**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**Expanding Opportunity: Apprenticeships for Individuals with Disabilities**

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JONATHAN VEHLOW: Welcome to "Expanding Opportunity: Apprenticeships for Individuals with Disabilities." So without further ado, I'd like to kick things off to our moderator today, Natalie Linton, program analyst, Office of Apprenticeship, U.S. Department of Labor with the Employment and Training Administration. Natalie?

NATALIE LINTON: Thank you, John. Hello, everyone, and thank you for joining us for today's webinar. As many of you know, October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month, and in honor of that, OA is hosting this webinar, Expanding Opportunity, Apprenticeships for Individuals with Disabilities.

In this webinar, experts in hiring and retaining individuals as apprentices will share strategies sponsors are using to develop and maintain programs that are working – that are welcoming and working with individuals with disabilities.

We have two great guests with us today, if we can next slide, please. Thank you. We have, first, Carolyn Jones who is a senior policy advisor for the Office of Disability Employment Policy with the U.S. Department of Labor. And additionally, we have Vinz Koller who is a senior strategist with Social Policy Research Associates. Try saying that three times quickly.

And before we begin, we'd like to have you all just take a quick – let us know what session you're in – I'm sorry – what organization you're with. So if you can please type the number that best fits or reflects your organization into the chat box. So, again, we see there on the screen the types of organizations, if you could just let us know which ones you're with. We're just curious to see who our partners are.

So for those of you who are typing it in, there is a box there that you click on the type of agency or organization you're with. And it will show up in a poll. We're taking a poll here. So again, please vote by clicking on the bubble that shows up for your type of organization in the box to your right.

Oh, great. Looks like we have a wonderful array of folks coming from apprenticeship sponsors to folks in the Office of Apprenticeship. Hello, all my colleagues out there. We have our federal agencies as well, and very happy to see so many disability-related organization folks on the call.

All right. So let's continue to have you poll in as we go along here. So let's continue.

So today's objectives for the webinar, we have a few objectives here. First, we want to provide you with strategies to ensure apprenticeship programs are inclusive and welcoming for individuals with disabilities.

Second, we want to review the requirements in the apprenticeship EEO regulations regarding individuals with disabilities and offering the best practices for – (inaudible) – them and discussing those innovative approaches to inclusion that sponsors are engaged in.

And finally, we want to also have some time during the presentation for questions and answers. So you're welcome to type your questions into the chat window as they come to mind, and we'll cover as many questions as possible when we get to that point. So, again, feel free to type in your questions at any time.

All right. So now, I'll begin by turning this over to Carolyn Jones with the Office of Disability Employment Policy. Carolyn, take it away.

MR. VEHLOW: And, Carolyn, you might be on mute right now if you're talking. Just make sure to unmute your phone.

CAROLYN JONES: Yes. Sorry about that, guys. Thank you very much. I really, really appreciate the opportunity to connect with you today virtually to spotlight inclusive apprenticeship. I'm always super excited to connect with my peers, apprenticeship sponsors, policymakers, and workforce practitioners as we continue to share promising workforce development approaches for youth and adults with disabilities from research-based initiatives such as ODEP's apprenticeship inclusion model or AIM for short, which you will learn more about later in this presentation. Next slide.

As mentioned earlier, I am a senior policy advisor at the Office of Disability Employment Policy or ODEP. ODEP is a small non-regulatory agency within the U.S. Department of Labor. We do not have regulatory powers. We coordinate with employers and government at all levels to increase workplace success and adoption of inclusive employment policies and practices for people with disabilities. Next slide.

In July we celebrated the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act or ADA. This month, October 2020, we are recognizing the 75th anniversary of National Disability Employment Awareness Month or NDEAM as we so call it, where employers and practitioners across the nation are really shining a spotlight on the importance and accomplishments of Americans with disabilities.

Many employers are recognizing greater opportunities for competitive integrated employment and career pathways for Americans with disabilities, including through approaches like inclusive apprenticeship and work-based learning initiatives.

This milestone is being commemorated with a range of events and activities centered on the theme increasing access and opportunity. It's not too late to get involved. You can visit ODEP's NDEAM page provided in today's presentation for ways and resources to plan your NDEAM event. So you still have a few days remaining.

With that, I will pause there and return it to Natalie. Thanks again for the opportunity. Next slide.

MS. LINTON: Great. Thank you so much, Carolyn. So let's talk a little bit about the EEO regulations and apprenticeship and individuals with disabilities. So for a quick refresher on what the apprenticeship EEO regulations say about the inclusion of individuals with disabilities, we want to keep in mind the 7 percent disability goal.

The regulations set an aspirational goal that 7 percent of a program's apprentices are qualified individuals with disabilities. This goal is simply that, a benchmark to measure progress towards the inclusion of additional qualified individuals with disabilities into the program. It is not a quota or a level that each sponsor is required to meet.

That said, sponsors are expected to take steps to promote the inclusion of more individuals with disabilities. And note that this is individuals who are qualified for the program who should be considered. Sponsors are never required to hire individuals who do not have the necessary qualifications for program entry. Next slide, please.

So increasing the proportion of individuals with disabilities in apprenticeship programs is a win-win for sponsors and apprentices. As the labor market continues to tighten, smart sponsors recruit widely to find all sources of qualified and talent for their programs, and individuals with disabilities can be a value, a largely untapped source of that talent.

In most fields today, teamwork, flexibility, and creative problem solving are prime skills for workers to have. Many individuals with disabilities have honed these skills and can be valuable assets to apprenticeship teams.

Additionally, research has shown that the public views organizations that employ individuals with disabilities more favorably than those that do not. The bottom line is that sponsors have many good reasons to recruit and hire more individuals with disabilities into their programs. Next slide.

There's a process by which sponsors will identify each of their apprentices and applicants for apprenticeship those that have disabilities. First, let me emphasize that the invitation process applies only to those registered apprenticeship program sponsors that are required to develop affirmative action plans or AAPs, as you'll hear it called. Generally, this is sponsors with five or more apprentices who do not already have an approved EEO program in place under laws or regulations.

Sponsors to whom this applies will invite their apprentices to voluntarily self-identify if they have a disability. Same for program applicants who must be invited to voluntarily self-identify at the time of application and then again if they are hired. For apprentices and applicants, voluntary self-identification will be documented on the appropriately named voluntary disability disclosure form, also known as Form 671.

The form is available on the apprenticeship EEO website on the disability self-identification page. And you see the link there, for those of you who'd like to copy and paste this directly. I do believe we may also have this in our resources tab there for you.

Individuals indicate only if they have a disability, not what type of disability, and the information will be kept confidential and may not be used for any employment decisions. Individuals are protected from disability discrimination, whether or not they disclose a disability.

Again, for more information on this process, please refer to the Guide for Apprenticeship Sponsors, which is located on the apprenticeship EEO website on the disability self-identification page and at the address listed on the slide there.

So now, we'll turn to a model apprenticeship inclusion program, and I'll turn to Vinz Koller who's the senior strategist for capacity building with Social Policy Research Associates. Vinz?

VINZ KOLLER: Thank you, Natalie, and thanks, everyone, for joining us today. Really appreciate it. My name is Vinz Koller. I'm with Social Policy Research Associates. We are a small research consulting and capacity building and technical assistance firm; been doing work for the Department of Labor in particular for many, many years doing research studies of all sort of the way major workforce programs the department has run. And we've also been the lead in this apprenticeship inclusion model that I'll talk about a little more. We can go to the next slide.

The goal of the model has been to expand the career pathways using apprenticeship for people with disabilities to increase the employer rate that – employment rate for people with disability, obviously. And it's been done in partnership with Real House Incorporated, a partner to us, and also at JFF, Jobs For the Future, where we've had four pilots in the country working on expanding pathways for people with different learning styles or needs.

We've looked at finding ways – built these pathways into competitive integrated employment and to document how – what kind of practices can we find that are beneficial and could be replicated. Though the pilot phase of the project is winding down, the programs continue. They were there before the pilot, and they'll be there afterwards. And we're still in the mode of documenting some of the learnings that the project has provided in a brief.

So I'll mention some of those briefs as I'm talking about the project over the next few slides. They're not – they're shortly before they're released. So we'll make sure when we provide some site for you that you can look to, and as soon as the briefs are released, they will be posted there as well. Next slide.

So let's look at the opportunity that apprenticeship presents in this context. It's been alluded to before. Obviously, we – I think – I don't have to tell this group here on this call what the benefits are of apprenticeship in general. I don't – you probably wouldn't be here if you didn't believe in it, but there are some direct benefits and indirect benefits that help folks in transition from either education into a career or say after a layoff that requires a change in a career trajectory.

Many of the reasons that make apprenticeship a winning strategy in general are also relevant for an inclusive career pathway. So let's look at a few of them.

One of the complaints that we hear from employers is that job candidates are not ready for the work that they're applying for. They may not have experience or have demonstrated interpersonal skills that the employer is looking for. And of course, apprenticeship is really meant to turn that around. It allows an employer to shift from the role of consumer of talent to a producer of talent.

And employers, therefore, are able to shape the candidates in ways they would like that allows them to provide a fit. And both the employer and the candidates or the trainee or the apprentice also sees over the course of the apprenticeship that there is a fit and, in some cases, there isn't. That's not a bad outcome. That happens in regular life. That happens on jobs all the time.

Now, it's very hard for a jobseeker who doesn't have work experience to make the transition into a new career without having the opportunity to demonstrate that they can do the job. And so the apprenticeship really is the bridge that connects the two. The jobseeker gets to see how the work is really done. The hosting company gets to see how the employee does the work.

Now, we all know this is why the first bullet on this slide is about implicit bias. We – obviously, implicit bias plays a big role into how we make choices in life and employment – in employment it's like that as well. It's much more likely that we pick people who look like us, act like us, talk like us because that is one of the way we manage risk in life and in employment, in every situation.

There are some mitigation efforts, and we've just heard about a few, to make sure that this does not become a source of kind of the legal discrimination. But again, implicit bias is implicit and, therefore, we're not aware of it. And in the workplace it has a somewhat more– (inaudible) – effort. It keeps groups of people who traditionally have not been part of an occupation out of that consideration.

And of course, the question is, can an apprenticeship, for example, also in this context help with bridging that gap? And can it actually help us reduce implicit bias because, again, what we're trying to do is provide an onramp into an occupation, and as part of that onramp allow the participants who come through an apprenticeship program to demonstrate ability that they might not otherwise be able to.

Now, in order to do that, the program, obviously, has to work on making sure that, in and of itself, it doesn't just repeat what happens in the workplace in general. But one of the benefits, as I mentioned before, of having apprenticeship as a – essentially a risk mitigation measure – and risk in this context is often a perceived risk. It's not a real risk. Sometimes it's just a perceived risk – we, again, eliminate people from consideration because we think they're not going to make it.

I know there are many jobs that have lifting requirements that have nothing to do with the job itself. This job could be done lifting anything heavier than a paperweight or a piece of paper, frankly, and yet those exclusionary rules are still in place just in case somebody might have to move something.

So, again, these are all steps that, essentially, through an apprenticeship program, one – and I'm not talking about now, the way the job is described, but an apprenticeship program can take steps to be a bridge that provides the opportunity to both acquire the knowledge and demonstrate capability and even fit, and the fit is often this filter that is to check whether or not someone is a worthy risk for an employer.

And so the benefit – if everyone that knows that there's a new person coming in and that person is an apprentice, then, essentially, the perceived risk of hiring that new person, being whether that person fits the mold, as it were, goes down. And so in some ways this is one way which an apprenticeship can be – it's not guaranteed to be, if it's not done well, but it can be, again, the mitigation factor to reduce implicit bias as opposed to increase it or just keep it neutral.

So this works both ways. Apprenticeships offer opportunities, and they can flourish as a diversity engine. And that's the idea behind the inclusion model is to figure out what is it that is necessary to make sure that the choices that are offered are diverse. And, of course, one of the things that is happening in the apprenticeship world is the diversity of the jobs that are becoming available are also a factor.

We'll look at it a little bit in a minute here in how the learning that happened has also shifted partly the COVID effect of having more virtual trainings available. And those also create an inclusion opportunity. Let's go to the next slide.

So here's some of the lessons of the inclusion model. Some of these seem – some are obvious, but they're still important to consider.

First of all, this is a partnership effort. This work cannot be done alone. Inclusive apprenticeships require inclusive partnerships, and that means finding individuals and looking at a diverse apprenticeship applicant pool that is maybe not always present. So that requires partnership with others.

It also requires training in staff and in the partners that you're working with because, again, any of the issues that I've alluded to and that have been mentioned before the staff may not be fully aware of. If this is your bread and butter, if you work in this field and you're constantly looking at inclusion, it is, but many of the partners, the workforce boards, the job centers, the apprenticeship – the existing apprenticeship programs, this is not their bread and butter. So they need to be sort of brought up to speed on inclusion issues.

There is some work to be done on self-advocacy for participants. This has to do with self-disclosure on – and also on accommodation alone to make these programs a reality. So all of that is relevant. If an applicant doesn't know how to do this, then they are not as likely to have a good comeback if the topic comes up both during the pre-apprenticeship, the recruitment phase, the onboarding phase, but also later. Or they may take themselves out of a pool for consideration simply because they don't see anyone who looks and acts like them. And so, clearly, self-advocacy is an important aspect, and that was found to be true as part of the pilot as well.

And then we'll spend a little more time on this. Applying universal design for learning principles has shown to be important. This was part of the pilot as well. There's a whole body of work on universal design and how it's relevant in its adapted form to learning and training design.

For the training it means that it is accessible. That's sort of a level one, but also that it is designed with the idea of universal access from the beginning. And I would say this is, again, an area where technology has been our friend. Clearly, some of our work, the training has been more accessible over time. But, again, that's not a guarantee. Let's go to the next slide.

So many of the resources that I'm going to mention are – can be found on the project website. So we'll put that website URL in the chat where you can find the – some toolkits and relevant resources and there will be more over time as they get released from – they get through the clearance process.

So we've sort of put this into what I would call a loose learning framework on inclusive apprenticeship with four categories of steps to take and, again, tools to apply. They have to do with the onboarding process, the – what happens pre-apprenticeship. I don't mean the pre-apprenticeship program. I mean just what happens before an apprenticeship actually kicks in, what happens on the job as part of the training process, the portion that happens on the job in training. What is the related training role, and then also what are some other factors that may play a role? So let's take a look on the next slide at the inclusive – at the onboarding and pre-apprenticeship component.

One of the keys in the onboarding process is to work with organizations that have experience in drawing in people with disabilities. So take advantage of community-based organizations, perhaps, that are specialized.

We have the benefit of working with H-CAP, just as one example, the Healthcare Advancement Program, as an intermediary that's one of the pilots, and they've compiled a number of resources that are not just specialized on inclusion but they, in and of themselves, are inclusive. So there's a toolkit that they have. Again, will be available through our – the website that's in the chat, and there are some partner – partnership documents. There's a primer on partnership that you can go on there. It shows you how they went about in building these partnerships in particular.

Another example I want to mention are what Apprenti, another partner of ours on this project and one of the pilot sites, an organization that works with IT employers and helps them develop apprenticeship programs for their various IT occupations, they have offered to their sites, to their employers essentially an audit.

It includes an audit of their website, their promotional materials, and their entrance requirements to see what of the things, again, they are requiring are really truly requirements for the job and what are, essentially, sometimes filters that might become barriers, often inadvertent barriers, that one should remove in order to have the benefit of having an inclusive applicant pool. So that's a possibility, this audit of how do you appear to the outside world and are you inclusive in that sense?

Another example of an inclusion strategy is the IMT Folio that was – that's a partnership between CAST and the JFF and that's worked on this as part of AIM but again also prior to AIM and will continue to do so. It's essentially an e-portfolio that assesses the readiness for industrial manufacturing technician apprenticeship. And the reason it came into being, IMT intermediaries identified that traditional assessments that use a test, they were essentially a barrier for many individuals, in particular for individuals with disabilities, and including individual with learning disabilities.

And so the IMT Folio is essentially a technology solution that provides an ongoing platform for individuals to demonstrate their mastery of skills and then includes – there's a number of features that are incorporated. So the team that worked on this included Jobs For the Future, the Wisconsin regional training partnership, and CAST. That's the technology and really an expert in universal design for learning.

And so that's, again, another example of how a – what typically has been a barrier into an apprenticeship program, in this case industrial manufacturing, has been turned into something that no longer should be a barrier. Let's take a look at the next slide.

On-the-job training also has some particular characteristics that require some adaptation in order to make sure that they're universally accessible. And so some work processes can benefit from adaptation. There will be more of this forthcoming information in the practice brief that's soon to be released on universal design learning.

And, clearly, one of the ways in which this is – can be addressed and ODEP has always been a strong advocate for universal approach in an inclusion – in an inclusionary sense. So having a way to align your learning so that it is inclusive actually has a lot of benefits for all participants.

We think of this sometimes as sort of a accommodation to individuals with disabilities, but by making it universal, it becomes a benefit to everyone just as we have right now captioning that for some of us who may not need it is extremely beneficial and helps us retain the information, go back to it, scroll through it, and all sorts of ways. That was not necessarily the original intent, but it obviously has these ancillary benefits which can be crucial benefits. I'll say more about UDL after we get through the framework. So let's look at the next slide.

So in the related training category, of course we all have become experts in virtual training now. We're sitting on Zoom calls and Adobe Connect rooms and WebExes all day long. And to some extent – I mentioned this earlier – inadvertently, this training has become more accessible in some ways.

So technology can be our friend, but as we all know, it can also be our nemesis. So as we move forward into the virtual world, we have to make sure that we leave no one behind, and that includes multi-modal accessibility. It includes the captioning and other ways in which training has to be made accessible. And it – and in our pilots, what ended up also being important is that the procurement of training partners needs to also be adapted to ensure that those who are trainers actually are the right trainers to be inclusive. And so this is a procurement rule. Again, this is something that Apprenti was working on as part of the AIM project. Take a look at the next slide.

So among the other supports that are important, there is a whole body of work around pre-apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs. So these are actual programs that lead someone and to make someone ready to be in a registered apprenticeship program. And the key there is to make sure that they're both aligned in the curriculum to entry requirements of the registered apprenticeship program.

So, obviously, a pre-apprenticeship program has to lead to an apprenticeship program, otherwise it can hardly be called pre. But it also needs to be aligned and making sure that those programs are actually onramps in a good way and, again, not the filters that might keep someone out. So that may mean that the training methodology has to be adapted as well, that the curricula of these pre-apprenticeship programs has to become more accessible to students with disabilities.

And, again, accessibility can range from using textbooks that are readable on a computer, tablet, or other mobile device. Again, those – they may not have been used – designed that way originally, but now, they probably would become – would have to be adapted anyway. And so making sure that those pre-apprenticeship programs are also accessible. There's another brief that the project is going to release soon on the – sort of the whole modalities – set of modalities within the pre-apprenticeship world.

One other example is the – a pre-apprenticeship program that designed a learning app that allows pre-apprentices of all learning styles to measure and track the acquisition of their competencies and demonstrate to the registered apprenticeship program that they're ready to start the program and that they deserve credit for skills and knowledge that they already achieved.

And then, as I mentioned it before, the whole training around self-disclosure and advocacy, that's kind of key as part of additional support that are necessary and useful.

So now, let's take a quick closer look at the universal design learning that I've mentioned a few times on the next slide.

So you probably know it's – UDL is an evidence-based framework that educators use to systematically plan for and address learner differences through the design implementation of an inclusive training practice. They may also be applied, these guidelines, in the recruitment, assessment, and workplace training efforts of apprenticeship programs.

So this is essentially a way to look at how could apprenticeship programs incorporate these guidelines that have been developed over the years, that have been originally really applied to – well, the very original source, of course, is to make things more accessible in the physical world. You think of curb cuts and things like that and doing them in a universal way, not in a specialized way that addresses only one particular group. And then they become applied to learning in general and now to apprenticeship.

So some of the key principles that are relevant here are co-designing programs and tools alongside with the learners, enabling learners to have autonomy by allowing them to make choices about how they learn. So it has to do sometimes with pacing. It has to do sometimes with modality or being able to switch modality. And then providing feedback that is specific and accountable – I'm sorry – actionable and focused on effort rather than on personal characteristics.

One aspect of UDL is to actually secure the public and private funding to be able to do these adaptations. These are not always free. Some are cheap. Some are not so cheap, and it's important to sometimes have the resources to make that happen. But, again, even there, on the procurement side, you could basically say, whatever we are going to fund in the future on apprenticeship, we expect it to be inclusive, and we allow you to make sure it is that so that you actually are able to make sure that you're not building barriers.

All right. Let's move in the interest of time to our next – to an example. There are many. I've mentioned some of the partners in the AIM program. I'm also going to mention one that is not an AIM partner but has been a friend of ours in some ways, and it is an inclusive youth apprenticeship in the Shenandoah Valley.

So in the Shenandoah Valley they've been running youth apprenticeships for some time. And, again, what I like about this project is that it is inclusive from the get-go. It was not designed to be an apprenticeship for people with disability. It was designed to be a youth apprenticeship that happened to pay particular attention to being inclusive from the get-go.

And I also think it's worth noting that it made it through the COVID period and that's somewhat understandable. Chocolate is an important and essential ingredient in life in general, including in crisis. So maybe especially in crisis. So in this case of course the chocolate production kept going, and the need for job candidates kept going. And so Hershey did do its fourth boot camp this summer. It's a two-week paid training program that fast-tracks job candidates into top paying apprenticeships in entry manufacturing.

So this is a manufacturing partnership because chocolate is a manufactured process, chocolate making. And you end up in a chocolate factory. So the boot camp is mostly external, and, essentially, a custom boot camp designed to prepare candidates with no previous experience into what they call an industrial manufacturing technician position.

And so just want to mention that as an example of a youth-oriented inclusive partnership. I think they've run typically 10 to 20 percent of participants are people with disability – youth with disability. Again, an inclusive methodology that has a fairly long track record and history and experience and has been able to operate with short interruptions at the beginning of the crisis – the COVID crisis and now is, again, I would say returning to just about full swing.

So that's, again, an example. There's more written up about it. We'd be happy to share more and connect you to the right people if you'd like to learn more about that as an example of a youth apprenticeship that is inclusive.

And I'll just also want to play in this context a short video. We've queued up a short video that provides an example of a – again, an inclusion approach. And rather than talk a lot about it, I'll let the person in the video do the talking.

MR. VEHLOW: And just so you know, we're going to show this video. For those listening over just the computer speakers, you don't have to do anything.

For those of us dialed into the teleconference line, for those participants, just make sure to unmute your computer speakers to listen to the video. There are subtitles for the captioning for it, but if you want to listen to the video actually, just make sure to mute your – unmute your computer speakers if you're dialed in over the phone.

MS. LINTON: Thank you, Vinz, for that wonderful presentation. Very informative, and I think for all of us, a chocolate factory apprenticeship is a great thing. I'm sure no one will say no to that.

As you demonstrated, hiring individuals with disabilities is an opportunity, and the perceived barriers are quite minimal. And the AIM project also shows us how organizations can create really flexible processes that are no or low cost or low effort but have really big rewards.

Now, I'd like to open the session to answering any questions that folks may have. Again, please type into the chat, and we'll answer as many as we can.

All right. We have a couple questions already in here. So let's begin. First is someone writes, "Did I hear correctly that sponsors are only required to fill out the form for each participant or just for those who do not have an EEOC plan in place?"

So let's deconstruct this a bit. I think the form we're talking about here is the 671 form, which is the individuals with disabilities form, the voluntary form. So as a general rule, I think that sponsors should ask if anyone has a disability so they can provide appropriate accommodation.

Yes. For sponsors that have five or more apprentices, they are required to do this as part of their EEO requirements, not EEOC plan. It is the EEO, Equal Opportunity – Equal Employment Opportunity plan. Again, that's required if you are five – if you have five or more apprentices in your registered apprenticeship program.

Please work with your ATR, your apprenticeship training representative, if you are unsure or, again, go to the EEO website that's posted here. We also have the self-ID sponsor guide in the file share that's, again, located in this – in – on your screen here. Should be somewhere on your left, I believe.

All right. The next question – next two questions are for Vinz. Thank you. I see that John is calling out the box. John, if you can do that one more time for those of us who did not see that happen where we do have the file share. There it is. All right.

OK. Vinz, "Can you please explain what you mean by universal design for learning? Can you explain how we can influence the use of universal design in both on-the-job learning as well as in the didactic experience?"

MR. KOLLER: Great. Great question, and I think – I hope that some of it was answered in the presentation when I got a little deeper into it. Now, I made this as a half-day session at least, and those who are experts in universal design learning will say it takes longer than that. But the good news is we have summarized this in a learning brief that will come out shortly. So you'll have more detail on this.

If you'd like to look at resources that relate to universal design learning, I would encourage you to take a look at the CAST website. I'll also – well, actually, our project website has links to CAST, and you can look there. So we'll make sure that that link gets posted one more time in the chat so that you can see.

And it is indeed true you can apply those principles both in the classroom, and, again, there they have to do with what we often consider sound teaching practices and training practices anyway, thinking of multiple modalities to do learning so that you reach all learning styles, learning senses, learning perceptive tools.

And, certainly, this is true in the workplace as well. And, again, making it universal, so not saying we're going to have a pathway here. All the people with disabilities go this way, and all the people with so-called no disabilities go that way is not the approach here. The approach is of course bringing people together and recognizing we all have different modalities that benefit us. And if we have a multitude, we all advance there. This is good business. This is good for the company.

And I will also say the ancillary effect of having individuals with disabilities in the work – in your workplace, if you're the employer, most employers have told us it has improved their ability to actually interact with customers because, of course, we're all the representation of the world out there that we're dealing with. And so being more inclusive is useful there.

So not a complete answer to the question because, again, it would take a day or two to answer it, but I will say there are resources there and it does apply to both.

And I think – should I just go to the next one –

MS. LINTON: Yes. Please.

MR. KOLLER: – because I see – the question – yeah. The question of, "Are there any partners focused on vets with disabilities?"

Super question as well, and it just so happens, also in – sponsored by the Office for Disability Employment Policy and the partners at the Department of Labor, there is a new pilot program on helping vets make the transition into apprenticeship and including vets with disabilities.

So yes, there are. There's a whole set of programs. I would say contact either Carolyn or myself. Send us a direct message, and we'd be happy to connect you to both the pilot information, some of the trainings. Every state has a series of specialists that are working on getting vets into apprenticeship programs and, in particular now, we're looking at making sure that that's inclusive as well.

MS. LINTON: Great. Thank you, Vinz. A couple of comments from folks. Not exactly questions, but I do want to call them out because there's – it's really great.

One is that, "It may be a missed opportunity to leave out the benefits of aligning activities with WIOA Title IV and because they provide a great many services to employers who are providing the OJL."

Great point. Thank you for that. I think that as many services that sponsors can connect with, it really helps to support the program.

Someone's giving us a little bit of kudos here. Thank you. "Wonderful presentation. As a new apprenticeship program, the information has been so valuable."

We really appreciate that, and we are here to, again, provide all of these types of information to help everyone to make their programs the best that they can be and, again, not a big burden to you to put in place some of these things. Thank you for that.

Another question. "We just obtained SAC approval for the registered apprenticeship for grounds maintenance worker on behalf of a community rehabilitation program in Hawaii. Are you aware of any other CRPs, community rehabilitation programs, on the mainland that have done the same thing?"

Oh, that's a wonderful question. I am not aware of it. I'll open it up to Carolyn and Vinz but also to the larger group. If anyone's aware of anything along these lines, please do share this information with us. Carolyn, Vinz, do you have anything to offer on this one?

MS. JONES: Yeah. Thanks. This is Carolyn. Thanks, Natalie. I am unaware, but I will absolutely look – if you could send me a direct e-mail message, that would be great, and I will look around to see whether or not there's anything out there.

MR. KOLLER: Yeah. I'm not aware either. I will say that I would be happy to do a little research in Hawaii and learn more about your program and then hook you up. But, seriously, it is – I'm not aware of community rehabilitation programs. There is an effort underway to have more civil service-related apprenticeships. Some of them are sort of in – potentially in this arena, but are specific to maybe a rehabilitation program, I'm not aware.

MS. LINTON: Great. And, again, one of the great benefits of these types of webinars is that you all get to meet other folks out there in this world that you're in. And so look across to the various folks who are signed in and see if there's anyone here you'd like to connect with. And maybe we can all be able to share information.

Another great question here. Someone is currently connecting a couple of tech companies in West Virginia with whom they've been working to do an apprenticeship work through the American Foundation for the Blind, which has an office in West Virginia. They're interested in doing an apprenticeship program in workforce training focuses. Any tips for making sure this new project is successful for working with the American Foundation for the Blind? Any general tips from Vinz or Carolyn?

MS. JONES: Hi. This is Carolyn. Just one general tip is just be intentional about whatever you're doing in order to make sure that it is inclusive and incorporate universal design so you can reach the greatest number of diverse learners. And we do have some research as it relates to UDL, and we have – this research was implemented in a college – community college setting. So I can share some best practices with you, if you want to reach out to me directly.

MR. KOLLER: Yeah. I would just add that I think the UDL brief could be useful here in taking a look at it. It sounds like you already have done the step number one, which is making sure that you're working with an expert in the field by having the Federation of the Blind involved. So I would say there's some – probably some community-based organizations that they're already interacting with to make that happen.

In the tech field, there are some examples, and we'd be happy to connect you with the practitioners in this arena that we know of. Again, this is an emerging field, and so you are doing important work that helps others. And we would like to help you connect with other organizations that are also doing this work so that you can learn collaboratively and exchange information.

So I think sounds like you're doing the right thing, and I would say the UDL brief could probably help you a little bit in areas where – to do what Carolyn just mentioned, sort of the intentionality of the design of the approach.

MS. LINTON: Absolutely. And I want to call out a response from someone else. They said, "A tip for working with the American Foundation or – American Federation or Foundation for the Blind is contacting the state Title IV entity. I'm sure they would jump all over supporting this." So thank you for that wonderful tip from our colleague there.

Someone is saying that they – yes. They need the– (inaudible) – information ASAP.

Someone is saying that they wish they had had this presentation before they started their program. Better late than never, we say, and we always appreciate your participation and anything that you can give us.

We are at the top of the hour, and I know that you all have some wonderful questions and more comments for us. We do encourage you to reach out to Carolyn and Vinz and myself here. So let's begin to close this out, and I'll turn this over. Carolyn, I know that ODEP offers a lot of resources. So if you can just kind of take us through that, thank you. Make sure you're not on mute, Carolyn.

MS. JONES: Sorry about that, you guys. I was on mute again. So we do have a lot of inclusive resources that will help you as you think through how to expand your apprenticeship program. So we have a series of resources.

The first one is the apprenticeship video series which depicts apprentices with and without disabilities and their employer sponsors.

Vinz took you through the AIM initiative today. So you can access the website there in order to download information regarding this project and there is also a resource library and there's some webinars that I think will be helpful.

We went over NDEAM today and it's not too late for you guys to participate and we hope that you do. Next slide, please.

Now, our – we have a couple of technical assistance centers. The first one is EARN, Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion. They have a lot of information focused on – it's employer-focused on how to hire, recruit, and retain individuals with disabilities. So I certainly encourage you to check out EARN because there's also videos and fact sheets and toolkits there that may be of help.

We also have a self-ID fact sheet which you should also take a look at. It focuses on how to engage in a conversation regarding self-disclosure.

And m any of you probably are aware of our Job Accommodation Network. It's a free resource, and the resource is free and available to employers, practitioners, apprentices, basically anyone. If you are looking for workforce – workplace accommodations or you simply just want to ask questions, that's a great resource to tap into. Next slide, please.

So I will turn it back over to Natalie. I see our contact information is there, and should you want to reach out to me, certainly do so. Natalie?

MS. LINTON: Thank you, Carolyn. And thank you, again, Vinz, for your wonderful presentation. There is our contact information there for anyone who wants to send follow-up questions.

Again, we have in the file share section today's PowerPoint, disability disclosure information, the form, as well as the ID for sponsors. We've also put in the chat and in a weblink some of the links that you've been asking for. So please do go ahead and connect with all of these. You will be able to reach out to us.

So, again, we thank you all for your time. I know that we did not get to all of the questions today, but really appreciate your participation. And, again, congratulations on Disability Awareness Month. Thank you all. Have a good day.

(END)