**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**Impactful Program Outcome Strategies: Building Partnerships Through Community Engagement**

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JONATHAN VEHLOW: Welcome to "Impactful Program Outcome Strategies: Building Partnerships Through Community Engagement." Without further ado, I'd like to kick things off to our host today Zodie Makonnen, grant lead, Scaling Apprenticeship Through Sector-Based Strategies, Division of Strategic Investments, Employment and Training Administration. Zodie, take it away.

ZODIE MAKONNEN: Thank you so much, Jon. And good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for joining us today for this webinar. As Jon mentioned, my name is Zodie Makonnen, and I am the grant lead for the Scaling Apprenticeship Grant Program. We're very excited that you are here with us today. And as many of you know, we are now at the two-year mark of the grant.

And although grantees have experienced unprecedented challenges during the last year or more, with some employer and workforce partners unable to actively participate in the Scaling Apprenticeship grant activities, we are here at DOL all hopeful that, going forward, we can revive and renew these conversations.

As we see the economy moving in a positive direction once again, we're excited to reignite conversations about how businesses are pivoting, learning, and growing from the COVID-19 experience; and how we can meet those needs with a pipeline of ready and eager students and employees who can manage change and reinvent themselves right alongside the employer.

Today we have an exciting panel of experts with us. Thank you to our panelists for joining us. They are experts at building partnerships. And they're here to share some practical tips about how to engage and sustain high-quality partnerships. I am now going to hand this over to Janet Bray, who is with Manhattan Strategy Group, and is one of our Scaling Apprenticeship TA coaches. Jan?

JANET BRAY: Thank you, Zodie. I appreciate it. It's a pleasure to be participating and facilitating this webinar. As Zodie said, we have a really unique and expert panel today. And I think this is going to have you thinking in some different directions, or enhance the directions you're already thinking about. So we are very excited to be bringing together this panel today. We talked a lot in the past about employer engagement and how do we engage employers? This is sort of continuing that discussion, although it's also adding in the recruitment of individuals to become part of the Apprenticeship Program.

So this is really to give you an overview of partnerships that can be developed at community colleges, what other kinds of partnerships that can help you really meet your goal. And we're bringing to the table today as part of this discussion people from workforce development boards, apprenticeship networks at the local and state level, and then community-based organizations. We've talked again about employers a lot. We've talked about recruitment and young people. What other resources can you use to address this? So that's why we brought this group together.

Our goal today is really for you at the end of this webinar to understand not only the value of, but the process for establishing partners with these other kind of entities to look at this as you look at your whole planning process strategically. How do you utilize these partners to engage and to reengage employers? Especially as we think about the results of COVID-19, I know employers are slowly getting into it. How can you utilize these kinds of partnerships? And then how do these partnerships work?

How do these types of partners work in terms of recruitment, training strategy, and placing people into programs? And how do they work? What kind of strategies are employed by workforce development boards and community-based organizations? And also, to give you an understanding of what drives them, the more you can collaborate the better. So it's an understanding of the goals and measures, if the workforce boards' needs meet, and how you and your organization can create a mutually beneficial partnership.

And then finally, how do you keep that partnership and collaboration going? So it's going to offer insights into the way that you can best position your objectives and the grant's objectives to align with those of this expanded partnership, as well as from a business perspective. So that's our goal today. It's a heavy list, but we have a great panel in which to achieve these goals. And I know and I'm very confident you guys are really going to find this very informative and interesting.

Our panelists today include Julie Parks, who is the interim dean School of Workforce Development Organizations at Grand Rapids Community College. I can tell you that Julie understands what it means to be working on these grants. I have worked with Julie on a number of grant, and she's awesome. And then Amy Lebednick is the chief operating officer for West Michigan Works! in Grand Rapids, who is their local workforce board. And they have a very interesting story to tell.

We have Melisa Stark, the commissioner of apprenticeship programs, with the Utah Department of Workforce Services; and Mikel Blake, who is co-founder of Tech-Moms in Utah, which is a nonprofit, community-based organization. Again, the expert advice -- we have the partnership between the community college and the workforce boards, Grand Rapids and West Michigan Works! These two organizations have had a longstanding, solid partnership that they have used to recruit, train, and place workers in their communities -- very successful. And it's that communication-collaboration between the two that has made a difference.

Apprenticeship Utah Network works with community-based organization employers. And the partnerships they have created connects individuals with training and work experience to create sustainable employment. And then finally, along with that, Tech-Moms, which is a community-based organization that works with employers to bring more moms into tech. They've developed partnerships to expand the talent pools that are needed to fuel the growth, while increasing diversity in perspectives required for innovation and competition in a global, digital world -- a very unique, very successful community-based organization.

So I think you're going to get very well-rounded input on this today. So with that, the first thing we want to do, as usual, we always have a poll. If you all can answer, what sources do you utilize to identify and engage employers? And check all that you employ -- direct outreach from staff, your business development staff, or any other departments within your institution, other college staff, workforce development boards, and community-based organizations. All right. Very good. I'm pleased to see so many working with workforce development boards.

Okay. So what we can see is there's a lot of opportunity for you guys to really learn and to do more. So this is great. That's pretty good. I'm hoping towards the end of this as we have Q&A, you all can really talk about any challenges, ask questions of this group of challenges you have in terms of working with your local board or your local community-based organization. So this is excellent. It seems like a good number of you have made some outreach to it.

What we're going to ask is we're asking each of the panelist members to talk about what's worked for them, how they work with community colleges, how they work with their population. What is it that they need? What drives them? What are their objectives? So we're going to start off with the community college workforce board collaboration. And it's my pleasure again to introduce Amy Lebednick and Julie Parks, who are going to step in and talk about their partnerships. Ladies?

MS. PARKS: Thank you, Jan. This is Julie. Hello to all my colleagues and friends out there, especially the community college partners. We've had a collaboration with West Michigan Works! for over 30 years. But I'm going to tell you that only the last 8-10 have been what I would call a good partnership. Before that, we were contractors for our West Michigan Works! We've staffed a couple of service centers and ran a couple of programs for them.

And then somewhere around eight years ago, they decided that they were going to take those services in house, and a transition happened and a discussion about how could we change from being a contractor to being a partner? And that wasn't easy. And it didn't happen overnight. And it took a lot of work for us to do that. But there have been so many benefits to that relationship. I'll just tell you, I can't think of a group or an organization or even an employer that is a better partner than our workforce system here and what they do with us.

They help us really reach further into the community than even we can as a community college. So how did we build that relationship? And it sounds so trite to just say communication, but it takes a lot of intentional communication with each other. We actually meet together once a month. Plus with just our regular work that we do, we have members of our team talking to members at the workforce board -- almost every day there's some kind of communication going on. I see them in this way of leading the sector groups that are huge and very important to me.

Yes. I have advisory committees that I'm required to have by Perkins. But these sector groups operate in a way that I get even more information from them overall -- not just about one particular subject -- for the whole sector. And they really help us plan and work together well. They actually hold the standard for so many apprenticeships for us. So we can be the trainer. We can be the educator. We do what we do best. And we let them do the intake paperwork, the follow-up that goes on. They provide services to students, to employers, things that we can't always do.

And by working together and having this one voice into the community, we really help employers to reduce the confusion. I know it's hard to believe, but there are some employers that have never worked with a community college. And there are some employers that have never worked with their workforce organization. And now we're both out there kind of singing the same song, using the same talking points, referring people back and forth, kind of working sometimes behind the curtain to look for different ways to braid funding to really be a benefit to those individuals.

It also gives us -- we really work hard to understand what does our workforce board -- what are their measures? And what do they need to accomplish to be considered successful? And they paid attention to what are the measures that GRCC, our community college, have to produce? And just involving them in every part -- not just workforce development, but any student that goes to our college, we can refer them to West Michigan Works! for supportive services, if they need food, if they need child care -- just things that they can do beyond what I can do.

So what do they help me with? They help me with recruitment, so my enrollment. They help me with placement activities and follow-up activities. And all of that really happens because working together and understanding what we both need. So, Amy, do you want to take the next slide?

AMY LEBEDNICK: Yeah. Thank you, Julie. It's a pleasure to be here with everyone. Grand Rapids Community College and West Michigan Works! currently have a robust relationship, but it always wasn't that way. So we recognize that collaboration and its challenges will look different in some communities. And that means partnership between the local workforce board and community college, or other partners, may not come as easily. That really requires different approaches in order to connect and collaborate registered apprenticeships. As an example, even a nontraditional industry may be one really significant way to bring partners together.

But the first step really, as Julie mentioned, would be gaining an understanding of what the workforce development and community colleges' needs are. So identifying those metrics, goals, and even their local area plan or strategic plan is really a key first step in understanding what those needs are. And then from there, you'll be able to identify how each organization can work together to help achieve those common goals. And when it comes to reaching out to a partner in order to engage and bring them to the table, it's helpful to leverage existing partnerships, such as state partners, a U.S. DOL representative -- as an example -- when conducting your outreach.

Invite your partner to the table for a discussion. And have prepared, meaningful agenda items that touch on goals that are mutually beneficial to all parties that are at the table. We all know that employers are a driving force behind the work that we do. And if you can identify an employer that is eager to engage and has been a strong advocate of the work that you do, commission them as your employer championship. And that can be extremely beneficial to have that champion kind of leading the efforts, and also even assisting in that outreach to engage your partners.

And lastly, ensure that regular and intentional communication is maintained even when there are periods in which there may be no collaborative work taking place. With that, we can go to the next slide.

JULIE PARKS: We want to give you an example of some participant recruitment strategies that we've done together. And we developed this "no wrong door" entry point for individuals who want to get education and training. So West Michigan Works! and Grand Rapids Community College, along with community partners, have set up a data sharing arrangement where we're sharing a system to put information in about individuals who need to or want to obtain new jobs or become an apprentice.

We started our first medical assistant apprenticeship program a little over five years ago. And when we first started and Michigan Works! did information sessions, we were lucky if we got 20-30 people to come. Three years after we started, 400 individuals came to information sessions that were held by our Michigan Works! to become apprentices. Look at that difference and that value of that partnership and that recruiting. And that's just one example of the different ways that we've worked together. Amy, how about employer engagement?

MS. LEBEDNICK: Apprenticeships are such a great way and a common benefit to all parties. And you can use apprenticeships to bring employers to the table, as well as your partners. Julie touched on industry sector strategies and engagement. And if you have an organization that can provide backbone support to organize an employer-led industry council that's focused on talent, that's extremely beneficial when engaging other employers within that industry.

And aside from phone calls to employers to get your foot in the door and build a relationship from there, other strategies for reaching out to employers are really not that different from those that I mentioned when reaching out to your partners. For Grand Rapids Community College and West Michigan Works! we did utilize apprenticeship programs as kind of a hanging carrot to bring our employers to the table. Again, I would suggest by starting -- identify one of your key industries. It does not have to be an industry in which apprenticeships are traditionally held or sponsored by employers.

Any of your industries that have an occupation that would align nicely with an apprenticeship program would be great. Identify an employer champion within that industry, and bring employers together for a round-table discussion. At that meeting, present labor market information, showcasing the need to work together to solve workforce challenges collaboratively. And then present solutions that address it, such as the development and expansion of the Registered Apprenticeship Program.

Of course, bring in and include those necessary partners and subject matter experts, such as the U.S. DOL and community colleges, for your area are critical. But from there, you can find other discussions will then take place. And for us in our area, we were able to -- what sprouted out of that was many other projects and initiatives, including projects such as analyzing jobs and positions – (inaudible) – curriculum with programs, and providing better talent to the employers. Julie, any takeaways in providing ongoing support?

MS. PARKS: Well, I think a good example would be the grants that we've achieved together over the last six months. We have four or five pretty major projects that we're doing together that really have resulted from this partnership in really doing what we each do best. And let me tell you, when your employer is the one out there telling people the value of an apprenticeship, the value that that brings to diversify their workforce, the value for the retention of their employees, then you know that your partnership has been successful.

We just got a One Workforce grant together. We're doing strengthening community colleges. We have three different apprenticeship kind of grants. So look at working together what we've done to be able to help individuals in our community and our employers by trying to bridge that gap that they have and that talent need. And West Michigan Works! has also done just this great job of reaching out to the next generation through their career events that they're having. And we're really building that pipeline that you hear so many people talk about. And as long as we keep that communication open, I think it'll only continue to grow. It's worth the amount of time you put in to build the relationship up front. It does pay off in all kinds of ways. Amy?

MS. LEBEDNICK: And I would add to that that each partner brings something to the table. And use the strength of your organization to benefit your partners when you can. Always bring your partners to the table up front and as early as you can. Be intentional about referring employers to partners when it makes sense to do so. And also, when you have the chance to do so, give your partner shout-outs, credit, accolades when speaking to others about the collaborative work that you do. Because we all win when we work as a team.

MS. BRAY: That's really good advice, both Julie and Amy. Thank you. One quick question because I know this is an issue that comes a lot. And I'll probably ask the other panelists as well. How does a partnership help when you have employers that are reluctant to take on an apprenticeship program? It's just too much time, too much effort. Why should we do that? How does a partnership respond to that?

MS. PARKS: Oh, Amy, tell them what you do.

MS. LEBEDNICK: Sure. Our workforce agency has apprenticeship success coordinators on staff. And we're able to kind of take the hand of that employer and walk them through the apprenticeship process. I think quite often when you hear all of the steps up front, it can sound really daunting. But actually, the implementation of it is not as bad. So we often act as the liaison between the employer and our U.S. DOL representative to really make an easy and less daunting process for the employer.

MS. PARKS: And West Michigan Works! holds the standard, which is really beneficial for smaller employers. They take care of the paperwork end for the employers. It just makes it very easy.

MS. BRAY: Well, that's a good step. Very good. So would you both say that the partnership has really contributed significantly to you getting the additional grants? Would you maybe have gotten them just as equally if you weren't going in together?

MS. PARKS: I don't think so. I think it has totally benefited the grants because we've had success. We understand the metrics that we have to achieve. And we communicate and work hard to get them.

MS. LEBEDNICK: Absolutely. And I think our collaboration has brought other key workforce partners into the circle. And the more partners we have, the stronger application you have for a grant.

MS. BRAY: Very informative. Thank you both. And I know we'll come back with questions later. I just want to remind everyone, if you have questions in general or for any of the panelists – (inaudible) – after the presentation. So at this point, we're going to look at strategies to engage -- sorry, guys I didn't move that in there -- which is really about understanding the goals that they set, the flexibility and program design, aligning data collection, and coordinating assessment strategies.

I think those are important strategies to think about when you're connecting to these organizations. So let's now turn to agencies at the state level, apprenticeship networks. We're very pleased to have Melisa Stark here from the Utah Department of Workforce Services, who is going to talk about the apprenticeship network that is in Utah and strategies to work with them, what they bring to the table, and how they can help you. So, Melisa, I'm going to turn this over to you now.

MELISA STARK: Great. Thank you for having me. I'm really excited to hear what some of our colleagues are doing in other states. I appreciated listening to about what's going on in Michigan, and took a few key points and hints for myself. Because as much as we think that we are great at what we do, there are always things to learn and new strategies to implement. So thank you for having us here today to be able to talk about what we've done in developing a new Apprenticeship Utah Network, is what we're calling it.

We've been really excited about this and the way this all came about. For those of you that don't know, Utah legislature implemented the commissioner of apprenticeship programs in the 2019 legislative session. So with that, the goals and objectives are to promote apprenticeship to employers, promote apprenticeship to individuals, to counselors, to students, to educators, to the public at large, on the value of apprenticeships. And this has really helped our partnership in what we're doing with our community colleges and universities and employers.

Because we really look at anyone that we're working with as a partner. And it helps us with each of these strategies when we're looking to recruit individuals to participate in apprenticeship programs, but also recruit employers to develop apprenticeship programs and have those opportunities available. You know, like any state, I think it's pretty normal that we have a lot of traditional apprenticeship opportunities. And in Utah, with our low unemployment rate and the way that we bounced back from COVID, we still have a huge need in that area for students taking place.

However, we are using the strategies and really using that as, yes, they are time-tested and true opportunities that can be valuable for any industry. And so we're using the network to take that to the next level and diversify the industries that we're in and the candidate pool that we're working with.

Some of the things that are exciting in terms of recruitment for employers is that we have these business-to-business webinars on a quarterly basis. We really hoped to have these in person. But when we developed our first one and were ready to start marketing for it, that's when COVID hit. So we really had to pivot and go into doing them online and electronically. But it's also presented an opportunity where we've be able to reach employers in some rural areas that we hadn't been able to before. And we had great participation out of these.

And out of each one of them, we have had results in engaging employers and beginning new programs for them. And even a couple of instants where we had reengaged a dormant employer that had a program previously but had kind of got out of the game for a little while, and now they're back. The interesting thing is when we pulled the data for what was happening in Utah – (inaudible). For the three years prior before the position for the commissioner was implemented, the Office of Apprenticeship on their own averaged 11 sponsors a year -- new sponsors.

The first year when the position was implemented, we were able to increase that to 21. And this last year during COVID, we increased it and developed 29 new programs. So I think that that speaks to the level of partnership that has been developed -- not that we were able to do it on our own, but because we now have this network that really truly is an expansion of our apprenticeship subcommittee from the state workforce development board. This is where the partnership began. And we didn't want to go in two different directions.

So we partnered together and really based up the individuals that were participating in that subgroup to make sure we had someone from each of the industries represented, make sure we had individuals from secondary and postsecondary education. Our community-based organizations, our other government entities, as well as our Federal Office of Apprenticeship partner, who is all part of this network. We really truly use this network to be meaningful. We look at objectives that we all can engage in and that we are all going to benefit from in one way or another.

And I think that's what makes the partnership work. Because we are listening to each other's needs, but identifying internal resources that we can help meet outcomes and goals of the group and really consider the state as a whole. So yes, we have something that's in it for us, but we're also looking at how it's benefiting the community at large. And if I can give any advice, it would be that when you do have partnership meetings, to make them meaningful and have actions take place, have goals, things that you're working on.

And when you ask for input, be genuine about obtaining the feedback. What you don't want is to have meetings – (inaudible) – but just being a rubber stamp or meetings that you could send an email to just put a report out. You don't have to call a meeting for that. So that's something that we have really strived for. If we don't need to meet, we don't. But in all honestly, we've had some things that we needed to meet about every month in the past year because there were different things that we're working on.

We're now working on an electronic resource hub where we have a brand-new website that's going to be released in the coming weeks, along with a mass media campaign. This campaign is going to be very targeted towards our different targeted populations that we're working with. We've been intentional about the visuals that we're using to show women in nontraditional occupations, to show individuals of different ethnic backgrounds so that we can show that apprenticeships are a true opportunity for all.

And on the employers when we're going to be marketing to them, we are being intentional about industries and showing industries that we're trying to engage in other areas -- so more IT, more health care, those sorts of things. When we talk about partnering with the community college and what can they do to engage with our state workforce agencies, state workforce boards, or other apprenticeship networks, I always like to say, "to see and be seen." Attend and get involved with networks, webinars, lunch and learns, boards, chambers, anything that you can learn from to see what the different industry needs are.

But when you do that, you're also making yourself visible. And opportunities present themselves to engage in some of these other boards, like the state workforce development board or like the chamber or some of the other community-based organizations. And, again, it's learning what their needs are, but also learning how to present a solution that you might have that could help them. We do know that registered apprenticeships are great. But we also know that they are not the solution for everything. But they are a very valuable solution for most things.

And so it's just knowing how to present that to the business community when you're looking to engage them, and showing them how this is going to impact their business practices and their bottom line. Coming from a state workforce agency, we have a tendency to want to talk about the goodwill and asking our employers to do this for goodwill. But what they really want is to impact their bottom line. If it happens to present some goodwill, they're fine with that. But really, they have a business to run. They have payments to make, products to produce.

And they really want the strategies that are going to help the business grow. So we really need to speak to them in that way and present those opportunities to them. In terms of participants, we're really looking at how we braid funding. And working with our local university, we were state university who have scaling apprenticeship grants. And then we ourselves have apprenticeship state expansion grants. So we look at how we can partner together and not duplicate, but braid the funding stream. And then being the state workforce agency, we are a single state.

And so we house workforce development. We house TANFF. We house WIOA, vocational rehabilitation, and veteran services -- are all within our organization. So we work hard when anyone comes into apply for a grant opportunity or so see about engaging in a registered apprenticeship program, we automatically check to see if they're eligible for any of the programs so that we can braid the funding and go further when we leverage each other's resources that way.

So I encourage you that if you have not reached out to your state workforce agency or your local workforce board, those that are responsible for other funding streams, that you do that to help you with your opportunities as well.

MS. BRAY: That's really good advice. Thank you, Melisa. I think one of the things great, we were talking to a group of employers in Utah as part of this grant. And one of them said -- I wish I had recorded it because it was phenomenal -- and he said, you know, with the apprenticeship, I get to bring on a worker at a reduced wage, teach them along the way in terms of how we want it done. And at the end of the time period, this worker is 100 percent ready to start. Why would I not bring on an apprentice? It saves me money to begin with and increases my productivity.

And I wanted to capture those words and put it out there for everyone. So your points are well taken. And also about being true to what you're asking them to talk about when you are really asking people for input to actually taking your input. So thank you. That's an important comment to make. I appreciate that. So the next group we wanted to talk about were community-based organizations. And they proliferate across the country. And they work with a lot of people who need training and employers who are willing to hire them.

And I was fascinated to learn about Tech-Moms. I think that's a very interesting organization. So Mikel Blake, I'm going to turn it over to you to talk about your organization, how you're working with the college, and how you are engaging employers as well.

MIKEL BLAKE: Wonderful. Thank you. Yeah. My name is Mikel Blake, and I am one of the cofounders of Tech-Moms. I'll give you a quick kind of high-level introduction to what our program is and what we do. We are a bridging program. Our goal is to help transition women into tech careers. So we are kind of tech-specific, obviously. And we did it through kind of a hybrid program. We do some basic software development, HTML, CSS. The women build a basic website. And then we also bring in working professionals across the industry to help our students get a good understanding and a lay of the land of the tech industry.

We find that one of the big barriers to getting into the tech industry is that there is a lot of mystery surrounding it -- like what the opportunities are. Everyone's heard of being a software developer. I'm a software developer by trade, so I obviously love that. But the tech industry is a huge, robust industry with opportunities that can fit really anybody who would like to be there. So our goal is to help women understand what their options are, and then get them into a nice pipeline and fully supported pathway into getting into the tech job, and then ultimately a long-term support and community to keep them in the tech industry.

Because unfortunately, tech also has a really high attrition rate, along with having low diversity numbers across the board. Our goal is to help create career-long community support for these women. Through this process, we have a big part of our program being around placement, which is where apprenticeships come in and are such a great fit for our women. Our women come from all sorts of backgrounds. We have women who have been full-time caregivers for many years.

Or they're coming from jobs that are kind of getting them by, but they're not good careers with upward mobility or not high enough pay to support their families, all of these kinds of backgrounds. And they are very interested in tech because here in Utah it is our fastest growing industry. And across the country, tech has really great benefits in that it can have flexible work schedules and remote options and all of these things that women are hearing about and wanting to utilize to be able to support their families and have fulfilling careers.

We have been partnering with Weber University and Apprente [ph] in this kind of apprenticeship model, because apprentice, many of our women are very interested in this apprenticeship. They come out of our program with a good understanding of the industry. Most of them do need additional skills, whether that's in the form of a certification or additional certificate program, or even some go on to do full degrees, all sorts of different paths. But apprenticeships offer the kind of hybrid that so many of our women need.

Most of our women are either a primary breadwinner or at least in partnership with their partner, they need to make an impact, right? So having this option is very appealing to our population because it gives them that hybrid of on-the-job learning, very practical, very useful but also getting some pay. Because it's very difficult for so many of our women. Again, we are mom-focused and most of them have children. And it's hard for them to be able to maybe quit their job to do a full-time degree program or something along those lines.

The biggest piece that we see when it comes to apprenticeships here in the state of Utah and in the tech industry specifically is that most of these employers don't even know that tech apprenticeships are an option. So there is a lot of work that has to be done and that we are doing certainly in our organization, I know Apprente is doing, and others to really just educate the employers and the companies locally about these opportunities and what it would really look like to implement inside their companies.

We constantly have employers reaching out to us. Diversity, and particularly diversity in tech these days, is such a buzzword. It's a big focus for many companies. And unfortunately, we're still seeing that companies are trying to solve this diversity problem that they see using kind of the same method that they've always used to hire, when we know that using the same method is going to create the same outcomes. So we do a lot of work to educate around new methods, one of them being apprenticeships, as a way to increase diversity inside their workforce and connect these companies with the diverse talent pool that they're looking for.

They're always reaching out to us because we have this pipeline that they want senior developers today. Or they want senior product managers today. And unfortunately, at the time, if you need a senior developer today, you needed to be investing in that pipeline 5, 6, 7 years ago. So we are doing that education. We spend a lot of our time doing the work of educating on the importance of entry-level rules, apprenticeship type rules, internships, because that's going to create the long-term pipeline that everyone is looking for.

Echoing what others have said, the strategies to engaging this community-based organization specifically is -- one of the ones that we're finding most valuable is finding the other organizations that are adjacent to what you are doing and leveraging their work and expertise. For example, in our program, we do provide child care because that's one of the big barriers that women have. And it is not core to our program, so we provide it in multiple different ways, but really the most beneficial way.

Because then when we find other community organizations or even with our partnerships with Weber University, they have facilities that already have child care on site where we are able to leverage the work that they have already done, the expertise that they already have, to achieve our end without stress or without having to use our resources. As a small nonprofit, we are always stressed for resources. Yeah. I think that's probably all I have.

MS. BRAY: That's a lot, Mikel. It's great. Thank you. A question because I know a lot of our grantees that are working in the IT industry. They're getting tremendous pushback from employers about the apprenticeship program -- they're too long, and I just want someone I can give them a month of training and they'll go in. Have you had that pushback? And how have you dealt with that?

MS. BLAKE: I have never heard anyone complain about them being too long. That's interesting. We've had other pushback for sure. The concern that we hear most is like you were talking about before, this ROI. Like, is bringing on an apprentice really going to affect the bottom line in the way they want? We see that really as a need for additional education for these employers, because it absolutely is -- getting to hire someone at a fraction of the price but getting to train them in exactly the role that you want. Once you get people through that process, it has been for us a fairly easy sale. People get that quickly. But I have not come across anyone complaining about the length of time, so that's interesting.

MS. BRAY: Good. All right. Well, that's good. We'll be able to share that with others then. Thank you. I think the work that Tech-Moms is fascinating. So I'm really pleased to hear about that. Let me just sort of summarize some of what we've heard here today. Key strategies that everybody should think about when you're leveraging partnerships to move forward with your goals and objectives.

First of all, don't do it all yourself. Build on what others are doing. You heard about workforce boards and about community-based organizations, state agency networks who are in the same area trying to do the same thing and have achieved some of their goals, so build on what they are doing. Look at and see what's in your area. You heard this from everyone. And develop relationships with other organizations, other agencies that have similar goals that can help you.

Understand the importance of the feedback that you get at the community college that you're getting from both community-based organizations, as well as the workforce board. The feedback on your program, your intake activities and systems, those are very important as well so that there's some alignment there. Plan. I cannot mention that enough. Develop a plan to implement feedback so when you're working with the workforce board and the community-based organization. Again, expand your outreach efforts. Let others help you. You don't have to do it yourself.

Whether it's just direct or even using your own institutional staff, their business development, or other department, utilize everyone. And let others help you with that heavy lifting. Look at new models as well as the existing one. What innovations are there? Tech-Moms is a brand-new entity. How do you take advantage of an organization like that and move on so that at the end of the day, you're both participating in and creating a new ecosystem of apprenticeships that engages and encompasses all of those within your community that have the same goal.

And I think that's what's so critical to all of this and that we really want to stress as part of this webinar. So we don't have a whole lot of time left. And I do have some questions. This is one of my favorite quotes, so forgive me for putting it up there. But I think this is what happens. We're so used to doing things the way we always did them that at the time the light bulbs go off, it's too late to open up another one. So people who know me know I'm big on quotes. Anyway, I do want to get to one question that was asked.

And, please, if you have questions, take advantage of the panelists that are here and put your question in the chat box. And I'll turn to the participant questions before I get to my own as we don't have a whole lot of time left. It was asked, have you worked with health care employers? I found that health care employers are not willing to pay for related instruction due to budget parameters. How can that be addressed with [??] grants currently subsidizing this training goes away? Amy, do you want to try to answer that for us?

MS. LEBEDNICK: Sure. The first registered apprenticeship program that West Michigan Works! sponsored was in the health care industry. And we've now gone on to create several other programs. But our first one was a program for medical assistants. And we were pretty aggressive in looking for funding that would allow us to cover the cost of the tuition for students enrolled in the first two cohorts of the apprenticeship program.

Following those cohorts, employers were able to conduct a case study which showed investing in those registered apprenticeship programs costs in what they were paying, – (inaudible) – from the lack of available talent with those skills, which then caused turnover in those positions that they were facing. So the participating organizations presented that case study to their finance and leadership team in combination with other outcomes that the registered apprenticeship program produced, such as increased diversity, they had higher retention of those apprentices following the program, and also just overall better prepared medical assistants than those that they were hiring on that had just graduated from traditional medical assistant programs.

So what that lead to was, 1, increased participation from other employers coming into the apprenticeship program collaboration; and 2, commitment from the participating employers to cover any cost of the tuition that grants could not cover moving forward. I know that there are several case studies out there. And I think the U.S. DOL even may have some information that's been published, a calculator that can show the value of apprenticeship programs, and that really ultimately it costs less in the long run than what they think or may have even taken a look at.

MS. BRAY: It's great. Thank you. Very helpful. Melisa, do you have some information you thought you might add to this?

MS. STARK: Yeah. So one of the strategies that we're trying to use is we know that a lot of employers provide tuition reimbursement assistance after they've been working with them for a year. So we're asking them or suggesting that they take just a small portion of that and redirect it for entry-level employees that are going to be part of a registered apprenticeship program.

So I'm not sure that we've had a lot that have taken advantage of that yet. But when we brought it up, you can see the light bulb go on and them think, oh, yeah, I do have an education fund. We are trying to educate our employees and provide professional development and reward them for attending college to get a degree. It just makes sense to take just a portion of that for the entry level and help them train.

MS. BRAY: Great. Thank you. Very helpful. Anybody else want to add anything to that? So let me ask one question of everyone. Does it help if -- when a community college reaches out or anybody reaches out to you to try to build that partnership -- does it help if they have communication strategies and a plan of action already in place? Does that make a difference in terms of how quickly you can move forward and whether or not you put a lot of time and effort into building that relationship?

MS. PARKS: I would just tell you, I would have a plan of what I need to accomplish. I would let the partnership develop that together. Because there was a lot of resistance to, you're telling us what to do. It's that joint idea. So me to say, hey, these are the number of people I have to serve and these are the number of apprenticeships I have to create -- how could we do this together? And then develop that plan together. That would be my advice.

MS. BRAY: Okay. Good point. Anyone else?

MS. LEBEDNICK: I totally agree with that, because really you're trying to engage them and get their buy-in. So the best way to do that is to develop that action plan together. But I think as part of that action plan, you need to establish what your regular communication is going to be. Are you going to communicate monthly, biweekly? Is it going to be by email? Are you going to have a conference call? Is it going to be an official advisory group that you meet on a monthly basis? And then put the goals and actions to each of those as well.

MS. PARKS: And when you start, I would really encourage you, after you meet and when you talk, that you do follow this by email so there's good understanding among partners. So if people remember it a different way, you can resolve that right away.

MS. BRAY: Good advice. Thank you. One last question to all of you. I'm asking it of each of you. Has it made a difference to what you're doing? I know you've all said that if it had to make a difference to what you're doing to have created a partnership with someone who is working on apprenticeship program and the related instruction. So, Mikel, I'll turn to you first. Has it made a difference in what you're doing?

MS. BLAKE: Certainly. I mean, like we were discussing before, placement is a big piece of our program. But it's such a broad piece that having partners that are working on each individual piece is key. We don't have enough resources to be doing the apprenticeship part all on our own. So it absolutely is making a difference to have partnerships in that way that can facilitate the placement pathways for our students.

MS. BRAY: Great. Melisa?

MS. STARK: Absolutely. I always think that you go further faster when you're leveraging each other's resources. I think the partnership is key. And if we didn't have the number of partners that we do -- especially as champions -- we have employer champions that are presented to other employers -- I don't think we would be where we are without that.

MS. BRAY: Good to hear. Amy, how about you?

MS. LEBEDNICK: Yeah. Our CEO likes to often quote, there's no one person or organization that has created the challenges we face. And similarly, there's no one person or organization that could solve it. So we have absolutely benefited and went much further than we ever could have went just by our organization alone.

MS. BRAY: And, Julie, I'll give the final word to you.

MS. PARKS: I'm just going to tell all of my community college partners to really think about relationship building. Just like for years how you've worked to build the relationships with employers, those community-based organizations and your workforce board will benefit you. They will help you move ahead quicker, faster, and more efficiently. They have resources and individuals. And if you can build that relationship, you will achieve more than you ever dreamed.

MS. BRAY: Thank you. Great way to have that final word. Thank you, Julie. I want to very quickly to thank Julie, Amy, Melisa, and Mikel for – (inaudible) – the information they provided, for taking their time today. I hope everybody got some ahas out of it. It's been great. There is a survey here. We do an evaluation that we'd like you to fill out. Zodie, if you're back on, do you want to close this up? She might be off. She had to get off to take another call and she was going to try to get back. So no problem. I do want to thank our panelists. They were awesome.

And I'm sure they welcome any other questions or output you want to outreach to them. And I want to thank you all for participating in today's webinar. And the next one -- I believe an email was sent out today -- I think the next one is July 29, but don't hold me to it. The goal of Manhattan Strategy on this grant is to give you the information and guidance you need to be successful. Everybody wants you to be successful.

So thank you for taking the time and participating in this. And until the next webinar, enjoy the rest of your day.

(END)