**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**Plenary: Sector-Based Approaches for Apprenticeships**

**H-1B Apprenticeship Virtual Convening**

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JON VEHLOW: Welcome to "Sector-Based Approaches for Apprenticeships: H-1B Apprenticeship Virtual Convening." So without further ado, I'd like to kick things off to our moderator today, Zodie Makonnen, Scaling Apprenticeship Grant lead, DOL-ETA, Division of Strategic Investments. Zodie?

ZODIE MAKONNEN: Thank you, John. Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the third part early session of our virtual H-1B Apprenticeship convening. We appreciate you taking the time to attend. We have a great panel lined up for you today.

During this panel, we will hear from panelists about their strategy – their effective sector-based strategies, and we'll explore how others can initiate and move to said strategies. I am pleased to introduce our moderator, Jaime Fall, who is the Director of UpSkill America at Aspen Institute. Jaime will be introducing our panelists and facilitating our discussion today. I am going to turn it over to Jaime now. Jaime?

JAIME FALL: Kind, Zodie. Thank you. I appreciate the introduction. Hi everyone. It looks like a great turnout for this session. Thank you. Very hearty individuals, staying with us through the end of the day. But I think it's going to be well worth your time, and we're glad that you're with us.

So, let me just follow up with what Zodie said. We really have a wonderful panel today. But what's really going to make the discussion rich, I think, is if you're all able to participate through the participant questions. Type those in as they come to you, and we'll do our best to get through them. Someone's going to be monitoring that. I'm incapable of multi-tasking, so thankfully we have someone else who is going to do that for us. But, really looking forward to hearing what's on your mind and get your questions addressed.

So with that, it'd be great now to bring our panelists on. I'd like to introduce them to you. I really think it's going to be a wonderful group. Let me begin by introducing Audrey Webb, project director of the Alabama Community College System; Terri Burgess Sandu, director, Talent and Business Innovation at the Lorain County Community College; and Jessica Borza, strategic advisor for the Ohio Manufacturer's Association.

Before we get too deep into our panel, though, let me take just a minute to do some level study, if you don't mind, to make sure that we're all starting the discussion from the same frame of reference. I'll start with the definition of sector strategies. My boss, Maureen Conway, director of the Economic Opportunities Program over at the Aspen Institute, really did a lot of the early work around sector strategies, and a lot of the research around it.

She defined sector strategies as a system approach to workforce development, that's typically on behalf of low-income individuals, that targets specific industries for clusters of occupations, intervenes through a credible organization or set of organizations, supports workers in improving their range of employment-related skills, meets the needs of employers, and creates lasting change in the labor market system to the benefit of both workers and employers. That's obviously really important.

Key components of sector strategies include that they're led by employers. That's to help ensure that it's a demand-driven system, and that people who are trained can end up in good jobs. It's focused on the single industry, usually, though not always. It's regional, and convened by a neutral intermediary. Some of the benefits include systems change in response to business needs.

So when systems can understand what the business needs are, it can respond my quickly. Reduce duplication in system inefficiencies, more streamlined services. Creates a pipeline of future workers. It can help attract funding, and better results in some cases. In many cases, actually. And also networking improvements and opportunities as well. Thank you for indulging me. I just wanted to do that quick bit of level setting. And now it would be great for us just to hear from our panel.

Before we get too deep into our discussion, today it'd be great to get to know a little more about the work that all of our panelists do. Terri, if you don't mind, I might begin with you. If you could tell me – so how does your grant do sector-based strategy partnerships in Ohio?

TERRI BURGESS SANDU: Sure. Hi everyone. Our project – it's called the Ohio Manufacturing Workforce Partnership. It really leverages and is also building capacity to significantly strengthen the quality and impact of education and industry collaboration, both at a state and a regional and local level. Lorain County Community College facilitates Ohio TechNet, which is a consortium of higher education institutions.

It's really focused on peer-to-peer engagement, and how we use that to accelerate innovation in advanced manufacturing education and training. Ohio TechNet was launched in 2014 with 11 community colleges, and today represents all 23 Ohio community colleges, seven public universities, and other partners who represent Ohio technical centers, state agencies, economic development organizations, and others who are just interested in the different topics that we cover.

Complementing that, the Ohio Manufacturer's Association – and you're going to be hearing more about this from Jessica – is building capacity and supporting collaboration across a statewide network of 13 regional industry-led sector partnerships, which are collectively guided by a state manufacturing workforce roadmap that is designed by the Ohio Manufacturer's Association with input from industry leaders, state agency partners, the Governor's office of Workforce Transformation, Shops Ohio, and others.

What that gives us is it really allows us, together to advance a set of shared strategic priorities that we work on every year, we pay attention to that, and how we're going to evaluate the impact of our collective work.

MS. FALL: Great, Terri. Thank you. That's helpful. Before you go though, how long has your organization been around? Prior to the grant? Or more background?

MS. SANDU: Sure. Ohio TechNet was launched originally – our scaling apprenticeship grant – we were working on a IRAP apprenticeship grant that launched last year. But previous to that, Ohio TechNet was formed in 2014, as I mentioned, really as a result of one of the round 4 tax grants. If any of my community college partners are on the webinar here, you know about the tax grants, and certainly with our Department of Labor colleagues.

So we have been able to keep TechNet going, in large part, because of the strategic partnership with OMA. And we're going to be talking more about that. But really recognizing early on with the TechNet grant that, because it was a capacity-building grant, it allowed us to partner with OMA and to set up this strategy, and really make sure that we are focused on things that matter to industry and are problem-solving in real time with our industry partners.

MS. FALL: Great. Thank you. I appreciate that. Thank you.

So, Audrey, how about you? How does the Alabama Community College system do sector-based strategy partnerships through your grant?

AUDREY WEBB: Hi. Good afternoon. Thank you for having me today. For Alabama, with the AlaMat project, it focuses on advanced manufacturing. Our grant started last year, the same as Terri, but before that we had already started working on some partnerships and apprenticeships throughout the state.

One specifically was Fame (sp), I talked about earlier today, and I think they talked about earlier in the week, that had started six years ago. So we are going to build upon that focus, with Fame and Advanced Manufacturing with Industrial Automation students. But then we're going to expand also with other programs, like machine tool, welding, just anything under the advanced manufacturing umbrella, to develop more apprenticeships.

Since our grant started, we've added four new Fame programs in Alabama. And we are currently working on two new ones. So we will definitely be expanding, but not only expanding to new Fame programs, but expanding industry partners within the programs we already have. Mazda Toyota just came here to Alabama, so all of their suppliers are here and are still coming in. So as all these new industries are coming into Alabama, we will be able to develop those partnerships also.

MS. FALL: Great. Thank you. Jessica, let me bring you in. We heard a little bit about, basically what the grants do. I'd love to know really, especially from your viewpoint, what does the partnership look like in practice?

JESSICA BORZA: Sure. Definitely. Hello everyone. As Terri mentioned, we're bringing the collaborative of our industry-led workforce community together with the strong Ohio TechNet for the purposes of the grant, but really for the wider purpose of alignment and systems change. So for us, the way that that works is kind of in holding with the demand-driven notion that you mentioned is a key tenet of sector strategies.

We've got a leadership committee that is made up of industry leaders from across the state that represent different geographies and subsectors within manufacturing, and so forth, that come together usually on a quarterly basis or so.

And they're really guiding the overarching strategy. So they had a big voice in our roadmap that's been guiding our work, and really identifying those areas of alignment that will have the most impact. And there are great sounding boards for us, to make sure that our strategies make sense, and when we need to pivot, then they are helping us to troubleshoot and so forth.

There are kind of three parts to this. The Leadership Committee is the first. The second is what we call our State Agency Committee, for lack of a better name. We need to get more creative there, but it's the group of state agency leaders. It's really important to us that we're bringing together those leaders from our Department of Higher Ed, and Education, and workforce transformation, and workforce development, together to have a two-way dialog with us.

The purpose of those meetings is for us to, obviously, share our roadmap and talk about what's important to us as a partnership, and to industry, but also to hear from them. What's on their minds, what their strategic priorities are, to really identify those points of intersection where can strengthen alignment and strengthen those partnerships.

Then the third aspect of that is our Industry Sector Partnership Intermediary Committee. These are those neutral conveners from across the state, who are working at the local and the regional level, to convene conversations with their sector partnerships. So we're bringing them together. And this has been really impactful for us.

We've got sector partnerships that are at various stages of development. Some has been around since early in the 2000s. Others, we've really been intentional to nurture and grow in areas of the state where none existed before. So that's our opportunity and the table to compare best practices, to talk about lessons learned, and we really gain some efficiencies through that process of networking everybody together.

The thing that is wider than all of that is that we have our Ohio Manufacturing Workforce Learning Community, is how we characterize it. And it's anyone who has really opted in, they're interested in these topics, they want to hear more about this, they participate in webinars and annual convenings, and get our communications.

That's a group that, I think, is up to 2,000 strong or so. That's really important to the way that we're approaching this work, because we do consider it to be a learning community, where we're all learning from each other, and we're really trying to figure out how to strengthen the systems that are going to be able to problem-solve and create really great solutions for Ohio manufacturers and workers.

MS. FALL: Great. Thank you. That's an impressive number, too. Let's see, Terri, how about you? What would you like to add to that, from your viewpoint?

Terri, it looks like you're on mute right now.

MS. SANDU: Yep. Thank you. You've heard from me about how we're trying to keep our educational partners organized and really support peer-to-peer innovation. Then, with Jessica, how they're supporting peer-to-peer innovation among industry colleagues. Then how, through this network, we're bringing folks together for set systems change.

So how that looks in grant practice, for example, with our scaling apprenticeship grant, it means true co-leadership. Lorain County Community College is the grantee. Ultimately, we hold fiscal and administrative responsibilities to DOL. But it is true co-leadership. Lorain County Community College and our leadership team for the Ohio Manufacturing Workforce Partnership, along with our colleagues at OMA and others they bring in, we have regular project management meetings, we have strategy meetings, we are jointly planning the technical assistance to our regional partners.

So it really, truly is a sense of shared ownership and shared responsibility on how we're going to get to these very ambitious goals for apprenticeship expansion. And more than that, it's not going to be enough that we just check the box on, have we gotten all of this done for the grant, but being able to answer that long-term so what? How does this advance our vision and our goals for our state long-term, in terms of that strategic vision.

MS. FALL: Great. Thank you. Audrey, how about you? How would you describe your partnership? What does that look like in practice, there in Alabama.

MS. WEBB: OK. Yes, we do have a – the Alabama Community College system as a whole has 24 colleges. Twenty-two of those colleges are working with us on the grant. And four of those colleges are main partners.

So we work with all of the 22 colleges to try to develop these work-based learning programs, whether they're apprenticeships, registered, non-registered, any type of work-based learning under advanced manufacturing. But also we work really close with the industry. Like Terri and Jessica said, the industry partners are really the ones that are in control of this system, because they are the ones that are going to be hiring our students for these apprenticeships. So it's very important to have those relationships with the industry partners.

And our colleges all have an Industry Advisory Board, that they've had for years and years and years, so we built upon those, and use those relationships to start with. Then, as these new companies come in, we work closely with our work board councils, our chambers of commerce, any of those type of government officials and partners that can help us bring in those industry partners.

But it is so important that we understand that the industry partners is really the key and the focus. Because those are the ones that are really going to be hiring the students when this is all said and done. And to keep this going even after our grant is over with, for our students.

MS. FALL: Great. OK. Thank you. So, looking back, how did this form of partnership start in Ohio? Then Audrey, we'll come back to you and find out about Alabama. Terri, would you like to begin there?

MS. SANDU: Sure. And I think earlier, one of my colleagues attended the session on braided funding, and I would say keep that concept in mind. Leverage what you have today, and then build this vision into any proposals that you're working on for the future. There's really two main courses that I want to credit for helping us launch this partnership.

One is an organization called Lift, which, for those who are familiar with the manufacturing USA network, a network of 14 manufacturing and innovation institutes, Lift is one of them. They were really – they have a strong presence in Ohio, and back in 2015, were really encouraging state associations like OMA to really get involved at a leadership level in solving the manufacturing workforce crisis.

And at the same time, as I mentioned, we were fortunate to be managing a round 4 tax grant that not only gave rise to Ohio TechNet, but had some of that capacity building flexibility that we don't always have with grants. And because it was focused on employer engagement, we were able to leverage that to help lend some capacity to OMA as they responded to that call and began to stand up the workforce strategy. I really want to credit Eric Burkland, the president of OMA, Jessica and others on the OMA team, who really brought their expertise around how do you operationalize a long-term vision like this?

I think some of us are do-ers. We're like, let's get in and just do these really cool things. And we did do a lot of cool things, but there also had to be a plan. It's no surprise that when you're working with manufacturers, they want to know what is that end product? And how are we going to get there?

And how are we going to ensure quality over the long run? That's my main advice to all of you. This didn't happen overnight. But I do want to give all of us in Ohio credit, that I think we continue to be really strategic in how we leverage different resources to stand this up, support it, and continue to advance this vision.

MS. FALL: Great. OK. Thank you. Audrey, how about in Alabama? Are you all an overnight success, or has this been something you all have been working on for a long time?

MS. WEBB: I would love to say that we were an overnight success, but that is definitely not true. I want to agree with Terri. This has been developing over years. The grant has really helped, and it's going to really be able to help us expand. But without Fain when we started six years ago and met with Toyota at one of our community colleges, and we've been able to expand on that since. I forgot to mention one of our major partners in our grant, NAM [?] and MI.

Without those guys, the Manufacturing Institute and NAM, then this grant probably wouldn't be possible either. They're a big partner with us, and since they have recently took over Fain with Toyota and that partnership, we are being able to expand even more, with their partnership. And all their contacts they have with industry, it just keeps building. So that's very important to understand that, it's definitely not an overnight venture.

So for these new grants, I think there's a grant that maybe has just started recently, you know, don't get discouraged. Just keep working every – and use your partnerships that you already have. Start with those, and then build on your new partnerships.

During this COVID time, just try to be innovative, try to use these type of platforms to stay in touch with your industry partners. We have regular meetings with our different groups every two weeks, to try to just see what their needs are, what we can do different, and how we can make it better. Just remember that. That's the most important part. Don't give up.

MS. FALL: Audrey, let's stay with that for a second. It would be, I think, a mistake for us to leave this session and not just talk about how this time of the pandemic has really affected your work.

So, if you don't mind, how has that changed things? Are there things that are better? Are there things that are worse? How would you – how are you doing during this really difficult time, because I'm sure that's something that, obviously, all of us are dealing with in different ways.

MS. WEBB: Yes, sir. As you can imagine, especially during the early spring when everything shut down in Alabama, and I'm sure all over the U.S., some of our companies that had expected to get students in the fall weren't able to get those students to start their work-based learning program. And then, some were able to come back right before fall, and able to hire those students.

So, we had a little mixture there, but we were really concerned, there for a while, that a lot of our students wouldn't get the work-based learning needed. Some of our students were laid off, and we had to find new sponsorship for them. But as we waited and continued, it got better on that part. We still weren't where we needed to be for the fall, but I feel very hopeful that spring we'll be able to gain more of those sponsorships.

At first, it was really hard because we can't get into the companies. We couldn't get into the high schools to recruit, and things like that. So we had to use a lot of these-type platforms. But as everybody started getting better, I think we're probably all experts now with Zoom and Teams and so forth, it's made it a little bit easier to do those things in these type platforms. It's still always better to be in person, to be able for these students to go into the plants and tour. Those type things have been put on hold, and they're still on hold for now, but everybody seems to think spring, things will get better.

We are seeing Mazda Toyota starting up, they're hiring people. So we are seeing some hiring out there right now, which is very positive and uplifting to see that. We're just hanging in there and hoping soon that things will pick back up. But we are a little behind on our goals for the first year. But I know that those will pick up too, as the sponsorships pick up.

MS. FALL: Great. OK. Thank you. I appreciate you talking about that. I think that's very helpful. And actually, Terri and Jessica, I'd love to go back to you and get your take on it, since we were just getting Audrey's education take, maybe we should start with you, Terri. Then Jessica, we'll be with you in just a moment. How have things been in Ohio during this time?

MS. SANDU: Sure. Like everyone, if there's a lot of uncertainty, and it depends. Some employers are going strong. We've had, again, OMA and others in the state have taken a leadership role in organizing to create that really important personal protective equipment that we all need.

There's an exciting story there, that I'm sure Jessica can share more about. But it still does create a lot of uncertainty – I know what I've seen with our local companies, hiring freezes and those types of things. That inability to go on the plant floor, and just the HR folks are as overwhelmed as any of us. They are dealing with a lot to stay open. So we are going through a pretty intense review with all of our partners, to look at where they feel.

Because again, because we are statewide, and each region is slightly different, really trying to understand. We have members of our team that are going out with OMA to talk with each of the sector partners who are our partners across the state, as well as our educational partners, to understand, where do we feel we're going to be able to get to, what's happening in those regions?

But we know at least the manufacturing, the needs are still there. It's really that alignment. Are they the same needs? Is this an upscaling issue? Is it a new talent issue? Is it some of both? And Ohio's also doing some really nice – Jobs Ohio and with the Governor's office has launched an initiative called Ohio to Work. That's a really good example where this systems change approach is so important. Because OMA is at the table. But I'll let Jessica talk more about that.

MS. FALL: Great. Jessica, I had an opportunity to speak with manufacturing associations in a different state recently. And we were asking them this question, how are things going? And he used a couple of terms I won't forget soon. He said that he had never seen a crystal ball so cloudy, and that he said that he would describe it as a hot mess.

Because he has some manufacturers that can't keep up with demand, and some that are even in a similar type of work who can't get into the shop, and they're worried about laying people off. Just what incredibly mixed things are right now. So we would just love to hear from you quickly – sorry, it doesn't need to be quickly, how things are going in Ohio, and what you're seeing there from your viewpoint.

MS. BORZA: I wouldn't disagree with those descriptions. Maybe I'll reuse them. It's been difficult. I know our sector partnerships across the state were trying to stay very connected with our manufacturers, but also respectful, knowing that they were dealing with a lot, trying to deal with safety concerns and so forth.

I know we've seen examples where our manufacturers came together even with our education and training providers to help share some of their best practices for social distancing and things like that, to enable that – some of those changes that needed to be made. We took the time to check in, give them space, but then check in.

And we have been seeing vast differences, where we have some manufacturers, Terri mentioned, are Ohio Manufacturing Alliance, which took the lead in identifying what the PPE needs were, and figured out how to connect manufacturers in the supply chain and repurpose their capabilities so that we were able to meet those needs.

So it is a really cool story. So we were able to keep a lot of those potential manufacturing workers working, and working with a purpose, to help us all through this. We're seeing that some of our original plans, when we engaged our manufacturers in the grant writing stage and early stages of planning and implementation, shifted drastically.

So, we thought that we'd have quite a bit of earn and learn strategies that were focused at the entry level with new employees and with hiring being somewhat limited or in changing – in flux. We saw more manufacturers turn to upscaling strategies to stay busy during the down time. But now we're hearing from a lot of manufacturers who are really quite desperate for employees, and we're seeing this strange – not strange, but just different dynamic with the job-seekers that we've never seen before.

I've been in the workforce for a while, and it's difficult to engage those job-seekers to connect them with these great manufacturing career pathways. So we're trying to now figure out how do we help with some of that outreach and recruitment, and then attach them with manufacturers who are committed to these earn and learn strategies. So it's just a really dynamic situation, and it's nice to know that we've got these partnerships so we can work through all of this together.

MS. FALL: Absolutely. Great. Thank you. I appreciate it. So, what are practical steps you would recommend to your peer grantees on how to find or either join that sector strategy to advance their grant goals? Jessica, actually, why don't you go ahead and start, if you don't mind?

MS. BORZA: Sure. Sure. Well, I guess, I think about, Terri mentioned Eric Burklund, who's the president of the OMA, and as he's reflected upon how we're approaching this – he thinks – he's reflected it – he's been around for 30 years in this space, and has talked about how many attempts OMA has made at addressing workforce issues, and how many failed attempts there were.

So, he really credits this as being truly different. It's because of the collaborative approach, the focus on systems change that you've heard us talk about, and really the comprehensive nature of our partnership. This is a very wide range reaching project, so that's really important, and that's the aspect that we're really excited about, and we think is going to make a huge difference here in Ohio. But that doesn't happen overnight, so I guess my advice would be, if you're interested in this kind of work, just find the livewires.

Find the livewires in industry, who's really excited about this, who's passionate about it, who has a little bit of patience to work through where the solutions can be. Then on the systems side, who is doing really interesting work? Who's doing good, innovative work that could kind of anchor it all, and just plug in to what exists, and start talking about what are the common needs when it comes to industry? Start there, of course.

And what are those problems we're trying to solve? And how can we collectively get some alignment around that? What resources do we have? What strengths do we have? What ideas do we have? And just start doing something together. And I think it sort of builds your collaborative muscles a bit. Then you can start to figure out where are the next level gaps? What are the next innovations that we want to work on?

And when you run into that place where existing resources aren't going to cover that innovation that you're really – that big idea that you want to pursue or the scale that you want to take and existing idea – that's really when grants like this come into plan, and they're so – we're so very grateful to have the resources to be able to innovate. That's how we've approached it. And I guess that's the advice I'd give.

MS. FALL: Great. Thank you. Terri, how about you? What advice would you give?

MS. SANDU: I think that Jessica hit on a lot of them. Mainly is, when you're leveraging grants to support this kind of systems change, Jessica used the word "patience." That's key. Problem-solving. And have that spirit of "how might we." We know there are always a set of rules and do's and don'ts and we never want to – you never want to break those rules. You want to follow those rules.

And at the same time, I think our federal agencies are really supportive of supporting innovation within those boundaries. So make use of that, and always ask that question. Can we do that? And if we do that, how do we do it legally? How do we do it within the boundaries of the rules?

So that is – systems change does add a layer of complication. It might be easier to find a way to check your boxes and get your grant work done without that, but there's real value in the long term, so that we're not always solving the same problems five years down the road.

So I'm a big – I think we're all big advocates for it's worth that upfront work, that upfront systems alignment, and finding the way to do it. Following the rules, but where there is flexibility and innovation allowed, push the boundary.

MS. FALL: Great. Thank you. So Audrey, from Alabama's viewpoint, what practical steps would you recommend your peer grantees take on finding, or joining a sector strategy?

MS. WEBB: I loved what Terri and Jessica said from their point of view. And I just want to add on to that at the community college level. One thing that I would do – or what I am doing, actually – is find that community college that's the rock star. Find somebody that's excited, just like Terri and Jessica said, that's read to do something new and innovative. And one thing that we're doing – well, of course we have to look at the industry around that college and see what their needs are.

But then once we figure that out, we'll develop some type of model for that apprenticeship, whether it's registered or not registered, whatever it is. Of course, if they're not registered, we still follow all the principles, the five hallmarks of the registered apprenticeship so that the industry could register it if they want to. And we develop a model. One of the things that I haven't really talked about today is pre-apprenticeships.

We are developing models right now for some of our pre-apprenticeships to build right into our apprenticeships. And we're doing that with our adult ed. Then, have that pipeline for those adult ed students, when they finish their GED and are ready to get into the college-level courses, have that bridge into those courses. Those are perfect candidates for these apprenticeships that we're working for, and new ways to look at adult education. So that's one thing that we're doing with our pre-apprenticeships.

So just find a college that is a rock star, industry partners that are ready and have those needs, then we develop a model. And that model we can use throughout the state. Now, there may need some adjustments, depending on their industry needs in their area, but it's a good model for us to use. Then try to build upon that to meet our grant needs, but also meet our industry partner needs and our students' needs.

MS. FALL: So Audrey, I'll stay with you here, for just a second. A follow-up question to what you just said. So, Jessica just talked about the livewires, right? And trying to find where the livewires are. And you talked about just really trying to find the industry partners.

So, speaking of employers, if there's someone out there who's still at the, having to more or less create this from the beginning – what kind of employers are you looking for? Do you need the large employers on board? Do you need just any employer that's willing to work with you? Do you need those that have the most credibility in the community? What advice would you give around that? Then Jessica and Terri, I would love to get your thoughts as well.

MS. WEBB: What's really cool is some of the programs we're working with, and really all of the programs that we're working with, is that we're trying to build consortiums of industry partners. It's hard to start a brand-new apprenticeship program with a small company that only needs one student or one apprentice. But if we have multiple small companies – say 10 or 20 small companies – then we can start that apprenticeship and it doesn't matter if it's just one apprentice to that company. In Fain we have a consortium.

Sometimes we have a huge OEM like Toyota or Honda or Mazda Toyota. But then we have colleges that doesn't have that big automotive OEM. They have a lot of smaller companies. And with those smaller companies, they can have one per year. We even have some that can only get an apprentice every other year. But with the consortium and using those consortiums in the area, for us it's a good way to develop these programs.

MS. FALL: Great. Terri, Jessica, anything you'd like to add to that? How would you go about prioritizing what type of employers you want to be getting on board for first?

MS. BORZA: I would say that I agree with Audrey. I would add that I think that it's really important to make sure that it's a quality employer, or core employer. So, making sure that they've got a good reputation in the community, a culture of supporting their employees and so forth. I think it's really important to have someone who is influential among their peers. And I don't think that's always just the big guys.

And in fact, I would balance it out to make sure that you've got big and small companies. For us – and we're finding this with the earn and learn strategy – that the value proposition is much different for the big companies and the smaller companies. And it's important to have both perspectives.

But in order to then grow your partnership, it's helpful if they are pretty well networked and they're influential. So, that peer-to-peer communication, I think, can't be beat. So if you can find those companies that are able to articulate what the big vision is, they're a little bit longer-term thinkers, and they appreciate the innovation in the space, those are always characteristics that we look for in the industry champions.

MS. FALL: Great. Thank you. Then, Jessica, let me add one more question to that. Sorry about that. So, who from the company do you want to participate? Is it somebody from HR? Is it a hiring manager? What kind of individual are you looking to really be active on the sector strategy work?

This is an experience in some of my former work in California. Often the company would want to send somebody from their marketing or community relations department. What's the profile of the individual you're looking for?

MS. BORZA: I think at the beginning you really want the highest level of leadership: the owner, the plant manager, a decision maker. Someone who is not just looking to who and how many they need to hire today. But what are their forecasts for the company and related staffing patterns for that three years from now, five years from now.

Because some of this work takes time, so you need that buy-in from those highest levels of leadership to begin with. Then I think it's a wise strategy to ask them to involve those other levels of leadership within their company, though. Because obviously HR has a role. They need to buy-in.

We want to make sure that the leader buys in first, so they can bring the HR person along, in case their practices need to change, or they need to be spending some time in some of these collaborative approaches. And you mentioned marketing. That's a great asset to have them at the table to help push your social media messages and things like that. But at the beginning, I think really looking at those key decision makers at the highest level is really important.

MS. FALL: Right. Terri, I want to turn to you now. But Jessica, thank you for raising the multi-tiered approach. Because in some other past work that I've done, that really is where we saw a lot of relationships break down between employers and workforce system. There just weren't deep connections, and someone would leave the employer, or someone would retire from the state or the county or whatever.

And that really would be a detriment to the relationship and would see employer engagement kind of fall off. So, Terri, anything that you would like to add?

MS. SANDU: I think what both Jessica and Audrey shared were right on. I can share the example, we have our own local sector partnership that formed just about two years ago now. We've got seven or eight local companies. None of them are huge companies. They're significant companies, but it started at that leadership level.

Then what we found in our community, which isn't the same in all sector partnerships, those plant managers or CEOs have now assigned, mostly HR – it's either HR or marketing folks. But it's the company that has signed an MOU. It's the company that's engaged and has made that commitment to identify somebody. So that's super important.

Again, that patience is – seven companies doesn't represent the more than 300 manufacturers that we have in our county, but it is an important start. And they truly are leaders. They are doing amazing work in – you know, part of our role at the college is not only to support their work, behind the scenes kind of stuff, but also we're proud affiliate members and we're proudly helping to promote other companies to get involved and speak to that value proposition about how it helps the industry overall, to streamline what we're all doing.

MS. FALL: Great. OK. Thank you. Appreciate it. So, what are some of the lessons that you've all learned along the way? What are some of the key practices that you're just always going to adhere to? Audrey, do you mind starting?

MS. WEBB: No, sir. I think communication first, and by far, most, is really, really important. So, communication with your industry partners, communication with your workforce boards, chambers, your manufacturing institutes, all your key partners, communication is so important.

Also, I'll add on to what Terry and Jessica were saying about it really needs to be with industry partners deeper than one person. I've seen that actually happen. Before this position, I was at a community college, and the guy that I worked with at the industry left, then my students didn't have anywhere to co-op for a while.

So I built that partnership back up. So, it's really important to have multiple people at that company that you can call to: the HR, the plant manager, the maintenance worker, whoever it is that can help get those students in there. But communication is most important. And also your K-12 system. We don't need to forget as those students are coming up – I know a lot – not particularly with this grant, but with other grants, we used pre-apprenticeships in high school.

And those are the students, too, that you're going to be hopefully putting in your apprenticeships when they graduate high school. So it's important to have that relationship with your K-12. But communication, relationships are key to – the key to good practices. Another thing that I just wanted to mention real quickly that Jessica was talking about with your industry partners, to make sure that they are the type of partners you want to work with.

That's one thing in the Fain program that we're real strict about, it has to be a safe working environment, it has to be a respectable company, it's going to be a company that will help us recruit. So they're going to have to have buy-in to the programs also. And there have been companies that we've turned down. Not to be in a program because they were a dangerous type environment for our students, or just not the type of environment that we would want. So those are very, very important and practices that we need to adhere to.

MS. FALL: Yeah. Great. Thank you. Good points. So, Jessica, how about you? What are some of the lessons that you've learned along the way, and what are some of the key practices that you adhere to now?

MS. BORZA: I think communication was top of my list too. I think just communicating, over-communicating, I suppose, even. Especially when you're working on big systems change is really important. This is complicated work. There's a lot of levels, there are many stakeholders. Even just among the team.

Terri and I are on the phone together at least once a week, and I feel like I wish we had more time that we could carve out to think and talk big brainstorms and those kinds of things. But also just continuing to use tools to stay on the same page as we're moving through the project work and through the bigger picture work. I think just not underestimating the time it takes to make progress in systems change.

And also we're trying to figure out a good way to capture systems change as we go and celebrate the success. Because that's not the thing that – that's not a metric on our grant scorecard, but it is the real important work that's going to have the lasting change. So, figuring that out and making sure that we're capturing that, and being persistent along the way. I've been joking lately about not starting a big federal project during a pandemic, but I guess we couldn't have had – (inaudible).

MS. FALL: No. It's a little late to go back on that one now. I think that ship's already sailed. Terri, how about you?

MS. SANDU: Yeah, similarly, show how a sector strategy advances other people's goals. At the end of the day, we have to think like business development folks, and understand whose problem are we solving? So, who else is trying to solve similar challenges to the ones that you want to solve? In whatever sector you are in. Then really approach it that way, from the mindset of, how do I help advance your goal?

Where you can, integrate approaches into project budgets. Either grants that you already have, grants you are writing, or other ways that you can generate revenue. We've had great success – again, thanks to OMA's leadership and partnership with all of our partners at Ohio TechNet and others.

Our ohio governor and lieutenant governor have really prioritized workforce development and industry-led innovation. And that led to some really significant opportunities for this collaboration to inform state policy and state investments. Even with the pandemic. And especially, I would say, with the pandemic.

And as the state looks at how it can direct investments that will close that gap, as Jessica was talking about, between people who need work and who have had no experience in manufacturing, with those employers who do need those entry-level workers. I've mentioned the Manufacturing Innovations Institute.

Again, it's just paying attention – that paying attention to who else is trying to solve these problems, and how do we align? And picking and choosing. Because it does take that upfront relationship-building, that you have to then spend that time understanding what those needs are, that those potential partners are trying to address and if you can really help offer some solutions through these kind of sector strategies.

MS. FALL: Thank you, Terri. So actually, that's a great point, really, about solving other people's problems. And Jessica, if you don't mind, I'd like to come back to you and get kind of that employer perspective on this, if you would, please.

So, when people are meeting with employers, what are the things that they can talk to the employers about, that's going to maybe have a better chance of resonating with them, to want to get them on board with the sector strategy approach?

Surely someone should go into and talk to their employer about a systems change federal grant that they want to get them engaged in. Is that the type of language they use, or, what are the things that are really going to appeal to the employers, that they're going to want to hear, that you think will improve the chances of them wanting to engage?

MS. BORZA: You know, we always start with the needs of the manufacturer. So, really talking about what is keeping them up at night, what are their main workforce challenges? And kind of backing into the solutions that we have.

And we always then talk about how by joining the sector partnership approach, that they're going to have more influence, they're going to be able to shape the solutions, they're going to be able to have a louder voice in the community. If their primary need is attraction, that they're looking to recruit more employees, for example, then we talk about the work that we're doing in the schools to get more young people excited about manufacturing careers.

If they're concerned about retention, then we talk about earn and learn strategies as a wonderful opportunity to engage your employees and show them that they've got a growth path internally. But definitely centering the conversation around what they need, then as you mentioned, kind of adjusting your language. We talk about sourcing training providers instead of – I don't know how else you'd say it.

But really kind of convert it to their language and the things that are important to them. Then kind of showing them the way, then, once you identify the solutions that are going to be the – kind of the hook and the thing to catch their attention first. We find that many of our manufacturers really appreciate the knowledge sharing and the networking that goes on among the partnership as much as they do the specific initiatives or projects that we're working on. They also appreciate learning about ways that they can improve their own business practices.

So we're not just plopping an earn and learn strategy down in their lap; we're talking about how do you – how could structured on-the-job training be more valuable than the more informal way that you're doing on the job training now? How could pairing that with related technical instruction accelerate learning and make it stick and be a quality assurance?

Things like that are some of the things that we tend to try to focus on when we're trying to engage manufacturers; especially at the beginning, but then also when we're presenting new solutions or engaging them in some of the dialogue about new challenges that they have.

MS. FALL: Great. Thank you. So Audrey, let's go back to you. Could you talk a little bit about what some of your mid- and long-term goals are for the partnership that you have? Just beyond the current grant?

MS. WEBB: Yes, sir. Well, we have – we're wanting to meet the grant that we have now, 5,000 apprenticeships. Whether they're pre-apprenticeships or apprenticeships. Right now we have them split 2,500/2,500. Our governor has a plan of 500,000 new credentials by 2025. So that's another goal that we have towards this grant.

But even beyond that, as an engineer, and I've worked in advanced manufacturing as an instructor when I taught at the community college and as a project director, some of the goals that I have is to get a work-based learning program in every one of our CTE programs in all of our community colleges, but not even just in our CTE programs.

We need to have work-based learning programs in all of our college programs. So, one thing that I had saw when I was first an instructor – and even in industry – is that our industry partners really want that student that's had some kind of work-based learning in their degree pathway.

So I think it's really important that we have some – and not just a co-op where a student is taking their classes and then working at McDonald's, for instance. That's great. That's good work experience, but to work somewhere that goes along with the degree that they're getting, so that when they get out, they have that real experience, that professional behavior, the experience to go along with what degree they're working with. I think that would be a great goal for our state, in Alabama, to do.

MS. FALL: Wonderful. And Terri, how about you? From Ohio's viewpoint? What are some of your mid- or long-term goals you're working toward with your partnership beyond the current grant?

Terri: Sure. Well, I know Eric will talk about, we want to be the state the solves the manufacturing workforce crisis. So game on, Alabama, and everybody else. I really appreciate that OMA has really worked on giving us a road map, which they refresh every year. And that, again, thanks to Jessica's leadership, and Eric's and others.

So, I think, I don't know, Jessica, if we can even share that website, ohiomfg.com. You go to their workforce services page. It's a public document. I recommend people take a look at it. But you know, with their leadership committee have set out a set of key performance indicators to help us know directionally, are we headed in the right direction?

And I really take that to heart, in terms of my work as a public servant and as an employee of a community college as part of our state higher education system. If this is what industry is telling us, directionally, we need to do, how am I supporting that? Jessica, I'll bounce it over to you, if you want to add anything to that.

MS. BORZA: I mean, there are – the kinds of things that you'll find in the road map are common career pathways, sorting out the landscape of industry credentials to help our landscape of education providers really have common language with industry. Continuing to push in education innovation to be more responsive to the needs of industry.

And, then we always have a policy agenda, which kind of reflects all of that. How are we moving our state systems to be in alignment with the innovative work that's happening on the ground, and kind of lifting up those best practices and things like that.

MS. FALL: So Jessica, while we're with you, let me just ask one last question here in about the last minute and a half that we have remaining. Could you talk a little bit about advanced manufacturing and what you're seeing there?

What's the situation in Ohio? Where are you having the greatest impact with that? Are you seeing lots of manufacturers going to advanced manufacturing and using more robotics and automated systems? You know, specifically around your partnership? Where are you having an impact? Where is that a topic?

MS. BORZA: Yeah, it's been a hot topic, actually. Terri and her team have been leading the work in partnership with OMA to really look at automation and robotics, both from the current needs – and we definitely are seeing those and trying to understand where do programs exist, how can we share those out among the Ohio TechNet with our other education and training providers so that they can build up the capacity to train new and existing workers as more and more of our manufacturers are going to automation and robotics. But, also looking at tech adoption strategies.

And so, how do we get more of our manufacturers to move there. So we've got really interesting partnerships with our manufacturing extension partnership, and our development services agency, where they're working on the tech adoption front, and now we're going to marry that up with our workforce development strategy. Terri, you might add details to that since you've been so ingrained in that.

MS. SANDU: Well, we still see the priority needs are things like machine and industrial maintenance. And just those front-line production workers. What we're starting to hear – and this comes from one of our partners, one of the MEPs who, what they're hearing from industry is it's really going to be, as we move into more automation, is it's going to be more about upscaling their existing workforce.

The part of what's holding companies back is that fear that, well, if I take Audrey off the production line, she's one of my best, most talented frontline workers, how am I going to backfill Audrey? So our employers really have to have confidence that all of these systems that we're doing are going to have that talent pipeline ready so that they can make those investments and remain competitive.

Because we do know that that's going to be critical for our companies to stay competitive. And I would guess that's true in other fields as well. Health care, IT, solving this upscaling crisis issues – these upscaling challenges is really intimately tied to really making sure they feel confident that there will be people to backfill those frontline positions.

MS. FALL: Great. Well thank you. It looks like our time is at an end. So let me just thank all of you for listening in, for our panelists especially. We really appreciate the opportunity to talk about this topic today.

So, thank you Audrey Webb, Terri Burgess Sandu, and Jessica Borza. We really appreciate your input today and wish you the best at what continues to be a very difficult time. Let's hope for better days ahead. OK? And now back to you, John, to help wrap things up for the day.

(END)