**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**Creating Diverse and Inclusive Apprenticeship Programs**

**Tuesday, March 16, 2021**

*Transcript by*

*Noble Transcription Services*

*Menifee, CA*

JON VEHLOW: Welcome to Creating Diversity, an inclusive apprenticeship program. Without further ado, I'd like to kick things off to our moderator today, Andrew Ridgeway, division director, Office of Apprenticeship, Employment and Training Administration with the U.S. Department of Labor. Andrew?

ANDREW RIDGEWAY: Thanks, Jon, and thanks, everyone, for joining us today. We're really, really excited to have this conversation with some of our esteemed panelists today. And just again, thanks for being part of the conversation. We'll be, hopefully making this a panel talk throughout, so I'm really looking forward to the dialog.

But before we dive in too deep, I'd like to go ahead and introduce our deputy administrator out of the Office of Apprenticeship, John Ladd, and our deputy administrator, Mike Walter, for our opening message. John?

JOHN LADD: Great, thanks, Andy. And thanks to your team and you for pulling together today's important webinar. I just want to be really brief. I know you have a really full agenda here, but I just wanted to lend my voice and support for how important this webinar is today and how grateful we are to Daniel, Leah, and Dr. Johnson for taking valuable time today to talk and to share some important lessons learned about creating diversity and inclusion in apprenticeship programs.

This is such an important topic for us, such an important priority for this administration. I think as everyone knows, the Biden Administration issued an executive order promoting racial equity. Similarly, we are also looking at this through a gender lens as well. I do want to wish everyone a Happy Women's History Month. It's only fitting that we're having this conversation today as we still see big gaps in women's participation in apprenticeship programs.

And we're going to hear a lot today on what steps we can take to improve that. So, again, I just want to really thank everyone for participating today. Thank all of our presenters. They bring such a wealth of experience and expertise to this conversation and that this is the first step and an important step. But a lot of work is going to be rolling out here in the next couple of weeks and months. Andy's going to highlight some of the things that we're taking steps to do today.

But this is going to be an important priority for this administration, an important priority for the department. And we look forward to working with you all moving forward. So, I hope you have a great webinar, really again, appreciate everyone participating today. And with that, I'll turn it over to you. Mike?

MIKE WALTER: OK, thanks, John. Just to piggyback on John's comments. This is Mike Walter, deputy administrator here at the Office of Apprenticeship. In a way, we are really driven to deliver value and quality in everything that we're doing for our customers, our sponsors and our apprentices. As John said, we're so glad to be joined by a group of tremendous leaders who are really guiding the way in showing that respect, diversity, and inclusion need to be at the core of how we deliver value and quality in the registered apprenticeship system each and every day. We have a ways to go, I think, to return our ideals.

We're making progress on some fronts, but we need to take that next step forward and get to real transformation. So, we look forward to ways we can work collectively to advance equity and inclusion for women, people of color, youth and other underrepresented populations. And I'll just end by saying that inclusion as we think about that as organizations and individuals, it's not simply a mandate. It needs to be a core tenet of how we engage in every policy and action. And I know that this conversation today will help us further some of our thinking there. So, again, glad to be with you. Over to Andy to keep things moving. Thank you.

MR. RIDGEWAY: Thanks, Mike, and thanks, John, for joining us. Really appreciate the message from both of you. And again, as we were saying, this administration is really prioritizing these activities and these conversations, and I think we've made a lot of progress. But this will be a good opportunity for us to reflect on where we are and where we're going and where we can continue to move.

And again, I'm really excited to hear, who I'll introduce in a little bit, some of the panelists, folks that are making it work in the field and some best practices that we can share throughout. But before we get a little deeper, I see people are continuing to introduce themselves in the chat, which is great. Please do continue to do that. Also, feel free to put in any questions that you have throughout the presentation into the chat. We will have a period where each of the panelists may be able to answer a couple of questions and then we may have a very brief Q&A session at the end.

But mostly it'll be a panel, but feel free to type in questions throughout the presentation and we may get to them a little bit later. So, again, thanks for joining us and we'll dive in. I think we've been having it answered throughout, but take a look at the poll and go ahead and answer it if you get the chance. It looks like, John, you're expanding it.

So, just wanted to see the mix of backgrounds and experience that we have on today's webinar. It looks like a really good balance between the employer community, which is so key, the education community through community colleges, a little bit from the community organizations, organized labor and the union community, which is a big driver.

Obviously, the apprenticeship agencies, both office of apprenticeship, but the state apprenticeship agencies, glad that you're here. And then some key partners of ours too, workforce development agencies, whether it's state workforce agencies or American job centers or any other key partners that are working with us and grantees that are working with us to expand apprenticeships.

And then, of course, we have other, which I know includes everyone else. And so, if you do consider yourself in that category, please do let us know where you're coming from, whether it's intermediaries or other stakeholders. But we're really excited to have representation from all these different stakeholders. And I think your perspectives will be really valuable throughout this presentation. So anyway, I think we will dive into the presentation itself.

We talked a little bit earlier about kind of our top line goals, but really this webinar is designed to learn from leaders in the diversity and inclusion space about how they have successfully broadened the diversity of the registered apprenticeship programs. So, these presenters are individuals who run programs, who have done it and have some great stories and experiences to share about how they've been able to capitalize on the diversity of their programs. So, we're really excited to hear from them about that.

And again, this is an opportunity to share strategies and promising practices for expanding diversity, inclusion efforts, and supporting the success of underrepresented populations to get into registered programs across all industries and sectors in which we're operating.

With that, I do want to introduce our panelists, who will be each presenting different parts of the presentation today, as well as participating in our panel later. I'm joined by Daniel Bustillo, who's the executive director of the Health Care Advancement Program. Leah Rambo, the director of training for the Sheet Meta, Air Rail and Transportation Workers Local 28, New York, and Dr. Ronald Johnson, senior adviser and chief policy strategist for the Wireless Infrastructure Association.

So, appreciate all three of you joining us today and taking time out of your days to share your knowledge and feedback with us. And really looking forward to our dialog this afternoon and morning for folks on the West Coast.

So just taking a step back, you know, we talk about diversity and inclusion in apprenticeship, but here's a little bit of what we're talking about. Are we reaching out to a broad and inclusive pool of candidates when we have apprenticeship opportunities in our community? Are we partnering with the workforce development agencies and getting the word out about those programs?

Are we partnering with community organizations and getting the word out in those programs? Additionally, are we investing in new sectors of the economy to grow apprenticeship and to other populations that may attract more diverse populations? And are we incorporating our knowledge about changing demographics? Does our workforce reflect the community that our work is done in? And that's a good question to ask.

And, you know, just in general, expanding awareness of apprenticeship opportunities to youth. I think everyone on this call is at least aware enough of apprenticeship that they know about it, but how do we get the word out more broadly about the opportunities available through apprenticeships? The earn and learn model is definitely becoming a bigger and bigger priority for all of us. And so making sure that youth also know that this is a really good pathway for us to encourage our youth to get into.

So those are just a couple of the bullets. And, you know, if there's other topics that you think are vital to this expansion, feel free to take them into the chat and looking forward to hearing from you on those opportunities.

But real quick, you know, taking stock of where we're at now, looking at our big global trends, we are, I would say, slowly diversifying registered apprenticeship. I don't think it's as fast as any of us would like, but we have seen an increase in the number of women apprentices of new women apprentices. The participation of Latinx apprentices is also increasing. And we've seen some increases in the number of African-American apprentices through our data over the last few years, at least pre-COVID.

So, you know, I think things are improving, but I think we all admit that we got a long ways to go. And again, that there's plenty of opportunities for us to continue to double down on our efforts to reach out in this space. So just a couple more from me and then we'll get to the more important part of the conversation, which is our panel.

But here's some of the pieces of expanding diversity that OA is looking at. There's a policy piece to it. There's the investments piece, partnerships, and then providing technical assistance on it. And so, we kind of view it holistically across the four categories there. We need to make sure our policies are encouraging it, our investments are fixed for those policies, and that we're using force multipliers, as they say, to leverage partnerships to increase that.

And then whether there's confusion or questions about what these policies and things mean, that we're providing timely technical assistance that's helpful and meaningful to sponsors and other stakeholders. So that's a little bit of how we view this. We have established a diversity inclusion page on Apprenticeship.gov. That just went live, I believe, today. So, we're really excited about that.

There's a page dedicated for the career seekers and the apprentices so they know about their EEO rights under the new regulation and then also on the sponsor page that they know, you know, what they need to do to ensure that they meet those requirements. There's plenty of resources there for folks. So, I definitely want to encourage you to visit Apprenticeship.gov after this webinar to look at those resources.

And we'll put the links in at the end where you can specifically go. But we're really doubling down on, you know, providing more technical assistance and resources for individuals in this space.

You know, as I mentioned, we've established equity and industry intermediaries through our apprenticeship expansion efforts. And these intermediaries have a strong focus on equity and apprenticeship. So, again, that kind of speaks to the investment piece, as well as our grant investments, which focus on increasing the participation of underrepresented populations in apprenticeship.

And we're continuing to develop nationally with partnerships with diverse agencies throughout the Department of Labor, such as Women's Bureau and the Office of Disability Employment Policy, and so, just building out those partnerships. Also, our partners in DOL veterans employment and training service. And then just making sure that our registered apprenticeship boilerplates are incorporating the EEO criteria into our standards, which we've been rolling out for a while now. And I know programs that haven't updated are continuing to update. A couple more slides and then we'll turn it over.

We launched a webpage in 2017, shortly after the regulations were renewed, which focused on the sponsor implementation of the regs. And then since then, as I mentioned, we've very recently moved this to Apprenticeship.gov to a very prominent location so that it's featured very quickly for both apprentices and sponsors. So, again, I encourage folks to visit this site in the near future.

And I'm going to pose a question to everyone, if you'd like to take a minute to type it into the chat. But what is one key challenge that you have encountered in your efforts to increase the participation and success of diverse apprentices? If folks would like to take a minute to feel free and type into the chat any challenges that you've encountered or experiences you have? I'd like to have an open dialog on this so that we can see where everyone's coming from. So just take a quick minute here. Feel free to type into the chat.

Here, a question about which places for sourcing individuals for the skilled trades. You know, I do encourage people to partner with the American Job Centers in their community. That's a key resource for finding, you know, some skilled labor. So that's one place where you can go. It also does help meet the outreach requirements of EEO regulations.

I see some comments about technology, you know, willingness to hire entry-level talent as a challenge. You know, finding the right people to have the conversation with, that's an interesting one. You know, there's a reference to kind of interacting with the old school, old mentality, employees. I think I know what that's about.

There are some interest in strategies for how to reach out for underserved communities. Hopefully we'll have a little bit of a conversation about that through our panelists and how they've been able to address that. Some employers just don't want to deal with the requirements, I've seen. It will be interesting to get to the why, I think on that, not just that it's a requirement, but, you know, why is it so challenging?

OK, well, I think, you know, we'll take these into account and you know, this will help us inform future technical assistance for us in the future. I see a reference to, you know, getting the SSA's EEO plans finalized. I do think that's key as well. So, yeah, lots of good material here.

So, with that, you know, continue to tap into the chat. But I think we will continue to progress into our presentation. So, with that, I'd like to take a minute to introduce our first panelist, Daniel Bustillo, from the Health Care Advancement Program. He'll have a presentation on what the work his team has been doing. So, Daniel, I will turn it over to you and I'll drive the slides for you. So just keep me posted.

DANIEL BUSTILLO: Thanks, Andy. I appreciate it. And thanks, I'm happy to be here with you all today, and thanks to the Office of Apprenticeship. I'm grateful for the work they're always doing to move towards a more equitable future. Andy, next slide.

To provide a little bit of context, H-CAP is a national labor-management organization across all sectors of health care. So that's hospitals, nursing homes, and home care. As an organization, we have a long history in health care workforce development with a formal registered apprenticeship program for the past, little over five years now.

As many of you may know, health care is a sector with a long history of apprenticeship-like training models. But it's only over the past few years that efforts have really begun ramping up to increase uptake of the registered apprenticeship model in the sector.

So, at H-CAP, we adopted apprenticeship with the explicit intention of using it to help increase racial equity and access to good paying, quality, well-supported jobs across caregiving occupations. And today we actually now have 17 different competency-based occupations registered nationally under the National Center for Healthcare Apprenticeships.

And as a national intermediary organization with an affiliate network of local intermediaries across 16 states and Washington, D.C., we've also worked across more than 20 states, providing technical assistance and resources to support the expansion of registered apprenticeship and health care as a US DOL industry intermediary during this time.

And as you see listed here, to date 85 percent of the registered apprentices we've supported are women, and a majority of those apprentices are black, Latinx, (AAPI ?) or indigenous, with many also being immigrants. Next slide, please, Andy.

So, picking up on some of the themes that have already been laid out by John, Mike, and Andy, I'm going to talk a bit from a high level about portions of our package of equity strategies as relate to registered apprenticeships.

And we really began this work from the premise that building apprenticeships centered at the intersection of skills attainment, job quality, and racial equity could be a key component of creating more inclusive and sustainable systems and economies that benefit workers, employers and health care recipients of care communities and more.

I want to provide some thoughts and background on some of our key equity strategies with the acknowledgment that, you know, we're continually working towards improving policy and programs designed to help meet our goals. And we're going about the work of creating more equitable apprenticeship programs in health care by working towards the following.

So, first is really adopting specific equity metrics and outcomes and the policy systems and data to support that really center the experience of black and brown workers in health care in our registered apprenticeship design and implementation. And by policy, I also mean institutional policy.

So, what's the recruitment and selection process look like? Who's involved in making those decisions? Are there processes for ongoing and substantive input from black and brown apprentices and communities? Are particular assessments being utilized that could be potentially unnecessary impediments to apprentice entry and success?

One of the things we've definitely seen during COVID, what about digital equity strategies? Longitudinal analysis of the disaggregated data we have available to us? So, a whole host of questions that really need to be intentionally grappled with, confronted, and meaningfully addressed to embed equity strategies and program design.

Second, we really wanted to use an asset-based framework. I mean, far too often a deficit-based approach is utilized, which centers on perceived shortcomings, failings or deficits. And that's far too often been the norm. So, we really believe strongly that all will be better served with the utilization of an asset-based framework.

And as an example, I'll give you one specific example. We support an assistant case manager apprenticeship program with its billions of dollars in Los Angeles, a job that was designed to serve the homeless population in L.A. County. By intentional program design, all of the apprentices that participate in that program had the lived experience of themselves being formerly homeless or housing insecure. So, this really leveraged equity strategies and lived experience to facilitate a much stronger apprenticeship program.

Third, we're focused on addressing occupational segregation in health care. And by this, I mean we have a really severe overrepresentation of primarily black and brown women in lower wage jobs and an underrepresentation as we move up the occupational ladder to higher wage jobs in health care.

And black women in particular have endured these inequities in caregiving occupations which have historically been undervalued. That's if we're really serious about addressing workforce inequity, it is critical to create programs that support both entry into the sector, but incumbent worker aspiration as well as a specific strategy. So, this could help facilitate progression for many experienced, talented health care workers and adult learners who have had traditionally had difficulty accessing access to higher wage occupations and start helping to confront some of the occupational segregation in our sector.

Fourth, just to talk a little bit about the supportive services through intermediaries and community-based organizations. High quality, direct services and support provided through sector partnerships with deep experience in the health care sector. If we think about it, if prior to the pandemic, 40 percent of Americans could not come up with 400 in an emergency, imagine the potential impact to your persistence in a program if you're an adult learner who encounters an emergency. So, things such as access to child care assistance, emergency funding, etc. These are all crucial components of an equitable apprenticeship program.

And last but not least, the development of some really robust resources in our role as a national intermediary. So, we've created a variety of open-source resources throughout the work that we've done. Some of them are listed here. They're available on our website, but we continue to update these on a constant basis to better serve equity goals.

As an example, we're presently updating our toolkit and mentorship training, which was developed over the previous years to account for making our own apprenticeship programs more inclusive for other populations that we did not initially focus on, such as people with disabilities. So, this entire package gives you a little bit of a sense of some of the specific things that we were engaged in, in thinking about really developing equitable apprenticeship programs and embedding equity strategy into our apprenticeship programs from inception. So, thanks for the time. I'll leave it at that, Andy, and I'm looking forward to the rest of the discussion.

MR. RIDGEWAY: That's great. Thanks, Daniel. Really great presentation. If anyone has any specific questions for Daniel, feel free to type them into the chat. If not, we can get to those at the end of the presentation, potentially. So again, feel free if you have questions, with any of the presenters, you know, feel free to type them in as we go. I've seen a lot of good feedback in the chat already. I wish I could spend more time focusing on it.

But with that, thanks again, Daniel, and I will turn it over to Leah Rambo, the director of training for the Sheetmetal, Air, Rail, and Transportation Workers for Local 28, New York City. Leah, are you there?

LEAH RAMBO: Yes, I am, and I guess first, I just want to say thank you for having me. It's a privilege to be here. And apprenticeship training is my passion. I've been involved in apprenticeship training since 1998 when I was just a wee little girl, I'll say.

But I would start off by saying there's really no magic bullet to getting apprentices in the program, having a diverse, inclusive and then more importantly, equitable apprenticeship program. It boils down to three things that I have listed on the on the next slide. The first thing is really setting your goals, evaluating your outcomes, sustained outreach, and preparing your work culture for a diverse workforce.

So, in my mind, I think of it, I try to simplify things as much as I can for myself. Is first, you have to want them, then we go to get them, and then the last thing is to be able to keep them, which is your retention.

If you move on to the next slide, what are some of the things that we've taken into consideration here in Local 28? I'm going to say the first thing is to set goals, is to know where you are. That's going to be your most important thing. There's nothing that takes the place of actually knowing exactly where you are because you can't tell where you want to go if you don't know where you are.

So, one of the things that we do at all times is like, so, for instance, you could even do percentages and numbers. I tend to like percentages because to me they're a little bit cleaner. But, you know, what's the percentage right now in your program of women, of minority, of veterans? And then, what do you want those numbers to be? So, I know right now in our program that I have 52 women in the program and that represents 12 percent.

To some, that may seem like, hey, that's a pretty good number for construction. But that wasn't my goal. My goal was 20 percent. So, I'm going to say also it's important to aim high with the goals, because if you start something very modest, then you're going to be disappointed at the end. And the same thing when it comes to minorities in the program. So, we bring down our stats between, we look at black, white, Latino, Asian, Native American, Pacific Islanders and know the exact percentage and the number count for each in the program.

And then the third thing is veterans. How many veterans do you want? When I became the training director in 2011 we had five veterans in the program. Now we have 37. Though 37 out of 440, I know that I'm getting close to that 10 percent mark. Not quite there, but close to it. And then what do you want the numbers to be? The one of the things that we use to determine what our numbers would be is we do talk to our apprentice training rep here in New York.

We look at the stats for our area, which is New York City, Nassau and Suffolk County. And we do our best to try to match those. And not using the excuse that we can't find them. If there's a particular group that we see that we're underrepresented in and representative of, then that's the group that we really target. And just go to the next slide for me.

And how do we do that, how do we how do we target them? Well, the first thing is casting a wide net. So, we look at the different community organizations that are in our area, making sure that we contact them, as well as the Department of Labor to know when is our program coming up. You know, when we're looking for, for women, we go to colleges, we go to sports teams, we go to women's gyms. We go to where those individuals are.

When they're looking for veterans, we work with helmets to hardhats and other veteran programs and feeder programs. So for us, these pre-apprenticeship programs are essential for us in meeting our goals. There's several in New York City and throughout the country that have created feeder programs, pre-apprenticeship programs, which tend to have a better candidate because they've already been vetted and they've taken that process ahead for us so that when we come in, we already know that the candidates, there are certain skillsets that they may have.

And some of the things we consider like how are we going to bring people in? Is it in-person versus online? That's something for an organization to look at. You know, if you're doing it online, well, you know what? You're probably going to get a younger group, someone who's a little bit more tech savvy. But even if you're doing it in person, well, you may get some people that are a little bit more determined because that took a little extra effort to show up at you at your doorstep.

And we decided to go on a lottery system rather than the first come, first serve. Sometimes with first come, first serve. you have people lining up for days. Well, if you have people lined up for days, you may not get as many women. You may not get people that have families, whereas a lottery system we found is very fair. Everyone goes in the pool. The first 300 are the ones that take our test. And the type of test is also important. Does the test that you're providing, is it an actual measure of what they the need for the program? Because with sheet metal, we found that, you know, we had all types of things: spatial, relations, geometry, trigonometry.

Yes, this is a portion of our trade, but it's not really a true measure on if a person will be successful or not. Taking that test doesn't really give us that measure. So, we've narrowed it down just to a math test of basic math skills and then the rest of it we can teach them.

And then the last point is really evaluating your apprentices early. And if we just follow the model and the Department of Labor has put forth in terms of evaluation, that has been one of our biggest things in making sure that our program is equitable for everyone. If the sponsors are doing monthly evaluations, it allows you to very quickly catch any issues that may come up with an apprentice.

And that's something that's really drastically helped when it comes to retention and also to catch any possible issues with discrimination within our program. Just flip over to the next one. OK, there we go.

And at the end of the day, one of the things for me that, you know, that inspires me is having this diverse workforce. I look at these little girls that went to a summer camp with an organization called Tools and Tiaras. They made their sheet metal cups that are in their hands. They're very proud of them. But it's important that in really everything that you do that you kind of preach the benefits of diversity in the workforce, make it part of your daily education, making sure your sites are free of bullying, hazing, and harassment.

Not only is it required with the EEO regs with the Department of Labor, but it is also part of our training with our apprenticeship program, it's part of our training with our union officials, it's part of our training with our shop stewards and everyone that's associated within our apprenticeship program.

And last but certainly not least is follow the regs. We have the EEO regs out there, they're comprehensive and they're possible to do. I'm not going to say they're easy to do, but they're definitely attainable. And there's guidance out there also to help us file those EEO regs.

Those are, I guess, our items that we kind of keep in the forefront, which has allowed us to have a really diverse workforce, even a diverse organization. Our organization is 52 percent minority, 48 percent non-minority. And like I said, within our program right now, we have 20, 12 percent women. But the goal is 20 percent.

And that, I guess covers, I guess, our strategy, what we use to make sure that we have a diverse workforce.

MR. RIDGEWAY: That was great, Leah. Thanks for that presentation. And I see someone had a comment that this is the first they've seen of, you know, how to target for these goals. And so, I think people really appreciated kind of, you know, the questions that you ask. And honestly, as the EEO tools get rolled out from OA, you know, that's ultimately kind of the questions that we're asking is, what are your goals for reaching out and to encourage people to set goals, for sponsors to set goals and to reach for them.

And again, what's not a game of gotcha, but it's definitely, you're not going to get a goal that you don't reach for. So, I appreciate you talking about that, Leah, and also encouraging programs to set goals that may even be a bit of a stretch and not just one that's easy to obtain. So, thank you for that. And we'll have more questions for you, I'm sure, in a little bit.

So now I'd like to turn it over to Dr. Ronald Johnson, who's a senior policy adviser and chief strategist representing the Wireless Infrastructure Association. Dr. Johnson, are you there?

RONALD JOHNSON: Yes, I am. How are you?

MR. RIDGEWAY: Great.

DR. JOHNSON: Thank you very much, Andrew, for moderating this event today and for the comments that were made by Mike earlier, and John Ladd. Our association is always very appreciative of their commitment and support of us, and for the entire OA staff that we worked with now for about five years.

And so, we appreciate what your office is doing to promote and fund our national apprenticeship initiatives. We know already in our association that this initiative is having a significant and long-term impact on our industry. And for that we are extremely happy. And so, we are very proud to be an intermediary partner with the Department of Labor. Just a little bit about our organization, our association, many of our viewers might not know.

But WIA is an association that represents businesses large and small, by the way, that build and own and operate the nation's wireless infrastructure, those platforms that give us all of the telecommunication networks and support and tools that we need to run our economy. And so, our 100-plus members include, as you well can appreciate, those representing our wireless carriers, infrastructure providers, professional services firms like engineering and right-of-way consultants and others.

And they operate telecommunication facilities around the globe, not just in the United States. And through our public affairs and advocacy efforts at the local, state and federal level, we do have an impact there, and we work to try to support the widespread deployment of wireless infrastructure nationwide. We believe that, you know, wireless broadband is everywhere and it should be for everyone, regardless of where you live or your economic status. The access to broadband is so extraordinarily important and our association is dedicated to making this happen, working with our stakeholders and with our government partners.

And so, in addition to that, we lead the industry, our industry and in hosting many national events and networking for new business development opportunities for wireless companies, those who are members of our association, and those that may not be a member of our association. And we showcase our industry in many, I think, really the kinds of ways.

For the month of February, as an example, you all know that the month of February was Black History Month. And so, we had the opportunity to develop a fairly significant and I think impactful blog around notable African-Americans contributing to telecom technology. And this blog was widely read and reviewed, and we got tremendous comments about it because it was the first time that I industry had done that. And we wanted the American public to know that we had distinguished African Americans that had made tremendous contributions to our industry.

And, of course, the month of March, as you well know, is Women's History Month. And so, we are doing a special program there. We've already teed up International Women's Day, which was March the 8th, by developing a meet the women making a difference in the wireless infrastructure industry. And so, this blog is on our website. We encourage you to visit and we encourage women of color and women of that are not of color, all women, in fact, should go to this blog and look at these wonderful women who continue to make a contribution.

And also, I'd like to say it is important for young women who are in colleges and young girls who are in intermediary schools and high schools to see that there are wonderful examples in our industry that they can ascribe to. And so, we are excited about our ability to have a community of members and an audience of Americans who can see these blogs and see what wonderful things not just our association is doing, but what the industry is doing to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion.

And so, in addition to these very informative blogs, and other ways that we reach out to the public, to our stakeholders and to those that we serve in our industry, we very often do not have an opportunity to go to the Hill and testify on important issues.

Just on February the 17th, for example, many of you might have visited, we're part of that conversation at the House. But we did speak before the House Energy and Commerce Committee on a hearing entitled "Connecting America: Broadband Solutions to Pandemic Problems," a very competent and timely conversation; and our CEO and president, Jonathan Adelstein made a presentation on behalf of our association. Many of you all know Jonathan. He's a former FCC commissioner, twice appointed to serve and it's where I first met Jonathan. And he has always been an advocate for DNI when he was the commissioner. And certainly since he left the commission, he has been equally adamant about the importance of having diversity in our industry.

So, at this hearing, we had a chance to look at the importance of broadband access during the pandemic. And we examined some of the challenges and solutions to ensuring that all communities have access to robust broadband. We emphasize, and I know this will be of particular interest to you, the audience, the need for a trained workforce to continue building out our robust networks that are needed in every corner of our country.

And we highlighted the industry-specific training programs that we have. For example, the telecommunication educational center is a part of the infrastructure at WIA where we actually train and offer certificates and in various areas of broadband infrastructure, deployment and development. And these courses can obviously be taken virtually now. And we believe that it has been a great service to our members to have their employees to come and participate as a part of their upskilling strategy, and that's what the TEC is primarily all about.

But in addition to that, we at the telecommunications industry and registered apprenticeship program, TIRAP, that many of you may be familiar with, which pairs prospective and new industry workers with companies that can help train and mentor them and setting them up for success and meaningful jobs and by extension, it helps to bolster our industry's workforce.

We also emphasized at that hearing the need for educational opportunities at community colleges, at technical colleges, at historical black colleges and universities, tribal colleges and universities, Hispanic-serving institutions as places that we will visit over time to develop relationships, partnerships with these institutions to ensure that our students, their graduates and their in-place students have an opportunity to come to our industry and get involved in meaningful occupations towards their career goals.

And so, we want our workforce and we are committed as an association to look like the people that we serve, which is as diverse as the United States is. And so, we believe that apprenticeships are a great way to get people of color, veterans, disadvantaged communities, underrepresented other populations and women involved in our industry to continue to grow their professional careers as we grow our industry, which is the wireless industry. And so, apprenticeships are a perfect place, a perfect match for our industry. And that's why it's so important for us to be a part of this conversation today.

Just as a backdrop, you know, 5G and you read about it, it's on the news all of the time about what's going on there and the notion that 5G is not reaching enough underrepresented, underserved populations. But our association is committed to working with our members, our company members, to help them to grow their workforces, to meet the requirements in urban and extended rural areas.

You know, as you probably know, about 18 million households in America today do not have high speed broadband. Yet our industry spends about $30 billion of shareholders' funds each year for infrastructure development. And that is in addition to the billions of dollars that federal government is offering up going forward under this administration to build out networks in areas that we have not had networks before, as well as to strengthen current networks that we have.

And so legislative initiatives like the Consolidated Appropriations Act, the Rural Broadband Opportunity Fund, the Emergency Broadband Benefits Program, the coalbed stimulus one program will exponentially increase the need for a more robust and trained workforce. And we believe that one of the pathways to fulfilling the needs of 250,000 new jobs over the next 10 years will be the pathway of apprenticeships. And so, one of the programs that we have, TIRAP, is dedicated to providing technical assistance to help overcome some of these barriers of finding competent workers to work with not only our members in our association, but others as well.

Right now, we have 50 employees that have (raised it ?) on our TIRAP program, and we have 2,200 apprentices across 12 occupations. And we continue to create new occupations to interest for apprenticeship workers and working with organizations like the Power Communications Contractors Association and universities and colleges.

So, let me quickly speak now to what has been some of the success on our first slide here for increasing diversity within the association. And there are five points that I would like to raise. First of all, at our national association advance, we have taken great pride to ensure that our keynote speakers, our panelists, our panel leaders, and special invitation to local stakeholders are offered to ensure that our conferences look like America, that they are diverse in all respects.

And not only do we do that with respect to the association event generally, but more specifically on our annual supply and development summit that we've had now for the last five years, we actually matched small and disadvantaged firms and women-owned businesses with our members in the hopes that out of that conversation and those meetings and those presentations, that these small companies will have a great opportunity to participate in our association, in the work that we do as a wireless association.

We believe by bringing in these smaller companies, these disadvantaged businesses, that by extension we will find a pathway into these communities and we can hire more people of color, more veterans and more women from underrepresented populations and communities.

In addition to that, we actively, obviously recruit women and suppliers as well to join our association, as well as diverse owned companies to join as well. We are working very aggressively to increase our membership because we think it's important to our association to continue to grow our enterprise by expanding the parameters of our members and by having different voices to speak to the issues that confront our association and those that we serve going forward.

In addition to that, our members, as you probably would suspect, are major contributors to all kinds of social issues. As a result of 2020, many of our members have given hundreds of millions of dollars to organizations to help strengthen our communities and to address some of the social issues that exist in these communities. And by extension, we think by our members doing this, in making this commitment to these social values, that it will help our industry grow and we will be able to provide a more robust and integrated service to the communities and people that we serve. And so, we think that is a very important part of what we do on our social responsibility from our corporations.

And then on our next slide here, we talk about an increase in apprenticeship diversity levels and how do we go about doing that? Well, we look at diverse populations in urban and rural areas as sources for our workforces. And through community anchoring institutions and organizations in these communities, we are able to touch base with them and have conversation about the kinds of employees or apprentices we might be able to get from those unserved and underserved communities, particularly in rural areas, as you well know, are certainly underrepresented in our industry as they are in those industries. And so, we are paying particular attention to rural America.

Having been born and reared in rural America, I am certainly aware of the need for greater broadband connectivity so that small farmers, small businesses, individual consultant businesses can have access to run their business more efficiently.

In terms of our veterans and women and underrepresented communities of color, our strategy here is to go to community leaders and chambers of commerce, universities and colleges, community colleges as well, and also houses of worship as an anchor institution that we have relationships with, houses of worship around the region and hopefully around the country very soon, to have conversations with them, engage them and helping us to reach out to these communities of color in underserved communities.

And then finally, in our market, we look at HBCUs and HSIs and universities that serve underrepresented apprenticeship programs. For example, last year at our annual conference, we had our first apprenticeship accelerator where we brought together industry partners with HBCUs. And out of that, we are beginning to stand up and grow some very aggressive and progressive apprenticeship programs.

And so finally, on our outreach strategies here on our final slide, you know, our task is to continue to inform and share the advantages for our members being involved in TIRAP and the many advantages that they will have by getting engaged.

We are looking forward to increase the number of active participants in our TIRAP program. In addition to that, we will continue to go to the Hill and to our state legislative houses to talk about the need for looking at regulatory reform to ensure that we can build out our networks and by extension, we can hire more wonderful people to work in our industry, provide job opportunities for them as we build out this robust economy. And so, we continue – yes.

MR. RIDGEWAY: Oh, hey Ron, we're almost out of time. Can we cut to the panel real quick? I'd like to – we have a hard stop at 1:30. Is that okay?

DR. JOHNSON: Yes, that would be fine. Just finally, I'd like to just say we continue to work with our local and state apprenticeship offices and we've enjoyed the relationship that we've enjoyed with them. So thank you very much, Andrew. I appreciate that.

MR. RIDGEWAY: Yeah, sorry to cut you off. Just wanted to make sure we had a chance to have a couple of questions on our panel today. I'll just quickly queue up for Daniel. Daniel, in what ways do you think diversity and inclusion strengthen apprenticeship programs?

MR. BUSTILLO: Sure, I'll answer that quickly as well. I mean, I think that, you know, great question. I think we have plenty of evidence that demonstrates that both workers and employers benefit from more equitable programs offering better bottom-line results, greater innovation, et cetera. I think in health care, specifically, given the changing demographics of patients, consumers, and resident, it's really critical that we create programs and systems that assist to create a more equitable workforce at all levels, one that's really representative of the communities they serve in order to support the health care delivery system of the future.

So just as a brief example, I want to touch upon a community health worker apprenticeship with partners in New York City that recruited both incoming workers with lived experience and worked with local community-based organizations to recruit new entrants into health care. So, apprentices were actually from the community in which they were working and providing care, which I think led to better outcomes and better care being delivered and was a win for all those involved.

MR. RIDGEWAY: Great, and Ron, do you have a – I might ask you the same question, in what ways do you think diversity, inclusion strengthen apprenticeship programs?

MR. JOHNSON: Well, very shortly, I think, by having a diverse apprenticeship program sends a very clear and profound message to our members, to our association, and to the communities that we serve that through aggressive apprenticeship programs, we can create jobs, we can help their economies grow. And I think that's very important to underrepresented, underserved communities.

MR. RIDGEWAY: Thanks, Ron. Daniel, for you real quick, are there specific partners that have helped you in your efforts to enhance diversity?

MR. BUSTILLO: Yeah, I think that it's important to note that there is a large ecosystem of partners that many are on the webinar today, employers, unions, education providers, CBOs, workforce stakeholders, and more that play really crucial roles. I do want to highlight and spotlight the role of workforce intermediaries here as well. I think that, you know, intermediary organizations can play a really critical role in efforts to enhance diversity, increase equity through the provision of a variety of services that are really attuned to both the needs of apprentices, employers and everybody that's involved.

I think intermediary organizations can play a really large role in ensuring that programs are focused on strategies. A lot of the strategies that we've talked about today, acting as a hub for some of the collaborations, partnerships and some of the change we've talked about that's needed to meaningfully create more equitable programs.

MR. RIDGEWAY: Great, thanks, Daniel. And I know we're short on time, but Leah, I'd like to ask you one quick question. What is the one thing that you have learned that you want to share about apprenticeship, diversity, and inclusion efforts, Leah?

MS. RAMBO: I would say that the main thing that I've learned is that diversity inclusion works, there's a better – we have a better retention when we pay attention to diversity inclusion. It changes the atmosphere not just in the apprenticeship school in our classrooms, but also on the job sites to one that's more supportive and one that's more likely to be, you know, free of bullying, hazing, and harassing.

And we've got quite a few compliments from our sponsors in terms of the quality of our apprentices. So, we see that when you have a fair and equitable system, then you're going to get the best of everyone. And so that allows us to have a very diverse workforce, but also a very skilled workforce. So, there's really no downside to it. It takes effort. It takes work, but the rewards are well worth it.

MR. RIDGEWAY: Great, thanks, Leah. And I know we're at time, so I'm going to just very quickly close this out here. Again, we've watched the EEO web page. I want to take a minute to thank all three of our panelists. We need to schedule another one of these in the very near future and keep the conversation going. And also appreciate everyone for joining us today and for all the questions asked. We will definitely review those and see if we can get another webinar on the books. And so, with that, John, I'm going to hand it over to you, Jon. And thanks again, everyone, and have a great rest of your day.

MR. VEHLOW: Thank you, Andy. And I know it's a little smaller on screen, but you can download that PowerPoint with those resources list, so that's in the file share at on the bottom right-hand side of your screen.

(END)