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**Transcript of Webinar**

**Registered Apprenticeship Technical Assistance Centers of Excellence New Awardee Orientation**

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JONATHAN VEHLOW: Welcome to "Registered Apprenticeship Technical Assistance Centers of Excellence New Awardee Orientation." Without further ado, I'd like to kick things off to our moderator today, Megan Baird, acting deputy administrator, Office of Apprenticeship, from the U.S. Department of Labor and the Employment and Training Administration. Megan, take it away.

MEGAN BAIRD: Thanks, Jon, and hi, everyone, and thank you for joining us today. We are excited to kick off the orientation for the Registered Apprenticeship Technical Assistance Centers of Excellence, which we'll refer to as RA TA Centers for short. And I'm really glad to see that you are all here today with your teams, as well as a lot of our Department of Labor team members. And we'll be talking a little bit later about this special role that a larger team of Department of Labor staff will be helping to play to support your projects.

For today's presenters, we have Suzi LeVine, our acting assistant secretary at the U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration; Brent Parton, senior policy advisor at the Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration; and John Ladd is not speaking today, but he will be joining us to listen in. He is the administrator in the Office of Apprenticeship at the U.S. Department of Labor.

We are also joined today by James Strait, the program analyst in the Office of Apprenticeship. He is also the federal project officer for some of the RA TA Centers. We are also joined by Julie Wong. She is a presidential management fellow in the Office of Apprenticeship at the Department of Labor. Julie is also going to be working to support the work of the RA TA Centers. And last, but not least, Ariam Ferro. Ariam is a grant specialist in our Division of Federal Assistance in the Office of Grants Management at the U.S. Department of Labor.

And before we move on to our first speaker, I wanted to touch briefly on our objective for today's presentation. We are going to be sharing an overview of administration priority and the department's visions for the RA TA Centers. We'll have a quick overview of the goals of the RA TA Center and then a spotlight from each RA TA Center on their goals that they hope to accomplish throughout their projects.

We're also going to touch on collaboration and coordination not just with the department and the centers, but also with other Department of Labor investments and other key apprenticeship stakeholders. And then we're going to move into the more technical portion of the orientation where we're going to cover roles and responsibilities, communication protocols between the department and the sectors. We're also going to cover some grants management topics, reporting requirements, some key resources to make sure you're aware of, and some upcoming next steps.

And then we'll have time at the end for questions from the audience. And we'll also go over the agency contacts. And, as Jon mentioned, please feel free to put your questions into the chat, whether they're for the speakers today or the centers or each other. And we will start addressing those, either in the chat or at the end of today's presentation. If you have not already done so, we do encourage you to identify who you are in the chat -- what organization you're with.

If you are with an RA TA Center, please let us know which Center that is. And for our Department of Labor team, thank you for joining us. And also, please include who you are in your role as well. And now I'd like to hand it over to Suzi LeVine. She is our acting assistant secretary at the Department of Labor, also a champion for registered apprenticeships. And she will talk about the administration's priorities and the department's vision for the RA TA Centers of Excellence.

SUZI LEVINE: Thank you so much for that introduction, Megan. Hey, everybody. It's so nice seeing all the great folks in the welcome chat. I welcome everybody to this. I really would like to thank you all. This is an incredible innovation and opportunity for us all to deeply and expansively grow registered apprenticeship. And I want to thank you for the time and effort that you've taken to respond to our call for partners, and what I consider a really critical program to expand registered apprenticeship. This really increases the capacity overall in the United States for this.

As many of you know, and as many of you have been involved in, there have been significant strides in expanding registered apprenticeship program opportunities. We've gotten extraordinary growth of 83 percent since 2010. And using registered apprenticeship to expand career opportunities for all workers, especially those in underrepresented populations, is a priority for the Department; and a really critical component of the Biden-Harris Administration Build Back Better agenda, the American Jobs Plan, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Framework, as well as the Build Back Better agenda, as I was saying before.

The key really here is to help registered apprenticeship and the system itself advance training, employment, and return-to-work opportunities that connect workers to higher wage, quality jobs. And that word, "quality," is really, really critical there, especially in ways that address systemic inequities and build opportunities and equity for all. To advance this priority in June, we awarded nearly $31 million dollars to establish four Registered Apprenticeship Technical Assistance Centers of Excellence. That's why you're here today.

There are key functional areas. There's diversity and inclusion, strategic partnerships and system alignment, apprenticeship occupations and standards, and data and performance best practices. With your help as partners, we intend to create successful and inclusive talent pipelines that meet the needs of today's industries, workers, and communities by providing this assistance to employers and industry to build out model registered apprenticeship programs across the range of industries and jobs, including those working on American infrastructure, cyber security, and the care economy.

And we look forward to working with public and private sector partners to expand opportunities for women, youth, people of color, rural communities, justice-involved individuals, and people with disabilities. As a number of you know, I served previously as our U.S. ambassador to Switzerland and Liechtenstein. And I know that it's through this collective effort that we can succeed. Going it alone, any one of those employers can try, and they can get some traction for a little while. But without critical mass and without economies of scale, it just won't work.

And you are really critical to helping provide that. And the opportunity for us to leverage your expertise and leverage your abilities to scale are going to be critical to our success. Now, one thing I want to dive into quickly is around diversity and inclusion. I know that there is a dedicated Center for diversity and inclusion, but it's also a cross-cutting focus for all of the centers to contribute toward that effort that support an inclusive talent pipeline to meet industry needs.

We have a shared objective -- and that's to ensure that we make the best possible strategic investment in our workforce to meet this moment, scaling what works, creating quality jobs for those that need them most. When we hear about things like the funding for infrastructure, I hope that all of you think like us, well, you can propose bridges and efforts to expand broadband and lay more concrete, but there are people behind each of those efforts. And we don't have enough people today to do that work. And it's going to really fall on all of us to help train up that workforce to be able to deliver on this next chapter in our nation's life.

This is a partnership. And we at the Department are committed to working hard on our end to provide guidance and support to you over the life of your project, but really our collective efforts. Next slide. Now, the Biden Administration -- as I hope you've seen since the very get-go -- is doubling down on registered apprenticeship, recognizing it's really one of the keys to our equitable recovery into building back better. I love the use of the term, "equitable recovery." 2008, 2009, that word "equity" wasn't associated with our recovery, was get people into jobs.

It wasn't necessarily thinking about equitably getting people into jobs nor getting them into quality jobs. This time around we learned. And we're going to do better. We're working hard on our end to identify registered apprenticeship investment opportunities that support the creation of successful and inclusive talent pipelines that meet the needs of today's industries, workers, and communities, and also lay the groundwork for how those industries will evolve and grow and change.

And the tectonic shifts that have happened as a result of this pandemic, with the integration of more technology and more digital reliance, are great in many ways, but also are challenging in how they might have exacerbated digital equity gaps that I know you're thinking about as you seek to lean in in this area. Your work as an RA TA Center is really critical within these efforts. We have high expectations for the work that you'll be leading. And each of the centers will serve as a critical puzzle piece in providing technical assistance across the national apprenticeship system.

The expectation is that you'll collaborate with a number of key apprenticeship partners to provide the technical assistance on a national scale. It's important to note that there's a lot of interest across the Department from key stakeholders in accessing and benefiting from the technical assistance you'll be providing. So not only will it be about providing, but it'll also be about learning and expanding that learning and amplifying that learning -- learning from what works, learning from what doesn't work.

We look forward to seeing what impact your efforts have on the expansion of registered apprenticeship, particularly around increasing access to apprenticeship opportunities for all Americans, and expanding registered apprenticeship into high growth industries where apprenticeship might not have historically played a part.

This means you'll hear from us in the Department often as we seek to share widely and amplify the impact of the work that you'll be leading, and to ensure that our shared goals are accomplished. I really look forward to our continued conversations and collaboration as you work to implement your projects. And I'm excited to see what you're able to accomplish. Again, I'm a deep believer in launching last -- not just launch and leave. A number of you have heard me say that in the past.

And that means being a partner on an ongoing basis and working together towards our shared goals. I so appreciate you coming on board. And I so appreciate the incredible work of the Office of Apprenticeship team, as well as all of our folks who are all over the United States. And now I'm going to turn it over to Brent Parton, who will talk more on the goals specifically for the Office of Apprenticeship. Brent, take it away.

BRENT PARTON: Thank you, Suzi. And thanks, everyone, for all the work that you've led up to this point and all the work that will be done. The work you'll be leading the centers of Excellence is so critically important for not only the Biden-Harris Administration -- goal of doubling down on registered apprenticeship -- but to realize that goal, which is really to optimize and modernize the nation's registered apprenticeship system.

I just want to say a few things to piggyback on what are always incredibly inspiring and powerful words from Acting Assistant Secretary LeVine to just drive home a little bit about what success will look like, particularly with this groundbreaking investment, the centers of Excellence. First and foremost, is we need to expand and extend the guarantees of registered apprenticeship to more workers, more industry sectors around our labor market. So the administration is absolutely looking to see growth.

The creation of a registered apprenticeship system that can support 1-2 million active apprentices a year is the ambitious North Star that we are operating towards. But we know that to get there, there are critical steps we have to take. And we want our growth to ensure it's sustainable. So if we think, for example, about growth, we think about our Center for system alignment. We need to ensure registered apprenticeship is a mainstream education of workforce strategy, something that is deeply integrated within our workforce -- not only workforces, frankly, but our community colleges, our K-12 districts -- something that is a part of the fabric of our communities and a fabric of the systems that operate within them.

When we think of our goals, too, we have to think of years from now being able to look back and seeing a greater industry mix, penetration of apprenticeship into more critical job industry sectors and cross market. We know that's the only realistic path to reaching these goals is a much more scaled-up system, but it's also incredibly important for our economy for ensuring that apprenticeship is a mainstream workforce strategy for critical jobs industry.

And we think of, for example, our Center of Excellence on standards development for ensuring that we're creating clear templates and opportunities for industry leaders, as well as individual employers, small and medium business to be able to sign on, opt in, and be a part of creating an apprenticeship system that supports the growth and resiliency of industries like advanced manufacturing and fair economy and even beyond.

The third principle that we're looking to advance is quality. We're committed to not only growing the system, but growing in the way that actually delivers on quality and results. That includes ensuring that registered apprenticeship programs are always a key element ensuring that we connect Americans to quality jobs. Also, creating a quality experience that both delivers return for the workers and employers, and invests resources and time within them. When I think of this, we think of our Centers of Excellence on data and performance.

We know that there's a huge opportunity to be thinking about how we can improve the data quality and availability within the registered apprenticeship system to not only be able to better understand how registered apprenticeship is working and where there are opportunities to improve, but also to be able to tell the story and build the case for continued investment to save time, continued adoption of this model across the country.

And last, but certainly not least, we look at the success through the lens of inclusivity. We are committed to the creation of management apprenticeship programs that reflect the communities that they operate within. So this includes a two-fold focus. One, we have to be achieving -- for example, through our Centers of Excellence -- folks who have equity diversity included in apprenticeship, be thinking about how do we diversify and create pipelines for underrepresented workers into our registered apprenticeship programs that exist today.

Also, how we think about apprenticeship is equity strategy within itself, how it can be a better way for connecting workers to good jobs in sectors where there is not a well-established set of apprenticeship programs or tradition. So when we think about preparing folks for jobs in health care, when we think about pathways into great jobs not only in manufacturing, but financial services, information technology -- areas where a college degree and work experience are still a barrier for so many folks to get into this opportunity -- how do we position apprenticeship not as something that we're reverse engineering equity into these new programs, but that we're building equity into the design principle from the beginning?

And that's something that we have the centers of Excellence that are obviously focused on different pieces of this puzzle in their own right. They're doing that coordination and working with one another to advance these core principles and realize what we want to see. So we are excited and thrilled about what's to come. We're excited to partner with you. And with that, let's get to the process of starting to make that happen. For that, I'm going to hand it back to my colleague Megan Baird.

MS. BAIRD: Thanks, Brent. And working together as partners -- as all of us have mentioned so far -- is a core component of the work we're doing together. As I'm sure you've noticed, we awarded the RA TA Centers a cooperative agreement instead of grants or contracts. And that was very intentional. Funding your work through a cooperative agreement lets us work together as partners, which is important given how closely the work you will be doing through the centers aligns with the work of the Office of Apprenticeship, as well as the Department and Administration priorities.

And as partners, we are committed to working hard on our end to provide guidance and support to you through a variety of resources. And this includes tapping into the department subject matter expertise, connecting to and leveraging resources and efforts funded through other DOL apprenticeship investments, and connecting to other key apprenticeship stakeholders to ensure the success of your project and our shared goals. And I know the teams here today will be covering later in this presentation the details of how we will work together as partners, so stay tuned for that.

And lastly, I did want to build on, I found that the Acting Assistant Secretary LeVine mentioned around the broad interest in the work of these Centers from the Department and from others. And providing technical assistance through national technical assistance Centers to the apprenticeship system is a new approach for the Department. So not only is there interest in the work that you are leading and the outcomes you achieve, but there's a lot of interest in understanding how this approach works and the impact it will have in expanding registered apprenticeship.

So we're all hoping to gather a lot of insight into using this model as an effective approach to supporting the expansion of registered apprenticeship at a national level. And as I mentioned, part of the department's commitment to this partnership includes leveraging our subject matter experts, who will help provide technical guidance to inform the work you'll be carrying out through your projects. Many of them have joined us today. So if you have seen their names in the chat or the participant list, many of them are probably very familiar to you.

We have a massive team of over 40 subject matter experts from across the department. And our team of subject matter experts includes representatives from the Employment and Training Administration's Office of Apprenticeship -- so it's in the national office and the regional office -- the department's Employment and Training Administration, the Office Workforce Investment, the Women's Bureau, and the Office of Disability Employment Policy. And we are committed to leveraging other expertise as needed to help your project move forward.

And this team of subject matter experts will work with your federal project officer to provide guidance and support to project success. And we'll talk a little bit more about the role of our subject matter experts and how you'll [inaudible] later on in today's presentation. So to get us started before our many spotlights for RA TA Centers, I'm going to turn it over to Julie, who's going to touch very briefly on the overarching purpose of the RA TA Centers. Julie?

JULIE WONG: Hi. Thanks, Megan. I'm just going to take you through a quick program overview before we get to the spotlight on each of the RA TA Centers, which is what everybody's waiting for. The focus areas for the four centers are diversity and inclusion. As emphasized, this is a critical objective for the administration, and also a key economic strategy as America's workforce becomes more diverse and we support plans to connect an inclusive range of highly skilled jobseekers with in-demand, well-paid jobs.

The second center is the strategic partnerships and system alignment, developing current partnerships, and evolving to meet the needs of new and emerging markets. The third center is apprenticeship occupations and standards development, looking at how we define apprenticeship occupations, and developing the standards which will support expansion and modernization. And of course, Center data and performance and best practices is going to be a critical and exciting area for analysis in seeing what stories the numbers tell, as well as evaluating performance and identifying best practices to share -- what's working and what's not.

In addition to working in close coordination with the Department's Office of Apprenticeship, the Registered Apprenticeship Technical Assistance Centers of Excellence will also collaborate with state apprenticeship agencies and DOL-funded registered apprenticeship investments. This collaboration will leverage and align efforts to maximize the use of resources and minimize the duplication of effort, ultimately ensuring the core customers of the apprenticeship system are served efficiently.

So right now, instead of just talking about what we hope each of the centers will accomplish, Megan is going to introduce the leadership of each of the centers for a discussion of what their specific goals, strategies, and plans are for the next four years.

MS. BAIRD: Thanks, Julie. And before we get started, I just wanted to let all of our attendees know today, if you do have questions of the centers during your presentations, or Centers if you have questions of each other, please feel free to put those into the chat box. Given our time constraint, we likely won't be able to respond to those during the presentation. But I encourage both the RA TA Center leads and their teams to respond to those questions, as well as DOL staff, as we move forward.

So we are going to kick off the presentations today starting with the Diversity and Inclusion Center. Next slide. So I would like to start things off by introducing Eric Seleznow, the senior adviser and founder of Jobs for the Future, or JFF, Center for Apprenticeship & Work-Based Learning. Eric, turning it over to you.

ERIC SELEZNOW: Great. I better get my stopwatch going because I've got to talk fast here. Good morning, everyone. And thank you for that excellent introduction. We are thrilled and excited to be part of these three other -- there are four teams all together -- to do the RA TA Centers. I think it's a great, thoughtful investment of your funds to drive this national expertise in these four areas. I'm particularly excited about the partner ones. We've got a lot to learn from those, so we're interested in working with all the other three organizations that are doing this. So we're excited about that.

I'm going to move through this quickly, but let me just say that JFF's been around for almost 40 years. We're at the intersection of education, training, and workforce. We have a lot of different work across the country in apprenticeship and everywhere else, and a lot of other areas. But diversity, equity, and inclusion is the North Star for JFF in two ways. One, it's a North Star for the organization. And we have spent at JFF the last two or three years focusing on DEI for our staff. And then we have also focused on DEI in our work out in the communities in all of our divisions. So it's a North Star both internally and externally.

So we thought you need to be qualified for this, and glad you agree. So thank you for your confidence in JFF, and we look forward to working with you. Just to zip through some of this stuff -- obviously, with a prime we have a lot of partners. We're looking forward to 40 years of some very difficult and challenging work and look forward to working with you. And to make this happen for us, we had some very specific concepts for partners, right? We didn't want to have some of the same old usual folks.

We wanted to have partners who were from the communities we were trying to serve. And I think we did that pretty well. And we also wanted partners who had the expertise in all the things outlined in the contract, which is a lot. So the first part, I just want to talk about briefly because they're really important. The Center for Minority Serving Institutions at Rutgers Universities is connected to all the MSIs and HBCUs. They have, I think, about 1,000 members or something like that. They have great reach and depth into MSIs and HBCUs.

And they're going to be doing some scanning and research for us, as well as working on convenings to try to drive this work for HBCUs. So we're really excited about them. We've never worked with them before, but we're very impressed. Chicago Women in Trades is a group you know. They're very deep on working with women in nontraditional occupations. And they do a lot of other stuff in apprenticeship. So they're a really good partner for things like pre-apprenticeship development, inroads for women in all sorts of apprenticeship programs. We're excited to work with them again.

Intelligent Partnerships is a group out of Seattle led by Danial Villao. He used to work at OA. But what's unique and interesting about them is their work in community benefits agreements and PLAs, public labor agreements, to drive requirements in cities and states and other locations across the country. They're really good at that. And they're also going to be one of our EEO partners. South Carolina Technical College has done some great work in this area and knows how to do apprenticeship. So they're going to be working with us.

We're thrilled to have the Apprenticeship School at Newport News because of their history and engagement with their communities in creating pathways for youth and adult and diversity. OneTen is a new organization led by African American CEOs from Fortune 500 companies. OneTen is just coming out of the gate. They are committed to developing black talent in major corporations. We look forward to working with them. UnidosUS, formally known as La Raza, is an advocacy group for Latino workers and others. They have 300 affiliates across the country. And we're looking forward to digging deep with those affiliates.

UMass Boston Institute for Community Inclusion is a group I worked with years ago when I was on the local level. They do great work for people with disabilities. And we've worked with them before and they're doing it again. And lastly, Donna Lenhoff and Associates are EEO experts on the legal side, so we'll be able to drive some of those things. Next slide and I'll talk quick. So, look, a lot of this is taken from the RFP. But we really have four buckets here -- we want to drive growth through demand first. We want to educate and inform the supply side, the stakeholders. We want to grow these regional and local partnerships to advance equity.

And as a result, we want to provide high-quality TA resulting in commitments and action on DEI. But mostly, we want to expand the employer capacity because that will drive everything else, so a lot of work with employers here. I know I'm almost at time, so give me another minute here. Next slide. I'm not going to go into this slide, but we have optional partners and required partners and what they're tied to their expertise in. Overall, we've got our management structure. At JFF, we take this management structure very seriously with our fiscal folks, our contract folks.

And our optional partners are really exciting too, not only with OneTen, but with the National Black Chamber of Commerce and some potential other partners. We put some money aside to bring in experts because we know things are going to change over four years and we want to have some flexibility to bring in the right and appropriate subject matter experts if we can't provide it ourselves. So that's a quick overview of how this is going to look and how it's going to flow through our Center for Apprenticeship & Work-Based Learning up until the JFF organization. Next slide.

Again, without too much discussion here, we're going to try to grow demand, grow strategic partnerships, and grow in supply. We've got to figure out some data results here. And we look forward to working with you on how we measure some of our results. I know we put the RFP, but some of that stuff may change or adjust over time. Again, growing the demand, aligning it with the supply, and providing a whole new level of resources, information, education, and hopefully some cutting-edge strategies on DEI in this work. Next slide.

Our technical assistance strategy, which we've used before successfully, is tiered. It's focused on what the issues are at the local, regional, or state level. Some people will enjoy touch -- some people need more intense touch. And we can maybe do it efficiently with some group TA. And then we're probably going to need to provide some one-on-one coaching. We look forward to hearing that particularly with employers to drive it. So we've got a technical assistance strategy to work with us before. Next slide.

All right. So we're excited about this project. We do think we're one of the best organizations to do this. We also have a lot to learn. But this is going to be some tough work. I'm sure we'll run into bumps along with way, but we're really looking forward to working with DOL as we do this. We're committed to all of those groups that you mentioned -- the rural communities, reentry offenders. You have expertise in those two communities. And then we have the right partners for all the other communities identified. With that, I'll stop. But I could go on and talk about this project for another hour. I feel really excited about it. Thank you, Megan. On to SAFAL.

MS. BAIRD: Thank you, Eric. And thank you for that presentation. And it definitely looks like you have some questions coming in for you and your team in the chat. A lot of great content there. And, yes, down the road, we will definitely have opportunities for longer and broader report-outs from the center. So look forward to that. So now we are going to turn it over to our Strategic Partnership and System Alignment Center. And for this presentation, I would like to introduce Mukta Pandit, the president of SAFAL Partners. Mukta, over to you.

MUKTA PANDIT: Thank you, Megan. And, Eric, you could just keep rolling on and do mine too. That would be fine. But I'm super-excited and thrilled to be part of this conversation. I think as a moment of reflection and celebration, I would just like to point out that we have made tremendous progress in apprenticeships over the last few years. So if you consider the fact that you have almost 2 million registered apprentices at this point, it is a moment of celebration. I think where we are now looking forward to moving next is a case from our perspective is how do you make registered apprenticeships, one, an absolute mainstream career pathway for workers?

So this isn't something that is one of the options, but it is one of the mainstream default options that you think about if you are entering the workforce, or if you have been in the workforce and you're looking to get up-skilled. The second piece that I would love to see happen as collective outcome across all our Centers is we really start having registered apprenticeships be thought of as a very effective tool for employers. So when employers think about, how do we get stronger, how do we get more diverse, how to we get a more future-ready talent pool? apprenticeships is by default the first thing they think of.

And I think all of the investments going into apprenticeships and all of the efforts that we are making and the department is making as we hope that collectively as part of this Center community, we can go ahead and try to make those outcomes happen. Real briefly on us, SAFAL is an education and workforce consulting firm. The only thing we focus on is education and workforce alignment. We have done a fair amount of work in apprenticeships. And, of course, our team has spent years of experience in apprenticeships.

My personal background, I was actually with McKinsey for several years before the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation and the corresponding stock holds. So I tend to infuse everything with an employer-eccentric perspective that everything we do around registered apprenticeships -- even when we are talking about alignment with workforce and we're talking about alignment with education systems -- at the end of the day, we always believe that you have to come and look at it from the employer perspective.

And the approach we are planning to take for the centers of Excellence is really summed up in local input and (matchmaking fact? ). So what we have tried to do is say, the innovation will actually happen at the local level. It's the local workforce development board, it's the local school board that will make a difference. It's the local employer that will make a difference. How do we, through this network, through these partnerships -- and we have an amazing set of consortium members -- and we are hoping to connect with the other centers and the other groups doing this work -- how do we build a system where we can draw on and really stimulate the innovation that is happening at that local level, and then essentially take that local innovation and have the scale?

So everything that we have taught to you in terms of our work is very ground-up. It's very sort of bottom-up and not as much top-down. Like, how do we actually take those practices that are working at the local level? How do we actually address those challenges at the local level and figure out solution? Next slide. So in terms of the consortium members, we have an amazing list of members, several of whom are actually not represented here. But I just wanted to call out maybe some of the factors that we considered.

One, we tried to have consortium members in essentially three groups. One was essentially industry partners. So between SAFAL, between our partners at FASTPORT, between our partners at WIOA, we are three industry intermediaries that are already working on scaling registered apprenticeships and have a track record of scaling apprenticeships. Between those three organizations, we reached about 220 industry associations, again, starting with an employer, the industry-focused front and center.

The other piece that we worked on was, of course, the workforce component. And here again, we have a partnership with NAWDP, which is the Association of Workforce Development Professionals. You've probably seen the team there. We are trying to reach the frontline workers, the frontline workers at the local workforce boards that are on the front lines of driving that incubation with apprenticeships. We also, of course, have National Disability Institute not only for the apprenticeship experience, but also for their ability to help infuse DEI into all of our work. Then, of course, we have multiple states that we are working with.

We are trying to take a focused approach in five states. And the idea is to build the solutions, drive the innovation in these five states, and then have that to be scaled nationally. And those include right now, Texas, California, Missouri, North Carolina, and Iowa. We also have a series of education partners that includes both secondary, postsecondary, career and technical education, as well as adult and basic education. Next slide. In terms of our approach, we are going to focus on bringing together leadership groups.

In fact, one of the first things we would love to do is actually have a working session with all the centers and with DOL to just really help define the problem as we all see it collectively. In our approach, we are planning to bring together leadership team members across industry, across workforce, across education and the apprenticeship agency; and then really focus on driving these four goals -- the participation, the partnership development, the system alignment, the policy change -- and doing it but with a very execution-focused mindset.

Because we believe it's not just ideation -- it's implementation that counts; so doing it with a very execution-focused mind set to essentially reach the four outcomes for the center. And I just wanted to make sure we had this from the center in terms of what are the four outcomes that we are targeting as a group at the center? And with that, I just would like to emphasize that we are really looking forward to partnering with all of you and working together to make this happen. Back to you, Megan.

MS. BAIRD: Thank you, Mukta. And I think some of the texts that you had in your very first slide are great praise of the work that the center is doing. Local input leads to national impact. So thank you for providing that context. If others have questions of her team, please put those in the chat. Next, we are going to turn it over to the Apprenticeship Occupations and Standards Center. And for that I'm going to introduce Diana Elliott. Diana is a principal research associate with the Urban Institute. Diana?

DIANA ELLIOTT: Thank you, Megan. Hi, everyone. I'm happy to be here. I'm just delighted that we are going to be working on the Apprenticeship Occupations and Standards Center. And its background, the Urban Institute is a nonprofit research organization based in Washington, D.C., composed of over 500 employees working on economic and social policy research and technical assistance. And the goal is really to improve outcomes for people, families, and communities,

And for those of you who know, we have a robust and growing apprenticeship portfolio and considerable experience developing occupational standards for registered apprenticeship. Next slide. Our prior experience studying and creating competency-based occupational frameworks -- or CBOFs, as we call them -- and helping sponsors on our two intermediary awards to create programs has really given us considerable perspective about challenges in the system, as well as the potential to scale high-quality apprenticeships.

Under this experience, our vision for this four-year, seven-million-dollar award is to build a gold-standard, occupational standard infrastructure that increases the transparency, portability, quality, ease of use, and scalability of the U.S. apprenticeship system. And many of you know on this call, the needs are tremendous for this work. The current U.S. system is fragmented. Between OAs and SAAs, there are 30 or more processes for creating and approving occupational standards.

If we can address some of these inefficiencies and encourage more knowledge sharing, we believe sponsors and others will be more likely to start and scale high-quality programs that benefit industry and apprentices. The U.S. system also lacks a consistent process to assess quality. The current system puts a lot of work onto OA and SAA staff, who must review each submission. And if a new occupation is elevated for approval, the process can move even slower because of industry review requirements. The current process is time intensive and burdensome, and may discourage consistency and quality across standards. By modernizing the process, we believe these burdens could be eased. Next slide.

To overcome these systemic shortfalls, we propose a comprehensive TA strategy to produce a gold-standard occupational standard system in the U.S. in three primary ways. First, we intend to build additional occupational frameworks that smooth the path to adoption and spread high-quality apprenticeships. And we will create at least 80 over the course of the project.

And we'll tap into subject matters experts on our team, partners in the field, and our sub-awardees. Second, we'll create systems for building and updating frameworks in the future. With our sub-awardee WorkHands, we will explore how to create technological solutions that enable easier access and development of occupational standards, and allow updates with input from industry and others. Third, we seek to modernize the compilation of standards, including from SAA states.

By bringing together most, if not all, standards into one unified and organized system, we'll create efficiencies in locating resources and identifying those of highest quality. We believe these three overarching efforts will help to upgrade, modernize, and maintain a high-quality and sustainable system. Next slide. We have assembled a strong team of urban experts, partner organizations, and advisers to do this task. The leadership team includes Zach Boren and I as project directors and Bhavani Arabandi and John Marotta as project managers. Collectively, we bring strong leadership skills and expertise on occupational standards development.

In addition, our team includes the talent of many Urban colleagues who previously worked on the CBOF project and understand how to advance high-quality standards with input from industry and others. We will benefit from the advising of Bob Lerman and his deep expertise on the apprenticeship system and consultant Diane Jones, who will be working to advance RTI and curriculum considerations for this project. Our sub-awardees include the Council of State Governments, whose work on this project will include occupational licensure issues across states.

Maher & Maher will be joining us to work on technical assistance materials and outreach. The National Association of State Apprenticeship Directors, or NASTAD, will be helping to connect us with SAA states. SPRA will bring expertise on the standards development processes in California. And WorkHands -- technologists who have been developing innovative, technological approaches to standards development and program design -- will be helping us with that aspect. So overall, I just want to say we're so excited about this work and the team we've assembled to carry out this vision. And we really look forward to working with our partners in OA and the other RA TA Centers over the next four years. Thank you so much.

MS. BAIRD: Thank you, Diana. And I'm glad to see a large portion of your team is joining today. And in the chat, it looks like there's quite a bit of excitement around the standards work Urban will be doing that you touched on. So we are now going to turn it over to -- last but certainly not least -- the Data and Performance and Best Practices Center. And for this presentation, I'd like to introduce Casandra Hockenberry, the senior policy analyst at the center of Innovation at the Council of State Governments. Casandra, turning it over to you.

CASANDRA HOCKENBERRY: Thank you so much. Just as a quick background, the Council of State Governments is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization serving all three branches of state government. We champion excellence in state government and really put our members first. We're really looking forward to working with all of you on this program. Next slide. Our consortium consists of my team at the Council of State Governments, as well as teams of both Mathematica and the Turnout.

We're really excited to partner with these two fantastic organizations to work on the Data and Best practices Center. Next slide. Our goals for this TA Center are to increase alignment with RAPIDS and WIPS, while also increasing the number of programs that are providing that aligned data. We are also going to increase the understanding of why data-based approaches are so valuable throughout the agencies, legislators, and stakeholders within the community. We will do this while working towards long-term, sustainable data systems and tools that can be leveraged by registered apprenticeship programs for years to come. Next slide.

We will do this through highly tailored technical assistance. The way the Council of State Governments approaches technical assistance is that we meet states and programs where they are. We work to understand the goals and the obstacles that each of those programs may have, and make sure we're taking that into consideration as we develop technical assistance for them. We will also be providing analysis of both the level of alignment of that data, as well as potential policy direction and ways to support the other Technical Assistance Centers Of Excellence.

Business processes will be investigated to analyze for efficiencies, as well as potential data leakage points in order to create systems and processes that support alignment with RAPIDS and WIPS. Finally, we will build relationships with registered apprenticeship programs, stakeholders, and state agencies in order to achieve maximum participation in our data collection efforts. Next slide. Those activities will include first and foremost, a baseline assessment to determine where registered apprenticeship programs are in terms of their alignment.

We hope to have that finished by December. We will then conduct webinars and town hall throughout the four years of the grant to help build connections and engage state agencies on the value of data-based approaches. Training -- both virtual and in person, as well as peer-to-peer training and best dates -- will increase the level of alignment and the quality of data collection. Data will be collected, analyzed, and reviewed in order to inform policy-related white papers and reports, as well as targeting areas for improvement both in data collection as well as potential policy direction.

And finally, we will use business intelligence systems and process modeling to help ensure long-term sustainability of this project. Again, we are so looking forward to working with you all. Please feel free to reach out for any questions or concerns that you may have. We think this project is going to really help create a long-lasting ecosystem for apprenticeship programs across the nation. Thank you.

MS. BAIRD: Thank you, Casandra, for that. And having you as the last presenter here really leads us into the next section we're going to talk about and some of the questions I'm seeing in the chat. A lot of the work that the data center will be doing will be helping to improve the quality of the data that will be able to inform some of the work and activities under the other centers. So thank you for that. Which moves us to collaboration and coordination. And I did want to touch on this a little bit to you all. Next slide.

In addition to the close coordination with the Department -- we talked a lot about this partnership here -- the centers will also be collaborating with state apprenticeship agencies and other DOL-funded investments. And this collaboration -- the aim is really to leverage and align efforts to maximize the use of resources and minimize the duplication of efforts with all of our goals and ultimately ensuring that our core customers of the apprenticeship system are served sufficiently. And with the next collaboration and coordination, there will also be opportunities for collaboration across the centers on related and shared goals.

So we've seen a couple of examples already. And I see that a lot of you are making connections. A lot of the activities that you are doing may seem into or support goals of other centers. So you will definitely have opportunities that will also help support to really leverage each other's expertise and activities to make sure that the centers are working together to support our shared goals. And one more comment on collaboration coordination just to really reiterate for everybody joining us today that the centers will be engaging key stakeholders and customers through a virtual platform or online presence. Next slide.

And that may vary based on center. That's certainly something over the next couple of months we'll be sharing that approach more broadly with everybody. And we at the Department will also support the dissemination and promotion of the resources developed through the centers. And this can include connecting, ensuring them with state apprenticeship agencies, our investments, as well as other ways to really support the promotion of the resources developed through your centers to make sure that they have as broad of a distribution as possible.

And with that, we are going to turn over to what we're calling Part 2 of the orientation. This is the more technical portion. We're going to jump into some grant management specific work. And before I turn it over to James to kick us off, I just really wanted to thank all of our speakers for the centers and for Department leadership really setting the stage for everybody around what the goals and visions are for the RA TA Centers. And with that, James, I'll turn it over to you to kick us off and talk a little bit about the roles, responsibilities, and how we'll communicate between the centers and the Department.

JAMES STRAIT: Great. Thanks, Megan. It's great to have everybody together and to see you all connecting in the chat. I look forward to seeing how you're all going to connect in the future. In this next portion, we'll discuss the various roles and responsibilities involved in carrying out the work of all of your centers. The communication protocols that we're going to discuss will ensure timely and effective action from all the parties involved.

The Office of Grants Management is an important contact. So the center's two main contacts will be the FPO and the grant officer. The grant officer has the overall responsibility for the award selection, execution of funding, approval of modifications, and formal monitoring resolution. The grant officer also works closely with the FPO to approve recommended mod requests, address issues and concerns raised by the FPO, coordinates fiscal policy guidance, provides policy guidance as needed, and provides oversight. Next slide. Now I'll turn it over to Julie briefly to talk to us about the subject matter experts and their role.

MS. WONG: Hi, everyone. As Megan touched on earlier in the presentation, as part of our partnership commitment to you, we have amassed a large team of subject matter experts to support the FPO in providing technical guidance and feedback related to supporting your projects. We're going to be providing feedback on proposed activities, identifying existing resources to leverage, reviewing and providing input on TA materials developed, identifying and giving feedback on areas of TA needs, identifying priorities through technical assistance, identifying administration priorities as it aligns with the work at the center.

So I'm really excited to be a lead liaison SME in diversity and inclusion. And we want to be a great resource for our Center, bringing together expertise from my teammates at OA, my co-lead, Reba Daniel (sp) at the Women's board (sp), and colleagues at ODEP and CRC to leverage for this new and innovative partnership. This is a new kind of partnership, so we're going to be creating the path as we walk it. And we're looking forward to this journey together.

I did want to make sure to clarify that the subject matter expert will work directly under the direction of your FPO to provide technical expertise related to specific RA TA Centers. We're not involved in the day-to-day management of the cooperative agreement. And we are not involved directly with the work of the center. So you'll have all the benefits of our diverse perspectives and unique expertise. It's going to be you, me, what army? This is the army.

They will be available to you as resources. Then you'll also have a unified direction channeled through the FPO for our team. And for our team, that's the amazing just could get. So no worries, a lot of resources, but it's going to come through one channel. Thanks. Back to you, James.

MR. STRAIT: Okay. Thanks, Julie. Next slide. There we go. As Julie said, you and what army? Well, this is the army. And we talked about this a lot in the interim calls with many of you that you have your main contact as your FPO. But behind the FPO, there's a team of people clamoring to help with these efforts. So many people in the Department of Labor have stepped forward and asked to assist with this. And we've been able to create a wonderful team comprised of OA leadership and subject matter experts that the FPOs can go to.

We can all meet together and work together on these issues and make sure that we're doing the best work that we can in the most efficient way possible. And just to highlight again, the contacts for the centers are not the SMEs. The SMEs will support the efforts, but the contact will be the FPO. The FPO will coordinate any sort of contact with the SMEs and OA leadership. Next slide. This graphic is another representation of how the communication breaks down. So if you are the cooperative agreement lead, you will be the primary contact for the FPO from DOL and vice versa. The FPO is your primary contact as the lead.

All the members of the cooperative agreement should go to the lead. And then that lead will communicate with the FPO. This is going to ensure that everybody is well informed, that everybody's on the same page, that we're all working in the most efficient way possible, and that things don't get lost or fall through the cracks. If any of the centers have questions about performance reporting, always CC your FPO so your FPO is aware of everything that's going on. You can send those requests or questions to the apprenticeship.grants mailbox.

If you're not sure who to go to or who to ask, you can always just talk to your FPO and your FPO can either figure it out with you or will have the answer. If you have questions or difficulty accessing the financial reporting system -- which we'll talk about in a minute -- here's the email there, ebss.help@dol.gov. And, again, always copy your FPO. It's a good idea to copy the apprenticeship.grants email box as well. Next slide. (Inaudible) – for your FPO will communicate with the primary point of contact for the center, and of course the authorized representative depending on the issue.

Any time the FPOs will communicate with the centers, we will be CCing the center lead. We believe in keeping everybody informed, keeping everybody together and aware of what's going on. And we appreciate when the centers do that as well. Those contacts can come through email or phone. And the FPOs can work that out with the center leads. There are times when you'll receive emails through the apprenticeship.grants mailbox. Oftentimes, we will send calendar invites through that email box, and not through the FPO's individual email.

That allows us to back each other up, especially if people go out on leave. It allows us to keep everything centralized and have everybody be aware of what's going on and keep things transparent. We also post information on the WorkforceGPS website. Each Center is responsible for their own online content, but we will reference the center's online content on WorkforceGPS. We'll post events, training; there are prerecorded webinars on there with information on grants management. And of course, the apprenticeship.gov website has a lot of information. Next slide.

Let's move on to grants management, performance reporting, and next steps. As was mentioned, these are cooperative agreements -- they are not grants. Even though the Office of Grants Management is involved, we often talked about the grantees, but really these are cooperative agreements. We want to work together as a team to move these forward to make decisions, to figure out what the key tasks and deliverables are, and to maintain an open dialogue so we can all collaborate together to move these forward. We want to help you and we want to be part of the process. Next slide. Ariam's going to take it over from here. Ariam?

ARIAM FERRO: All right. Thank you, James, and hello, everybody. By now, everyone should have received a grant award package, which will be the grant award letter, the actual grant agreement, and the Grantee Handbook, which is a great resource for ETA grants in general. The grant award letter -- which is also called PMS Letter -- contains information about the payment management system, ETA's grantee fiscal reporting system, and passwords and pins for online security when accessing your accounts. Next slide.

As I just stated, the grant award letter contains important information about, 1, how to access your funds via the payment management system, or PMS, which is operated by the Department of Health and Human Services; and 2, how to access DOL's grantee reporting system for financial reporting. These systems require two separate passwords and pins. Information and forms for these systems can be found at www.doleta.gov/grants under manage your awarded grant.

You'll find information on this site about the grantee fiscal reporting system and the federal financial report form, also known as the ETA 9130. Your passwords and pins are sent separately after you supply the necessary information. So once you receive it, please do not lose it. Next slide. The grant agreement includes a notice of award, or NOA; followed by the condition of award page; a table of contents of the grant terms; the grant terms and conditions; and attachments, which include the updated federal assistance, also known as the SF 424; the budget which, includes the SF 424A and budget narrative; the statement of work; and if applicable, the indirect cost rate agreement. Next slide.

The first page of the grant agreement is a notice of award, or NOA. This page has a project title, which is Registered Apprenticeship Technical Assistance Centers of Excellence. And it contains the grant recipient's identifying information, which is the name of your organization, address, EIN number, and DUNS number. It also contains a federal award identification number, or FAIN, otherwise known as a grant number. All RA TA agreements start with AP and then a 5-digit number, the 21-60-A, and then either a 1-or 2-digit number.

Please reference this number all times when you contact the national program office or your FPO when you have questions about your grant. The period of performance, award amount, uniform administrative requirements, cost principles, and signatures are also included in this document. Next slide. As grantees, you're required to fully comply with all applicable statutes, regulations, and cost principles in performing your responsibilities under this grant agreement.

Cost principles are a series of government-wide rules that apply to all ETA grantees, and are outlined in the Code of Federal Regulations at 2 CFR 200 -- which is the uniform guidance -- and 2 CFR 2900 -- which are DOL exceptions to that guidance -- which define the conditions under which grantees may charge costs within federally-funded grants. These regulations provide guidance to help you determine whether specific planned expenditures are allowable, unallowable, or allowable with conditions. There are also other requirements, including the terms and conditions of the award. Next slide.

After the NOA page of the award agreement is the condition of award page. The Office of Grants Management conducted reviews of grant award packages identifying areas of concern within the submitted application that required either clarification or modification from grantees. Those areas of concern were noted as conditions of award, or COAs, and were listed in your grant award. Any questions, responses to requests for clarification, and/or revisions for modification related to the COAs must be submitted to your FPO assigned to your grant within 30 days of the receipt of your grant award package.

If you have not already discussed the COAs noted in your grant award with your FPO, you should do that immediately. Note that a submittal of revised documents does not in and of itself constitute approval by ETA. The modification is required. Final approval must be given by the grant officer through the grant modification process. Your FPO will walk you through that process. We will touch on that process later in the presentation. Once approved, revised document will comprise the official modification to your grant agreement as appropriate, and the COAs will be resolved. Next slide.

Attachment A, B, and C of the grant agreement contains the SF 424, SF 424 A, and budget narrative respectively. All three of these documents were taken from your proposal. Attachment D is your statement of work, commonly known as the SOW. This also comes application and includes the project narrative and all required attachments, such as the abstract, project work plan, performance outcomes table, and documentation of partnership commitment. Next slide.

For those applicants claiming indirect costs, attachment E includes a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement, also known as the NICRA. If you claim indirect cost and did not provide a NICRA or provide an expired one from your federal cognizant agency, you were put on a 90-day temporary billing rate. In that case, please send your approved current indirect cost rate agreement to your FPO. If no current NICRA is submitted within 90 days of award, spending on indirect costs will be limited to the de minimis rate of 10 percent of modified total direct costs, or MTDC.

See 2 CFR 200.414(f) for more information on the use of the de minimis rate. Next slide.

So what is a grant modification, or a mod? It's a tool used to make a change to your grant agreement for clarity between the grantee, the regional office, and the national office. Processing of grant modifications is vital in the grant process. The process for modifying a grant can take between 30 and 60 days to complete. And requested changes cannot be implemented until final approval from the grant officer is provided. Next slide. Your FPO will review with you when you should be submitting a mod request and the process for preparing one.

That said, when your FPO receives a mod request, they will review it with the following questions in mind -- how will services and staffing be impacted? Is the change effective and beneficial? What about grantee activities and expenditures? Are they on target? If not, why not? Does the change conflict with the requirements of the FOA? And finally, is it an allowable change? Please note that there is more detailed information about submitting a modification in your grantee handbook, so you can use that as a guide when submitting modifications. Next slide. Now I'll turn it back over to James.

MR. STRAIT: Great, thanks, Ariam. Let's talk about reporting requirements briefly. You all have this information, so we don't need to dwell on it long. The two formal reports -- you'll submit the quarterly financial report, the 9130; and the QNR, the quarterly narrative report. These reports are due no later than 45 days after the end of the quarter. So the first reports are going to be due November 14. That'll cover July 1 through September 30. Next slide. We'll send a template out for the QNR in August. And the template will be designed with the centers in mind.

There's a lot of visibility on these projects, so we want to make sure that you have the opportunity to report out the stuff that your leadership and others are going to want to see. So that's the purpose of the template. For right now, QNRs can be submitted through the apprenticeship.grants email box. And please always CC your FPO. Next slide. So, of course, one of the terms and conditions of the grant is financial reporting. So all grant recipients are required to submit a financial report.

We do this through the reporting systems that Ariam was talking about. If you need instructions for accessing the financial reporting system you have done before, then those instructions are the PMS letter that Ariam mentioned. While we're talking about reports, I will add a third sort of informal that we often get requests from DOL leadership or Congress or others on the progress of these Centers and the efforts -- what's happening with the money -- and we appreciate the collaboration that we can work together to answer those data calls. Next slide.

We want to highlight this. These smart trainings are very useful, especially if you have limited experience working with grants. I know many of you have had lots of contracts with the Department of Labor. If you want more training on how to administer grants, you can come to these trainings. There are prerecorded webinars and you can find a lot of information. Almost all of your questions will probably be answered. Next slide. You can get the slides here and have access to all of these links. I know many of you are familiar with these. I would especially highlight the Grantee Handbook. And if you haven't done that, please do. Next slide.

Just a couple of things to save the date and draw your attention to -- we'll have a grants management call that will take place in early August, and also the Department of Labor and Center partnership kick-off calls that will be mid to late August. And just stand by for emails and calendar invites from your FPOs for those. Next slide. Next steps to make sure you're aware of -- please ensure that your entire team has read the grant agreement and is familiar with the information. If you forget things or you need to revisit it, that's fine.

If you need to talk to your FPO about things, that's absolutely the way it should be done. You should keep an open dialogue. Nobody needs to flounder around looking for answers when we can all just communicate. Please respond to the conditions of the award in your grant award package as appropriate. And, as I mentioned, those smart trainings can be very useful. We can turn it back over to Megan now.

MS. BAIRD: Thank you, James. And we are going to open it up now and see if there are any questions in the audience that we can help answer. This is not your only opportunity. As James covered, there are going to be individual calls set up between the FPO and each Center to do a detailed walk-through around grants management requirements similar to some of the topics covered today but in more detail. And then separate from that towards the end of August, we'll also be having individual calls with each Center.

More of a partnership call, we'll be walking through your statements of work and tying it into administration priorities and giving technical guidance around areas to help support your efforts. Those are our August activities, but if you have any questions please type them in the chat. And while folks are typing, we can just go to the next slide to make sure everybody is aware of who their primary points of contacts are.

The grant officer is Brinda Ruggles. And your federal project officer for the individual Centers who is your primary point of contact is listed on this slide. And it's your FPO who'll be coordinating and sharing any technical guidance to each Center through the team of subject matter experts.

Seeing no questions and great to see a lot of you chatting with each other and making connections with each other between the centers is really what we hoped to see today. So glad to see that you guys are engaging and finding opportunities for collaboration. And with that, I believe we're going to give you all back about 13 minutes today. I'm going to turn it back over to you, Jon, to close us out.

(END)