**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**Strategies for Resilient Apprenticeship Expansion**

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LAURA CASERTANO: With that I'm going to get myself right out of the way. Again, I want to welcome everyone to today's webinar. I'm going to turn things over to your moderator today, Michelle Mills. She's the project manager with the SAE 2020 grant lead, which is with Office of Apprenticeship, Employment and Training Administration. Michelle, take it away.

MICHELLE MILLS: Thank you so much, and welcome, everyone. It's such a pleasure and a delight to be here with you this afternoon during the lunchtime – yes – to talk about a very exciting topic; right? We're so privileged to have you all here.

We're talking about strategies for resilient apprenticeship expansion, and given the current situation and the times that we're in, it's very important to talk about these issues and how we're pivoting and really think through the types of resources that can be leveraged to support you all as you implement your grant.

So hi, everyone, again. I'm Michelle Mills. I am the SAE, state apprenticeship expansion 2020 grant lead, overall project manager in the Office of Apprenticeship leading education and youth initiative. I'm very excited to be here to moderate today.

Today we have some dynamic speakers. We have Gina Wells who is our TA project director for all state apprenticeship expansion grants, and then we have Joe Quick who is a senior consultant and TA coach at Maher & Maher. Next slide, please.

Today's objectives – go back one. Yeah. Today's objectives, we're going to review the apprenticeship expansion resiliency planning documents. We're also going to review the resource compendium, and we're going to discover ways to evaluate apprenticeship expansion goals in the current environment. And then we're going to discuss some promising practices and have some peer-to-peer exchanges.

So very exciting time for all of us, and we look forward to the healthy and wonderful conversation today with these dynamic speakers that I've introduced who will walk you through the program. So now, over to you, Joe.

JOE QUICK: Thank you very much, Michelle. We're excited to talk with you all a little bit about resilient apprenticeship expansion strategies today. And before we dive directly into the resources themselves, we're going to spend a few minutes setting the context for these resources by discussing the obvious need for resilient apprenticeship practices and hear from all of you about what resiliency means to you in the context of this current environment.

So as apprenticeship grows in the U.S., our systems, our strategies, and our programs will need to be able to weather changes in the economy and in society, and we're certainly experiencing that now and will experience it again in the form of growth and contraction of the economy, in the form of potential health emergencies, and other challenges that arise.

So we – as we react to those current challenges and look forward to emerging from them, we know that all of you apprenticeship stakeholders and experts across the country are really examining your approaches for retention efforts, for upskilling and reskilling incumbent workers, for adjusting to new skills needs. And apprenticeship really can be, as we all know, a prettier solution for doing that.

So we want to make sure that we're establishing some resilient practices and learning from and scaling innovations that have resulted from the need for adjusted approaches at this time. So that's really how we're framing this conversation today as we move in – as we move into talking about the resources, specifically how you might be able to use them in your apprenticeship work across the country.

So we created these resources really as a starting point for evaluating your current challenges and those that might arise in future economic downturns and to provide some key considerations and planning steps to help you keep your apprenticeship expansion and retention efforts strong.

So recognizing that we're looking at currently some economic challenges, challenges with regards to the pandemic, we've all been looking at various forms of distance learning and other ways to adjust our strategies to reach people at this time in new ways.

And so really keeping up that momentum, retention, and growth in apprenticeship expansion is the goal of these resources and really highlighting some really innovative practices in new delivery methods, responsiveness to industry challenges, and supporting various apprenticeship stakeholders, whether they be sponsors, apprentices themselves, RTI providers, workforce and education practitioners that are focusing their efforts on apprenticeship expansion.

So the way that we designed these resources that we're going to talk about for a few moments here, we're going to talk about the resources, how you can use them, and what's included with them. But then we're really going to hear from some of your peers across the country about some of the resilient practices that they have implemented in their states.

We designed these resources to both leverage and align with the five elements of effective apprenticeship expansion. These resources and this framework are available on WorkforceGPS. We've included the link here as well, but I will draw your attention to the file share section of your screen as well in the lower right.

All of the resources that we're talking about here today are available on WorkforceGPS, and they're also linked here as PDF files. Thank you for pointing those out. So the PowerPoint is in there with the links and then also all the resources that we'll talk about today.

But we really wanted to align these with – for those of you who have done some work in aligning your work around state leadership and policy, outreach and business engagement, capacity to launch, develop, and manage programs, development of an apprenticeship pipeline and steps to increase diversity, and alignment with career pathways and postsecondary education.

We've aligned these resources to sort of fit into those categories, and – (inaudible) – a little bit about each of them and the components of them that might need to be adjusted at this time or really expanded and leveraged to really put into place some long-term resilient practices.

So before we move on to the resources themselves, we'd like to hear from all of you a bit in the chat window. And we'd like to hear from you about what resiliency means to you with regard to apprenticeship and where are you seeing the need for resilient practices in your apprenticeship work?

So share with us either what resiliency means to you or what challenges have been popping up for you where you've had to start thinking about not only how to respond to them now but how to put in some practices that are really sustainable long-term resilient practices for growing apprenticeship. Excuse me.

We will take a few minutes to – I see several people are typing into the chat now, which is great. We're looking forward to hearing about how you're approaching this situation and kind of what some of the challenges are that you are seeing.

We've got a few coming in, which I think is great. "The ability to respond to difficult or challenging issues and building opportunities out of them."

So that's a great one. I think, overall, thinking about how there are some difficult challenges that have popped up in our apprenticeship work, in keeping that work going and continuing to grow and expand apprenticeship across the country just really provides us an opportunity as well sort of on the glass-half-full approach to this to really think about how this time is allowing us to innovate in ways – or sort of motivating us to innovate in ways that maybe we haven't as strongly in the past.

"Consistency in messaging." Another one that I think comes up frequently, and, Rob, thanks for bringing that up. I think making sure that we've got all these different stakeholders that we know are part of this system, and having some consistent messaging around your approaches, around the value of apprenticeship in this current economy I think is really important.

"Capacity building versus apprenticeship engagement." Another one.

A lot of references I think popping up here to recruitment strategies, and with different shifts in the workforce, shifts in the economy, and shifts in what businesses' needs are right now, those are all things that really come into place when you're recruiting both potential sponsors and potential apprentices.

Some reference – some great reference. Melissa mentioned building flexible programs and processes that can withstand any economic conditions. So recognizing that this is giving us an opportunity to really explore some both flexibilities and just sort of foreseeing the challenges that may come up and sort of keeping that in mind as we're building new programs that can withstand both the current economy and any future challenges.

So great things coming in around alignment across multiple apprenticeship-funded projects and multiple partners and recognizing that the whole set of partners that you work with really brings some value to the table and the resources they can bring to this resiliency conversation.

Some great comments around consistency in entry points, really clarifying the way that people can connect to the apprenticeship system.

And capturing data on underrepresented populations was just mentioned as well. And I think part of the process and one of the things that you'll see in these resiliency resources is considering the ways that we can use data as we both evaluate the current environment but also how needs are changing, how skill needs are changing, how businesses' needs are changing, and how we can adapt to those in the apprenticeship environment.

So keep those coming. I think a lot of great ones have been shared so far. You'll hear from some of your peers later, and, certainly, as these are captured in the chat, they're – this conversation is a great one that we can refer to later and beyond the webinar today.

So we are going to transition into talking a little bit about these resources themselves and really keeping in mind both the short- and long-term uses of these tools for overall resilience, thinking about how they can be used both now and in future economic downturns or any health crises that might require alternative programming, training, or service delivery methods. And so we're going to dive into these resources.

Again, a reminder they're attached in the file share here in the webinar environment, and you'll see throughout the presentation the links to these resources as well.

So the full suite of apprenticeship resiliency resources includes several documents. The first is an overall apprenticeship expansion resiliency planning tool. And we heard from all of you kind of what you – what resiliency means to you, and I think as we created this tool, we really wanted to create something that was a resource for you all to think about specific considerations around the five elements of effective apprenticeship expansion and the strategies that you have in place to expand apprenticeship across your states and across the country and then document both the current state challenges that you have and then be able to plan forward how to address some of those challenges, tap into resources and best practices across the country, and move your work forward in this time of challenge that we're experiencing.

We also created resiliency resources and promising practices compendiums. So there are five of those that align with the five elements, and those really – we'll get into some more detail, but those really provide some promising practices, some thought leadership, and some tools that are out there. We know that many are being created in response to this environment on a regular basis. So we've captured some of those that we think are really promising.

And then we also have, which we'll talk about for just a couple of minutes today, many of you are apprenticeship expansion grant recipients. And so we've got a document that can be helpful for those of you that have apprenticeship expansion grants and speaking about your statement of work and how you might need to adjust that in this environment.

So the first tool is the sort of overall umbrella apprenticeship expansion resiliency planning tool, and this was really created as a resource for both creating and maintaining strategies for continued growth and diversification of registered apprenticeship in an economic downturn.

This resource can be used to kind of align with the overall strategic approaches to responding to the changing economy, to look at internal and cross-partner strategies to addressing apprenticeship growth and expansion. They can be used sort of internally with your teams or with a full group of partners to address your strategies, and they can be used to guide content strategy sessions, training, and technical assistance that you might be providing to other partners.

This overall tool, the way it's structured is by each of the five elements of apprenticeship expansion, and so you'll see we've got just a screenshot here to kind of demonstrate the format of the tool itself. For each of the strategies, there's a page that has some key resiliency considerations.

So around state leadership and policy, we've identified some categories like apprenticeship expansion vision and strategy, messaging to all of your partners, something that came up in the main chat, staffing and funding to support apprenticeship as you work through a challenging time like this one, aligning apprenticeship with other services, and strategies and sub-grantee performance, if you are one of those organizations that has an apprenticeship-related grant.

So these really kind of help you think through and there's some key questions and considerations that we feel like, in our experience across the country and in working with all of you, are things that are important to pay attention to in an economic downturn.

The second page for each of the strategies is a resiliency planning tool that allows you, as I mentioned, to propose specific strategies or from those resiliency considerations things that you want to tackle and think about at this time, assessment of your current state, being able to use this as a planning tool to outline next steps, who might be responsible for responding to those next steps or carrying them forward, and then collecting some resources and tools for further planning.

The resiliency considerations, as we mentioned, follow the five elements of effective apprenticeship expansion, and so they lean on state leadership and policy. And those are some of the categories underneath that we've captured of specific resiliency considerations.

Outreach and business engagement is thinking about how do we need to shift our employer outreach and communication strategies around apprenticeship? How can we talk with business about apprenticeship as a tool for upskilling and reskilling and a strategy during an economic downturn? How can we align with other business services, assets, and approaches and thinking about industry-specific economic shifts and how that might change the types of businesses or industries that we're working with, especially as we seek to expand apprenticeship in non-traditional industries and occupations?

It also walks through the overall capacity to launch, develop, and manage programs. So what new partners and alignment strategies might we need in an economic downturn to connect to new resources or new supports for apprentices and sponsors? How might we transform our technical assistance and support to those partners? Should we consider looking to industry intermediaries or workforce boards to serve in a role as an intermediary to support business in a downturn, for instance?

And then really thinking through as we develop and manage programs to the point of a lot of what was coming up in the chat. How do we look at creative distance learning strategies, ways to build apprenticeship programs that are flexible and adaptable to an environment that requires some distance learning and sort of other methods of delivery and engagement?

And then we get into developing – development of an apprenticeship pipeline and steps to increase diversity. So how might we need to change our recruitment strategy? How might we think about equity in a different way in an economic downturn and the challenges that are presented in a downturn economy versus the economy we had just eight or nine months ago? What adaptive supportive services might need to be provided to apprentices? How do we reach new populations at this time and both get them engaged and keep them engaged and retain that talent in the apprenticeship pipeline?

And then the last of the five elements that we cover from a resiliency standpoint is aligning with career pathways and postsecondary education. So oftentimes in an economic downturn, if you think about youth employment or youth apprenticeship and connecting with the school system and the challenges that may arise both in a downturn economy but also in the environment that we're currently in and needing to explore new education and training delivery modes, we captured some thoughts around what might you consider with regard to supporting virtual RTI? How are skill needs changing, and how might you integrate with youth and CTE programs and the providers of those programs to support them through this economic transition?

So I mentioned the resiliency resources and promising practices compendiums. So that's a mouthful, but in a nutshell, each of those five elements also has a document that outlines some tools, resources, and thought leadership around, for instance, capacity to launch, develop, and manage programs, as you see on the screen now.

These are resources that we've been involved with, resources that the Office of Apprenticeship has put out there, resources that you all have created across the country, and articles, thought leadership, ideas around how to respond to the economy, to respond to new methods of apprenticeship delivery. So we've captured them here. Again, they're always growing. There are always new resources out there, and this is a subset of those resources that we found to be really valuable.

We also connected to some promising practices that we've seen around the country, and you'll see those in these resources as well. So, again, each of those compendiums includes tools, resources, thought leadership, and promising practices. And the promising practices, many of them came out of the work that was done around the country to capture some of those practices.

I think we link later in this presentation to some promising practices briefs that were created to really highlight some of the great work that was happening around the country. And those were created before the pandemic, but a lot of those practices are just even more important now. And so we highlight some of those practices to key in on and pay attention to at this time.

I'm going to turn it over to Gina now to talk a little bit about the resources that have been created for those of you that have apprenticeship expansion grants. Gina.

GINA WELLS: Thanks, Joe. Hi, everybody. Great to be with you today and see so many familiar names over here in the main chat and in our login page.

The resources that Joe just walked you through are really there to support your strategic thinking and planning. So think of those tools that Joe just shared as inputs that you can use to help you craft strategic conversations you're having, planning conversations. Maybe you're sitting down with your internal team or you're pulling your partners together to think through where you are now and where you want to go in the future.

And we crafted those resources to really help inform and structure those conversations, inspire some of your thinking, making sure that you're able to connect to promising practices and resources that are already out there. And we hope you can use them as really sort of a plug-and-play set of tools so you know what issues are feeling most pressing to you. We can see over here in the chat in your responses about what elements of resiliency are important to you you have specific things on your mind.

So we hope that you can pull the resource that best aligns with what you're thinking, quickly hone in on the particular thought questions or resources that seem most relevant to you, and weave them into your ongoing strategic and planning work that you have in front of you both now and into the future.

This next resource that we're going to talk about is specifically around the grant management implications of what we're all experiencing right now and adjustments that we're making for resiliency. And I want to say that these – I know we have friends with us on the webinar today from a variety of funding sources. We may have some AAI grantees. We may have some H1-B funded grantees.

This grant resiliency tool that I'm going to talk about right now was developed specifically in collaboration with the program office for the state apprenticeship grantees, so the SAE grantees, the ACE grantees, and the SAE 2020 grantees. So what I'm going to talk about was created with the program office specifically for them. If you're from a different funded grant program, you're of course welcome to look at it, but definitely be talking to your federal project officer or your program office if you're feeling like there's some adjustments to your statement of work that you're contemplating right now.

So for ACE and SAE and SAE 2020 grantees, we put together this statement of work considerations tool. It aligns with the five elements. It is structured around types of grant activities that you have built into your statement of work. And it's created to help you review sort of other conversations you've been having about strategy as you think through adjustments you need to make to assure of your resiliency and strengthen your resiliency.

Where might there be some impact to your statement of work, and what might be some thinking you need to do about formal changes you might need to make to ensure that you're in compliance with your funding agreement and with the requirements of your funding source.

So you can see that there is a topic. There's some thought questions for you to ask yourself, and there's a set of boxes here where you can sort of think through what the implication might be for your statement of work. So maybe in terms of outreach and awareness you're having to make some adjustments to your business outreach strategies or to your messaging.

Now, you can think – look back in your statement of work and say, okay. Are the adjustments that I've been thinking about, are they in line with my statement of work? Do I identify a challenge there? Are there some risks of either the strategy I'm currently using or the one I'm thinking about to my performance and achievement of my goals? Might I need to consider an adjustment to my statement of work and what questions might I have for my FPO or maybe, if it's a strategy question, for your TA coach? And then a place for you to keep track of next steps.

So this is really just designed as an additional tool to you, and you might not all need it. But if you are finding that the current environment we're working in and causing you to take a closer look at your statement of work and think about potential needed adjustments, we want you to use this tool to help you so that you just don't accidentally find yourself operating outside the scope of your statement of work and so that you can be organized in your thinking about what adjustments you may need to be proposing or in discussion with your federal project officer about.

So that's what this tool is really designed for. Let me kind of dive in there a little bit more deeply.

So the key statement of work considerations that we cover in this grant – in this statement of work adjustment considerations document are outreach and awareness, targeted industries and occupations, how you're delivering and supporting related technical instruction, on-the-job learning, and those types of things, supportive services, your diversity, equity, and inclusion of underrepresented populations, the strategies you're using to create a pipeline of registered apprentices, and that could include any youth apprenticeship work you're funding or pre-apprenticeship work you're funding, partner alignment, staffing, technical assistance, training you might be doing for partners or for staff you're funding across the state, and performance management and data tracking.

So there's just a component there for each of these areas, some thought questions, and a place for you to track any potential implication to your statement of work. So think of the resources that Joe was talking about as your strategic planning resources and think of this statement of work adjustment consideration as a tactical resource to help you once you've done that thinking to understanding any additional sort of grant management work you might need to do to make sure you're in alignment with your statement of work.

And, again, this is – this is really carefully kind of constructed for the state grantees. Certainly, anybody should be in contact with their federal project officer if they're contemplating adjustments to their statement of work.

With that, I want to turn things back over – actually, I don't. I want to keep right on moving forward. We're really happy to be able to move into some discussion and conversation now. We want to spend a few minutes discussing with your peers some resilient approaches to apprenticeship in response to the current environment. So I know you're eager to hear from each other, and so we've invited a few folks to speak here briefly, and we want to hear from you too.

So if you're doing something interesting, if you want to share with your peers what's happening for you right now in this area of building resiliency, we certainly encourage you to share that in the chat. And while we're doing that, I'm happy to say that we're joined by a few folks, Jay Reardon in Montana and Desi Holmes in Texas and Kathryn in North Carolina. Chris, I see that you are included here. We didn't mean to do that, but if you have something to say, we're going to welcome you to chime in. But don't feel any pressure.

But I want to start with Jay. So, Jay, if you can unmute your line, that should be easy for you to do. We've seen some coverage of the United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters Local 41 apprenticeship and the benefits that they've been seeing in these times to shifting to virtual learning for RTI. Can you tell us a little bit about what's happening in Montana, sort of what you're seeing in that move to virtual?

JAY REARDON: Sure. Thank you, Gina. Are you getting some echo because I'm watching the webinar, and I'm also dialed in on my phone?

MS. WELLS: No. You sound clear.

MR. REARDON: Okay. All right. Thank you. Sure. One of the programs that our governor highlighted in his annual Labor Day report is not only apprenticeship but virtual training program that one of our local JTC's put together as a result of COVID.

It already started a little bit, but through some small grants that we had provided training providers, which the JTC qualified for, they were able to upgrade some of their computer network and their programming, lots of cameras and stuff, which allowed their members, rather than traveling to a central location, which was already difficult in some cases for their apprentices – they cover an area that's probably from our southern border of the state 300 to 400 miles north to the northern border of the state.

So by going to pretty much 100 percent virtual RTI, that allows their apprentices to log on when they have time. There's taped instruction from their instructors, their training directors, and they can listen to those. Their tests are sent to them. They can do their tests and things like that.

So it worked out real well. I mean, they're actually finding that their apprentices are completing their RTI and being more successful in completing their RTI. And as a result of this, they're not the only JTC that did that. I mean, almost all of our JTCs in Montana had required in classroom instruction for their related instruction.

Another JTC, plumbing and pipefitter JTC in Billings has done the same thing. They've got a virtual platform that apprentices in Northeastern Montana can access to do their related instruction.

And our largest JTC and our largest sponsor in Montana is a Montana Electrical JTC has also adopted a virtual model. Their main training center is in Helena, Montana, and their apprentices from across the state were required to travel there at least four times, five times a year to get their RTI for a week. And they just had their first virtual RTI session. We call. Apprentices still have to log in during the day. So they are off work, but they're doing it from a virtual platform and not in a classroom, especially with COVID the way it's spiking around the state.

So it's really been successful. I think some of the other things that we were able to do with our other training providers besides the JTCs, our two-year colleges, through the CARES Act, there was money came to the state that the governor allocated to our two-year colleges to set up virtual platforms to provide RTI for several of our registered apprenticeship programs. So students that are apprentices across the state can access these classes now virtually rather than having to be in a classroom.

So it's worked out pretty well for us so far. I guess an advantage, if there is one, of COVID is that it's forced us. I think the resources were there, but I think it's kind of forced us to this virtual platform that, especially in a rural state like ours, can have some real advantages for our apprentices out there in the far corners of the state. So thank you.

MS. WELLS: Thanks, Jay. Now, I think it's nice to see this example of how being pushed in this direction is actually creating some increased opportunity in the state and might have some downstream benefits to apprentices and it sounds like to potential sponsors too. Have you seen any increased openness to apprenticeship given that access to RTI now can be done virtually? So maybe some sponsors in more rural areas of the state might be able to consider this approach where they may have found it prohibitive before?

MR. REARDON: Yeah. Gina, we really haven't seen – a little bit of a slowdown I guess because some of our hospitals and healthcare facilities were actually closed for a while to any – but in regards to overall growth of apprenticeship in Montana since the end of April, we actually enrolled more construction occupation apprentices in the period of April 1st through August 31st of this year than we had in the previous time period – in the previous year.

So construction has not slowed down at all. We don't have a lot of retail. So that hasn't really been impacted, but we're about where we were.

Obviously, in our SAE grant we actually I think have met all our performance measures already. Ours will be done here in January. We got a one-quarter extension. Non-monetary extension on ours but I think right now we haven't really seen a slowdown yet. I think if there's a slowdown, depend how our winter goes. That usually drives it, but right now, we're doing well.

We're starting some youth apprenticeship programs up. We're accessing additional resources that the state has for training. We have an incumbent worker training fund that apprentices, obviously, are incumbent workers once they complete six months of work. And employers can apply for a grant to assist them in paying for their related instruction. So that's a good program we've been able to use, and we are still seeing continued growth in our construction trades.

I had a conversation with an employer yesterday that wants to start up a youth apprenticeship program in conjunction with our schools and career center in Billings, Montana, which is our largest metropolitan area. So things are so far still going well.

MS. WELLS: Thank you. Thanks, Jay, for sharing a bit of what's happening in Montana and a little bit about that transition to virtual related technical instruction.

I want to turn now to Kathryn in North Carolina. Kathryn, could you talk with us for just a couple minutes about the challenges that virtual work and learning present – (inaudible) – your apprentices – (inaudible) – and then what Senate Bill 704 did and the impact you've seen it have on apprenticeship this year?

And I just want to say, Jay, if you want to go ahead and mute your line again, that would be great.

KATHRYN CASTELLOES: Okay. Well, yes. This is Kathryn Castelloes, and thank you for the opportunity. Yeah. COVID, as far as impacting, it's pretty much the same as what Jay said. I mean, we had – everybody was like, okay. Take it back. Let's see what the situation is, but as far as registrations and programs, we continued to do that.

Now, Senate Bill 704 was related to our tuition waiver for our high school apprenticeship for the youth that are in high school because the bill actually was written for those employers who have – originally written, I should say, for those employers who have a registered apprenticeship who hire a high school student while they're in high school, either in a pre-apprenticeship or a registered apprenticeship, and that student graduates from high school. They have 120 days to get into a registered apprenticeship. Well, that's during the summer, and that was when COVID hit.

So the revision to Senate Bill 704 extended that opportunity for those high school students to be able to get in with an employer and get started, continue their related instruction because their tuition was waived on that senate bill. So it helped extend that through December.

So, therefore, it helped with not having any hiccups with the employers and registered apprenticeship, if you will. Everything was – everything continued and continued going. And as far as furloughs, I think we may have had two students, but they were called back. So that ended up not a big impact. It's just like, okay. Well, now, this is different. We got to increase and have more virtual learning.

MS. WELLS: That's great, Kathryn. Thank you. And I appreciate this example because, as we have more players at the table for apprenticeship expansion as we increase the number of state-funded and state-legislated programs and policy related to apprenticeship, I think this is a helpful example both of how a shift in our economy – an unexpected shift in how we work together and how our communities were functioning impacted how you were able to fund apprenticeship and a specific program that you had created. And so you all were able to put through a policy fix to let that continue seamlessly in spite of what was happening in the spring.

But I think it's also good food for thought as we're crossing this kind of policy in the future to be thinking through potential – a broader set of potential scenarios that our program could be operating in and to think through building that kind of resiliency and these lessons learned into the development of programs going forward. So thank you so much for sharing.

And I want to say Joe has encouraged folks to share some examples over in the chat. Also, if you have questions for Kathryn and Jay and Desi's about to talk, feel free to put those questions in the chat too.

I want to keep us moving so that we have time to get to some of your comments over here. So I want to turn to Desi in Texas. Desi, could you talk a little bit about how Texas has been sustaining apprenticeship expansion work this year, sort of what you're seeing in your state?

DESI HOLMES: Okay. Sorry. Took me a minute to get my mute to go off.

Honestly, COVID slowed us down, but it definitely hasn't stopped us. And I'm just going to provide you a few snippets that we're working on, and you can reach out if you want more information.

As everybody has been talking about and knowing, everybody's moving to Zooms and Teams and we're putting out public service announcements and Facebook and Twitter trying to engage with more people since we're not traveling around the state and having live events.

One thing I think that's helping us sustain is Governor Abbott has a tri-agency strategy that we've been working on for the last several years which brings together Texas Workforce Commission, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, and Texas Education Agency, which are the ISBs, which we're all working together to make sure that we align all the education with workforce to bring out our population and our workers with highly skilled, highly paid career paths, which registered apprenticeship is in the middle of all of that.

We – just to give you – Texas always says we're the biggest. Well, we're not always the biggest. Currently, we have about 540 programs in Texas. This year, to put it in perspective, we – not this year but with the initial expansion grant funding we created 31 of those with partnerships between our boards, colleges, and our state staff, which is large numbers to us. And we have 20,000 apprentices.

In our initial funding, we – our target was 1,902, and we have increased that by 596 for a total of 2,495 apprentices. All our strategy behind that is bringing in the workforce partners and building capacity at the local level.

Now, we did – like I said, we did slow. We had been pushing more than 50 percent of all of our expansion funding to the local areas so that they could engage with the local employers and build the capacity and expand registered apprenticeship in their local areas.

When we got the state apprenticeship expansion grant, we were delayed in getting our money out to the boards in our request for application because of COVID. We put $4 million of our $5 million on the street, and we only got enough viable grants back to take up $1 million of that. So we had $3 million left.

Now, looking forward we still want to push money to the local areas for them to do the work at the local area with our support, build capacity, and mentor their staff and further build relationships between Department of Labor all the way from the regional director down to his apprenticeship training representative, ATRs, so we can build registered apprenticeship programs.

So thinking that we're going to be moving more back to a normal reality with our ISDs, our community colleges, our local workforce work, we're putting out $10 million in November for exactly that type of – to fund and support those types of activities.

So that's pretty much our sustainability. It's been working for us. We have more boards and more colleges saying we're ready now. Last – when you released your last money, we weren't ready. We were focused on more emergency type situations, trying to move back to normal. But we really think that and we have a positive feeling and our eyes are forward about we'll put all of that $10 million in contracts and be putting more of our Texans into registered apprenticeship career pathways.

So that's kind of what we're doing, and with our – I'll go back to what I think it was Jay was talking about. We work with our registered apprenticeship not only with expansion grants. Our legislature also believes in registered apprenticeship and gives us funding to support at least a portion of their related classroom training. And we put that out every year, and we just started new contracts back in September.

Our numbers are slightly down. Most of the ones that we support – most, not all. Most of the ones that we support are building trades. We didn't see that much of a fall off, no more than in past years when it's fallen off but then it picks up. And we'll have – that was their estimated numbers. At the end of November, we'll have their real numbers. Hopefully, they picked back up to last year's totals that were more. And that purports about between 7,000 and 8,000 of the 20,000 apprentices that we have registered in Texas.

So Texas is moving forward. We were slowed but not stopped.

MS. WELLS: Thanks for sharing, Desi, and I know there are many folks on the phone who experienced similar impacts of a lot of demands being placed on the workforce system in the last many months as we've expanded our capacity to develop programs and work with businesses and build the capacity and the role of the workforce system in this space of apprenticeship expansion, the incredible demand on the time and energy and resources just in the spring I think slowed many people's expansion efforts in ways similar to what Texas has experienced.

And I think it's really promising to hear that your boards are looking into the future and seeing that ability to respond to your RFPs and to take on this work again. That's really promising to hear.

MS. HOLMES: We're excited. We're focused.

MS. WELLS: I bet. That's a big RFP you got coming out.

I want to thank Jay and Kathryn and Desi for sharing a little bit with us today. I want to invite you all in the chat here to both ask questions of them, if you have any, if you heard something here that you want to follow up on, but also to share with us what you're doing.

So we know that each of you had something important to share on this. Paul has shared in the chat already some business engagement resources that have been helpful, and there's – looks like there's a link to that there as well. But we'd like to hear from you.

What are you doing to increase the resiliency of your apprenticeship system and expansion efforts right now? Just take a minute into the chat and tell us a step that you've taken or that you're thinking of taking in the near future to strengthen the resiliency of your system to respond to what the – what was put before us in the spring and prepare for the future.

And I do want to say, Kathryn, too, there's a question for you in the chat from Carolyn Perry. So if you want to respond back in the chat too to her, that would be great. And I see that Gina is typing something in, and others should feel free to share as well. We just got a couple more minutes. Plenty of time to hear from several of you.

MR. QUICK: And, Gina, this is Joe. I think just to kind of, as people are typing in, expand on what Paul put in the chat box. I think that that's a great example of working on something pre-pandemic that ended up working out really well for you.

But I think that idea of – that Paul's presented there of creating some toolkits and processes that are virtual that allow employers to kind of work through processes themselves and access resources and calculate potential ROI are certainly things that you all have been interested in before and to really set you up for success in adapting the way you're working with businesses in this time. So some great thoughts from Paul there.

MS. WELLS: Thanks, Joe. And just building on that, Gina is sharing about offering virtual office hours to workforce system field staff, taking advantage of increased comfort in Zoom and other virtual collaboration platforms to offer additional technical assistance, connecting in ways that are lighter lift than maybe the in-person types of training that we might have offered in the past that can be real time in response to needs that happen. If we could turn around and get people the information they need to have comfort with your goals and know what they need to do and what role they're going to play.

Daryl's chiming in with a question to all of you about SDOT, examples of registered apprenticeships in railway construction. That's great. You all can definitely use the chat to connect with each other and ask for the information that you're looking for. So please do chime in if you have something helpful for Daryl there.

All right. I'm not seeing a lot of other questions coming in. So I want to thank you all for being here. I want to sort of move us – and the chat is still open. Please don't – if you're in the middle of a thought, if you have something to share, please do jump in there. Of course we've been taking questions and welcoming your questions throughout today's presentation, but if you've been holding onto one, definitely chime in with it now.

And while you're doing that, I'm just going to take us through this last little recap of where we've been today.

So we wanted to connect you to these apprenticeship expansion resiliency planning documents. These have been in development for the last few months as we've been in conversation with all of you and hearing about the questions you're asking, wanting to support those strategic planning conversations you're having, those partnership discussions, your tactical planning for your work unfolding over the next six months to a year and longer.

These documents are designed to help you do that. There's two types. There's one that has big-picture strategy questions that you can use for personal reflection, for team reflection, to help shape a partner meeting that you might be planning, or any kind of strategic conversation that you have coming up.

And then we have our resource compendiums that are companion to that document that put you in touch with information, resources, promising practices, tools so that you're not reinventing the wheel and that you can quickly learn from each other and from your peers across the country as you are implementing and sort of shoring up these aspects of your apprenticeship expansion.

You've had a chance to chat with each other, and I see there's still some good conversations happening here in the chat, and we had a chance to hear from a few states. So thank you, again, for everything you offered. Michelle, I don't know if you want to chime in with a closing remark. And if not, we can –

MS. MILLS: Oh, no. Thank you so much. This was incredible, and I really just appreciate all of the feedback in the chat and the engagement. It was quite interesting to see that. So just thank you all, and I hope these resources were helpful as we think about how we're pivoting during these challenging times. So thank you.

MS. WELLS: Thanks, everybody. Good to be with you today, and we look forward to being with you again soon. Take care. Be well. Bye, everybody.

(END)