-checks in there. But we've got people who are just dedicated to going through, making sure the data's clean and valid.

MS. RUSCH: Great. Thank you so much. I think I heard someone else but because we're at our bottom of the hour I'm going to probably close this for now. But we will try to hold onto your questions and make sure that your FPOs are aware of any of these.

Want to just share real quickly that we do have some resources that you'll have access to. These are all hyperlinks, so you can see some of the things that our presenters were talking about today.

And we do also have – you should already have these emails to access DOL and ask some questions. But don't forget to also talk to your FPO.

And lastly, just really want to say thank you so much for joining us today. We hope you were able to gain some great insight and innovation on practices and solutions. And I just want to pass it over real quickly to Ayreen and Zodie to see if you have any final thoughts.

MS. CADWALLADER: This is Ayreen. Again I wanted to thank the Scaling Apprenticeship presenters who shared the practices that you shared today. I think it was a really valuable conversation to support the Closing the Skills Gap grants as they launch into their first year of their grant.

Definitely want to let the Closing the Skills Gap grants know that this is one of the many technical assistance events and activities that we do have planned for you. I know next week we've invited you to the VETS presentation for the VETS pilot apprenticeship program.

And then later in the fall, for both the Scaling Apprenticeship and Closing the Skills Gap grants, we will have – we will be able to meet again as a cohort, as an apprenticeship cohort, in the upcoming virtual conference.

So thank you so much, everyone, for your time this afternoon. I think I should turn it over to Laura now for the last – (inaudible) – closing remarks.

(END)