**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**The Great Resignation: A New Opportunity for Participant Engagement**

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JONATHAN VEHLOW: Welcome to "The Great Resignation: A New Opportunity for Participant Engagement." Without further ado, I'd like to kick things off to our moderator today, Ayreen Cadwallader, with U.S. DOL Employment & Training Administration, with the Division of Strategic Investments. Ayreen, take it away.

AYREEN CADWALLADER: Thank you so much, Jon. And good morning, good afternoon, everyone, to today's webinar. This is a technical assistance event for our Apprenticeships Closing the Skills Gap grants. So we certainly opened up this invitation to the other grant programs. And I know we have the polling question in the beginning. Jon, if you wouldn't mind pulling that up, I thought I saw a good number of our representatives in the Apprenticeships Closing the Skills Gap grants, as well as the H-1B Rural Healthcare grants and One Workforce grants.

Certainly, for those two new grant programs, well done. I know we've recently rolled out these awards, and this is a wonderful time to really learn about some of these outreach and engagement activities. And then for our existing Closing the Skills Gap and Scaling Apprenticeships grants, I know that participant engagement, outreach, and recruitment is still a big focus. And so we're really hoping that this could be a wonderful TA opportunity for all of you, especially with today's current environment with what we're calling, the Grantee Resignation.

I saw a news headline last night that right now a lot of the trends are being driven by young people ages 24 and up to age 40, who are really defining the trends -- cultural trends, as well as workforce trends. So there is certainly a lot for us to learn from this webinar that we could apply to our H-1B grant program.

With that, I am happy to introduce my colleagues at SAFAL Partners -- Christian Lagarde, who is a coach and a subject matter expert for Apprenticeships Closing the Skills Gap grants; and LaToria Strickland, who is our grants management support lead supporting both the technical assistance and the grants management work that's required here at the Division of Strategic Investments.

With that, it sounds like we've got a good number of callers -- about 72 of you now. Definitely excited that there are lots of participants online. And, Christian, I'll turn it to you now. Christian?

CHRISTIAN LAGARDE: Thanks, Ayreen. As Ayreen just described, hello. My name is Christian. I'm here with Tori from SAFAL to talk about the Great Resignation today. I did want to introduce our two speakers that are going to be co-hosting with me and talking about their experience with the Great Resignation as it pertains to their initiatives. We have Karin Norington-Reeves, the CEO of the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership; and Danielle Haro, a senior specialist, Program Development, at the United Service Organizations, USO.

Today's objectives, what we're going to be talking about is a couple things; one, throughout this is we all know no matter what grant program you come in on -- and hello to everyone on the call from Closing the Skills Gap to Scaling to the Rural Healthcare grant -- we all know that recruitment and participant engagement is always sort of a challenge. So we understand that there are challenges. And that's something we want to explore throughout this call today.

We're familiar with those challenges. Some of the two presenters today have done some things that I think you're going to take away from, and could possibly benefit on their approaches on recruitment and marketing and just the in-general nature of how they engage with their participants. And we'll talk about some new ideas. We have a slotted out time for discussion. So there'll be questions not only for the participants, but also for each other on the call. Sure, it's a nice little intimate 75-person call today.

But at the same time, we still want to be able to use that main chat feature -- which you see there on the left -- if you did have questions for your own entity or something that you were curious about that you heard on the call. You see it moving back and forth there, that main chat. Please, if you have any questions about what's being said or even a question you may have brought to this webinar before you got here, please throw it in the chat and we'll definitely address it.

And then the last thing we wanted to discuss -- and we're going to open with this -- is about the Great Resignation Ayreen just described. When you said that, Ayreen, I was like, I think I read that same article yesterday. There's a lot of attention and a lot of press about the Great Resignation. And let's get into it a little bit. What does that mean? And what does it mean for participant engagement?

How we are seeing the Great Resignation and how our presenters -- both Karin and Danielle -- are thinking about it is an opportunity. It is a challenge. I didn't see Mary Wright on the call, who is from the Society for Human Resource Management – (inaudible) – Closing the Skills Gap grant. Her and I have talked in great length about what the Great Resignation means for human resources, talent, development, and things like that. Seeing the challenge as an opportunity is looking at it from a different perspective.

Yes. It is challenging for employers to have to deal with these early resignations and people leaving their jobs. But it is an opportunity, and we want to address that today and talk about some of these things. If you have not heard, you haven't been watching the news, or looking at business blogs, there's something out there called, the Great Resignation. Ayreen was describing that article she read yesterday.

Essentially, what it is -- following the heights of the pandemic -- this all happened in the guise of late 2020 and continuing on into 2021 that workers across the country left their employment in search of better opportunities or a different opportunity. Because of the great pause -- I don't know if I could coin that, Ayreen -- but because of the great pause, people started to think about their work in a different way, think about what they were doing; and maybe they wanted to try something different.

And then the pandemic gave them an opportunity to think through that and possibly choose that. Which is why, as Ayreen was describing that article, she read that 25-40-year-old-shifted mentality and shifted what they wanted to work didn't surprise me. Over 650,000 retail workers left their jobs in April alone, tired of low pay, poor working conditions, and lack of advancement opportunities, as many of us can probably attest.

How many times have you gone to a store, gone to a restaurant, or gone to even a hotel, the hospitality business in retail and they just don't have enough employees? Hiring or employment signs all over the place, help-wanted signs all over the place for these types of reasons. So as the Great Resignation peaked in April and have remained abnormally high in the last several months, with a record-breaking 10.9 million open jobs at the end of July, which is enormous. According to the BLS, 4 million Americans have quit their jobs in July of 2021.

That is a sizable number. We want to see that as a potential opportunity. So why does that matter to us? We think it matters to us and what our presenters are going to talk about today. It provides an excellent opportunity to engage job seekers to apprenticeships -- which is a lot of what our grant programs are focused on -- to meet their needs for a better career. As Ayreen described that article, that shift that those 25-40s looking for something else, and as you look at the research on the Great Resignation, that's exactly what is happening.

An apprenticeship opportunity is in whatever sector that you're serving could be a benefit, it could be a good landing place for some of these people that have left their jobs looking for better opportunity. So that's on the front end of the flow, is the engagement part. Secondarily, it also opens new doors for conversation with employers to help meet their needs for their talent gap. So those organizations that have had lots of resignations are looking to fill jobs. Perhaps there are employers that maybe would not answer your phone or did answer your phone but really didn't engage with your organization, may be picking up the phone a little bit faster now.

They may want to set up a meeting with you, may want to set a face-to-face. Imagine that… across the table from each other and have conversations about your program that you didn't have before. So we see this as an opportunity. We see the Great Resignation as a chance for a big push at both sides of the spectrum -- both on the intake side and on the important engagement side as well. With that and the definition and thoughts about the Great Resignation, I'm going to hand it now to Karin Norington-Reeves from the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership. Karin, it's all yours.

KARIN NORINGTON-REEVES: Thank you very much. Great. Good afternoon or good morning for those joining from the West Coast. I wish everyone well. I'm going to get started with my presentation. You know, we've framed this as the Great Resignation, and it occurs to me that this is less of a resignation and more of a reset perhaps.

In my opinion, people are declaring that they are no longer resigned to lives of subsistence or barely scraping by or being unhappy and being imbalanced because of the volume of work and the way in which we work in this country.

So before I get started, I want to just share with you a little bit about who we are at the partnership. I am Karin Norington-Reeves. I'm the CEO of the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership. And we actually operate the largest publicly-funded workforce development system in the nation. We oversee the area of the City of Chicago and suburban Cook County. And we have a network of more than 90 delegate agencies. We have 10 American Job Centers. We have 9 satellite locations. And then we have 4 sector-driven centers as well that cover high-growth, high-demand sectors in our region.

We provide services to more than 100 locations all throughout our area. And we serve more than 1,000 employers a year. And we are incredibly excited to do this work. It is hugely impactful within our region. And many of our services target communities with high rates of poverty, individuals with significant barriers to employment. And we were spun out of county and city government about 9 years ago in order to operate as a nonprofit organization so that we could generate corporate funding to help us move beyond some of the constraints of the Federal Government.

So this is just a little bit about our network. I won't spend a lot of time on this. But we do serve youth. We serve the full gamut and meet people along the entire spectrum of job preparedness. A little overview of our system -- like all of you, we have job seekers and employers as our core clients at the heart of everything that we do. And then we've built this ecosystem to meet all of their needs in a variety of different ways. Whether it's through our business services teams, our career coaches, our training providers, we provide a whole comprehensive set of services, tools, and resources.

And then we have a strong policy and data analytics team as well to help really drive decision-making and policy creation. So during this pandemic era, we have piloted a number of different things to try and keep our public engaged. We see about 140,000 people a year. And just to give you some context -- in Cook County alone, we had 1.5 million unemployment insurance claims filed between March of last year and in March of this year. And so for us, that is roughly the equivalent of half the population of the city of Chicago.

So we had to figure out ways to keep people engaged. We also at the same time had employers begging us for employees. So we were trying to balance both of those needs. So the first thing we did was create a page on our website called, Work Now. So that was for all of the folks who were still looking for employment during the pandemic, and for the employers who were still looking for people. At any given day, we had 60-70 employers posted; and at any given moment, thousands of positions available.

A lot of them wound up being in health care, as you can well imagine; whether it was contact tracing or some other supportive service. We did a lot of work with taking populations that were being laid off en masse; so for example, hotel workers and folks at restaurants. So we took those hospitality and high-touch customer service skills and translated them into other options and opportunities within other sectors that we serve. So many of the hotel workers that were being laid off translated nicely into supporting the hospitals that were overrun and that had high needs for customer engagement in housekeeping and in other services of that nature.

We also very quickly pivoted to allow for virtual enrollment. I know that many of you across the country already do virtual enrollment. Well, we did not. And some of it had to do with our state. Some of it had to do with capacity issues. But within four weeks, we were able to pivot and allow for virtual eligibility and enrollment into our system. We had our own data system, and we were able to create opportunities for people to just leverage using their cell phones to take pictures and to scan documents and upload them into our secure system.

We also set up an 800-number that we promoted far and wide. We wound up securing a contract with the City of Chicago to actually oversee the creation of a 600-person, community-based contact tracing core. So we set up a website called, ChiTracing.com in order to gain applications from individuals who were interested in the contact tracing roles. And once we were filled with the positions for our core, we actually shared referrals to other partners; whether it be federally-qualified health centers, FQHCs, or other hospitals that we had relationships with who were interested in staffing up.

So we had a large campaign around ChiTracing. In addition to that, at some point, once the mayor realized that she was going to have to shut down the restaurants, she actually asked us to stand up a campaign to support the restaurant workers. So we created ChiServes. So that was a campaign where it included a text platform, as well our website, as well as a phone number where individuals in the restaurant industry could get connected to us for job placement into other sectors that were hiring.

We also pivoted our digital literacy program, which was an initiative that we started many, many years ago through funding from our CHA partners, Chicago Housing Authority. And we wound up pivoting that to a virtual provision. And just to show the uptake -- the first month that we offered our digital literacy training online, we saw 200 participants. The next month we got 200 participants in one day. So the demand skyrocketed. And we wound up creating a whole web-based program. And we actually have maintained that.

So we do about 8 sessions a week now online for the public. We also needed to pivot in terms of our outreach and ensure that we were broadly tapping into all of the different communities that were in need. So we wound up doing Spanish television. We got a segment on Univision. And we were able to do that every single Monday morning. We also wound up seeing a huge uptick in our print and broadcast requests. At one point, we were literally on the news every single week.

We also opened a new education and workforce center in the middle of the pandemic. Because for those people that did not have solid access to broadband at home, who didn't have access to a device, we wanted them to have a safe place where they could come and actually continue with their workforce development needs; whether it was applying for jobs or receiving other support.

Another thing that we did in the context of this virtual environment was to continue with our various workshops and panel offerings.

One of the populations that was significantly impacted for us on a local level was returning citizens -- folks coming out of incarceration. So we were able to hold a virtual panel with a nationally-known author called, a Hire Calling, that was focused on our returning citizens population. And we actually wound up having an employer panel, as well as people with lived experience. And for the employers, they were able to actually put job openings in the chat. We got people hired within a week of that event based off of the job postings that were put in the chat.

Another thing that we've done in the context of the pandemic -- again, trying to account for this great demand for employees as well as the great reset, the shift in what people are looking to do -- we created in collaboration with the mayor's office HireChicago. And it's called, HireChicago2021.org for a reason because we expect that she's going to have us revitalize this next year. So we focused on 5 sectors that were identified from an economic recovery task force by the mayor's office.

And so we did a 5-week, 5-sector, virtual hiring initiative. We had more than 15,000 positions posted on our platform. We only had about 3,000 job seekers actually participate, which was disappointing. I will also tell you that out of those 15,000 positions, 7,000 were posted by UPIA [ph]]. So it was a massive undertaking. We put a lot of time and energy into this. We just bombarded the air waves. We were all over the city. We had ads on buses and trains. You name it, we were there. And it still only yielded about 3,000 folks. There is more to do.

We will continue to work with those employers now as we have concluded this initiative. But we know that there continues to be great demand. We also launched a podcast in the midst of this pandemic called, Hire Frequency, focusing on employing, empowering, and elevating our participants and listeners. We have had great discussions. We've brought in industry experts. We actually led a session with the leaders from our hotel industry to talk about the impact that the pandemic has had. And we actually just last week did one with our county board president.

We expect to have one with the mayor in short order. And I suspect that we will continue to see this grow. As I mentioned, our media outreach and promotion has just expanded exponentially from penning op-eds, to appearances on television, to MPR radio, national and local newspapers, national and local media. We really are just trying to ensure that we are reaching people as broadly as possible, finding them where they are, and helping them understand how they can retrain, how they can pivot, how they can move in the direction in which they would like to; and also working with employers to help them understand how best to connect with job seekers.

So many folks are creating signing bonuses and other incentives. What we're counseling them is to translate -- take those bonuses and actually put them into salaries, put them into wages, make shifts so that you're creating the environment that is sought after, where people actually want to come and work for you. And as I mentioned, HireChicago was a massive virtual hiring event. We've also done lots of smaller ones, and these are smatterings of flyers from all of those different events. And they've been across every sector.

We have done them across the county, across the city. We've done them by electoral districts. We've done with them with various elected officials. We've done them with CBOs. We've done them by sectors. Virtual hiring events have been in great demand. It has also been very clear to us that certain sectors do not lend themselves greatly to virtual hiring events. And also, it is a big pivot for a lot of employers; particularly, I would say in the manufacturing sector we found greater challenges with posting these events.

Some of the practices that we've adapted that I think are here to stay include streamlining the eligibility and intake process, ensuring that there will continue to be a virtual process, having to provide more of our resources online so that more people can access them; also, our text campaigns to announce new programs and services and new opportunities to enroll.

The virtual hiring events I think are going to continue, as well as other special events -- conferences, board meetings, hiring fairs. All of those things are going to continue to be complemented, I think, by virtual access. Although, my hope is that we will return to some in-person aspects of many of those things. And then finally, remote work -- my team and I are actually still working from home for a number of reasons. And I suspect that we will not be returning physically to the office until later this year or the beginning of next.

And I do think that remote work is certainly one of the things that I'm hearing from the general public that they're most interested in. A lot of people are leaving because they need the flexibility to manage their lives. So I suspect that remote work is going to continue to increase. Finally, in closing, I want to talk a little bit about some of the growth that we've seen with respect to apprenticeships in particular. We have focused through our ChiTracing initiative, as I mentioned earlier, we hired 600 contact tracers.

We didn't want them to just be in temporary short-term positions. So we really focused on how do we scaffold career ladders for these folks? And how do we create earn-and-learn opportunities? So what we did was leverage some existing programs that we had created with a group of hospitals on the west side of Chicago that were focused on incumbent worker training. So we are turning, taking so many aspects of that training and pivoting that into earn-and-learn opportunities for our contact tracing core. So we've had a number of different pathways.

We did one for medical assistant, another for nursing candidates, and another for health care IT. And you can see here some of the pathways that have been created with respect to allied health. Here we have a pharmacy technician apprenticeship, also one for radiology, and then another one for sterile processing technician. So these are short-term. And they start off -- in many instances, we borrowed for our incumbent worker training program, so they were entry-level employees at one of our anchor hospitals and then were able to advance up.

And then we're just translating that over into our contact tracing initiative as well so that they're not short, temporary positions, but really get translated into longer-term opportunities for career growth. So that concludes my presentation. I'm happy to stand by and answer any questions.

MS. CADWALLADER: Christian, this is Ayreen. I had some comments for Karin, as well as a question. Really excited to hear about what you've done with the workforce that you had to conduct the contact tracing work and really create career pathways for them in this allied health industry. I definitely see this is something that could be replicated easily certainly with our other grant programs. And then the other question I had was are there any plans to track the success and the performance of the virtual services that you provided since Covid?

MS. REEVES: Yes. Definitely. We are tracking on many fronts. Number one, we want to track the outcomes for all of our contact tracers. We have gotten so granular with the data on them; it is fascinating. And by the way, I should also lift up that they've pivoted -- only about a quarter of them are actually still doing contact tracing. And they are assigned to Chicago Public Schools where they did 9,000 traces just last week for new cases that came up. But a quarter are serving as vaccine ambassadors.

So they are literally going door to door in communities where there is low vaccine uptake and knocking on the doors and scheduling in-home vaccinations for people. We also have a Spanish-speaking version of the vaccine ambassadors, the "promotoras de salud," that are going through Latinx communities. In addition to that, they've just been asked to pivot again. So we've re-upped that contract. And the city is expecting that we might even get a third year. So we have a lot of granular data around all of those folks.

In terms of, for example, the participants in our digital literacy work, we are tracking every single point of contact in engagement with the public that has leveraged any of the various programs that we've offered during the pandemic. And for the HireChicago effort, we are doing 30-, 60-, and 90-day follow-ups. Now, those folks are not registered in WIOA yet. Many of them may become. But we are going to continue to track them to see outcomes to see if they wind up getting hired by any of the employers that they might have spoken to during the event, and then also to track the employer needs and outcomes as well.

MS. CADWALLADER: That's amazing Karin. Wow. I definitely want to encourage our grantees to enter your questions and comments in the chat window directly for Karin to respond at the end of this portion. I think there might be another question, Christian. I'll turn it back to you.

MR. LAGARDE: Sure. Yeah. There was a question about -- and Danielle, I know you're ready to go, but I want to throw this for both of us. This is from Ann Skinner, who is on the Rural Health Care and One Workforce grants about one of the two is, we have the ability to send messages to AJC users by using the data part as a targeting filter. What are your thoughts about the different messages for different ages?

I'm thinking and if I'm not mistaken, you're thinking about targeted marketing and targeting engagement to attract them based on this different mindset that someone who is 18-25 or the 25-40. I think that's a brilliant idea. Now, this is me coming from the thought and a background in marketing that that is fantastic. Karin, or Danielle, do you want to chime in? Have you done this before, thought about age groups, demographics to target marketing before? Karin, I'll start with you and then go to Danielle.

MS. REEVES: Yes. Absolutely, I think it is absolutely. Not only is it important, I think it's required, right? We're dealing with different demographics, and we have to appeal to them in different ways. So for example, in the city, we were about to do a TikTok Takeover of the mayor's TikTok channel because we know that's going to reach a different population than would Facebook or LinkedIn. When we take out Facebook ads, we target specific demographics, and we tweak the way in which we are connecting with them.

One of the things that we did for Hire Chicago, a promotional tool, the mayor said to us, kids can't be who they can't see. So we created a whole campaign for the youth that is called, See Who You can Be. And it shows them doing different activities as a child, and then what that translates into as an adult. So I think it is really important to tailor those messages to different populations. And the next layer to that is cultural competence as well, and making sure that you're tailoring messages that resonate with people where they are.

MR. LAGARDE: Fantastic. The TikTok Takeover, that's so timely, so relevant, so perfect for that. You're right. That is a social media tool of choice right now. Danielle, any other thoughts or insights on this thought of targeting marketing?

DANIELLE HARO: Yeah. Thank you. I love that as well. What a great idea. I'm just sitting here thinking about for us, we've actually gotten the opportunity to do some research on Generation B, or Gen B for short, and just really identify the ways that they like to receive information. So couldn't agree more. I think it's an excellent question, excellent strategy. What we are seeing -- just kind of high-level observations -- is that that generation is looking to influencers to get their information. But it's not the influencers we think, right?

So it's not the celebrities of the world; but rather, it's people who have been there, done that. And they're looking to just hear some real talk, is the way I like to put it -- just short, concise, to the point. What is it that you want to convey to me? So these are certainly things that we're thinking about for our program as we strategize, because we do want to reach a younger audience. And I'm happy to expand more on that in my presentation.

MR. LAGARDE: Well, that being said, you have the floor, Danielle. You might as well just keep going right into it. So, Danielle, take over. It's all yours.

MS. HARO: All right. Thank you so much, Christian. Hello, everyone. Let me just quickly introduce myself. My name is Danielle Haro. I'm a program development specialist for the USO. It's so wonderful to be here with you today. Just to share a teeny bit about myself, I'm a former military spouse. My husband is now a veteran, and my brother is currently active duty in the Army. I'll stop the list there, because we have quite a bit of military in our family, which I'm so proud of.

But I just always like to share that and of course take a moment to say thank you to you, anyone in your families or your circle who have served in our military. My sincere gratitude and appreciation for that service. So I just always like to share that. I'm here today to talk not about me, but about our Pathfinder Transition Program. So you've probably seen the USO logo and thinking, are we going to talk about Bob Hope and entertainment? What is going on? But you are not the only one if you're thinking that. That is such a common reaction.

People don't realize what other programs the USO has to offer. So such an honor and a privilege to be here today to share what we're doing with our Pathfinder Transition Program. So transitions -- it's a bit of a challenge for us, because it leads you to think it is just about the transition from the military. But I'm here to say that we know that the military journey is full of transitions, right? So our program really is aimed to support service members and military spouses every step of the way. I want to share some broader context to paint the picture here.

And we know that every year approximately 200,000 service members are leaving the military. So that is a huge population that is looking to find their next career step, looking to reenter their civilian communities. And then I just also wanted to share that consistently we also know that our National Guard, Reserve, and military spouses especially, are facing consistent struggle with their employment and building their careers as they are fulfilling their duty to service that kind of pulls them in a lot of directions -- so for military spouses especially.

I'm not sure if anybody has heard the researcher statistics before, but looking at a Deloitte article from last year, I mean, I knew that this was a problem. But to see the statistics around it was just staggering, even for me. So their unemployment for the MilSO community -- even before 2020 and the global pandemic -- was 7 times the national average. Just let that sink in for a minute. It's really significant. On top of that, we know that our military spouses also struggle with underemployment.

And then just one last thing I'll throw at you. There are actually two. About 30 percent of our military community is experiencing a PCF every year. PCF is permanent change of station. So, of course, you know the military has lots of fun acronyms. I promise that's the only one I'll throw at you today. But PCF, 30 percent -- I mean talk about transitions -- shaking up your career journey -- that's a big impact. And then last but not least, I wanted to share, too, that we know that our veterans are struggling to find meaningful employment after their military service.

There's a survey that came out a couple years ago sharing that 47 percent of veterans are saying yes, my transition was either very difficult or difficult. And that's a significant portion. I want to share, too, that we also know that it's not uncommon for them to leave the first, second, even third job that they land after the military. So certainly, that's crushing to us. But it serves to inspire us to serve them and help them find what that best fit is for them so that we can help make them prepared for civilian life after the military.

And as I mentioned, for our Reserves, our National Guards who are holding down full-time employment while fulfilling their service to country, we want to make sure that we can help them find the same. And our MilSO is, I mean wow, what a tough hill to climb. Anyhow, I wanted just to share that to add some context to why we have such a dedicated program to serve our service members and military spouses.

So with our program, we have the opportunity to extend our USO mission of connection. I'm really focused on professional services. And our secret sauce -- as I like to say -- is really our highly personalized approach. So anyone who registered [star?] program, they get met with one-on-one service. They are connected to a transition specialist who works to customize a plan that will fit their individual needs and goals. So that really is the framework. Hopefully, that was not too much, but I just wanted to set the stage for what we're doing and why.

I already covered this, but just for anybody who is visual, this of course is who we serve. In terms of service members who are leaving the service, we will extend our program up to 6 months post separation. We really like to prepare them. And we see it as sort of preparing the veterans of the future. And there is such a wonderful plethora of resources available for our veteran community. I know it sounds a bit dramatic, but for me the way I see it is, it's a bit tragic when there are so many resources out there and our service members or military spouses don't know about them. That to me is heartbreaking.

So that is also where we come in -- not just in that one-on-one approach, but helping them navigate that huge plethora of resources. With that said, we do serve to augment existing programs that are already on military installation per se. We work to make valued connections within the local community, within the national community. I mean, connection, connection, connection is really the bottom line there.

So we really do stay within our state with the military-serving organization, or MSO for short; and then try to leverage those connections that connect our participants to those veteran-serving organizations when the time is right. So I'll touch more on that in just a second here. But I wanted to share that in terms of our reach, I love the conversation that we've been having today in just talking about the need and what's out there. I know people were asking questions about what are the rates and the numbers that we're seeing of people quitting?

I'll share for context that from last year to this year, we've seen about a 21 percent growth in our participants, which is amazing. And we do attribute some of that to really amplifying our presence on the global stage. So the USO, we have that global positioning. And I think before last year, we didn't really do a good job of conveying that to people. People were looking at us and saying, okay, which USO center do you have your services at? And that's really not the case anymore.

I would label myself as an optimist for sure. So I think one of the silver linings and the takeaways from last year was really pushing us to pivot more into this virtual space and to amplify our goals and positioning. So with that said, our transition specialists are ready to support no matter where participants are located. Again, that's huge and is certainly a big contributing factor to the growth that we've seen this year. And then with that goes just supporting time zones all around the world so we get people away from thinking about location as a constraint and really just coming to us for support if and when they need us in their military journey.

I think I was starting to make the connection earlier about the Gen B and reaching a younger audience. And that comes into play here with who we're serving. As I mentioned, our vision is preparing the veterans of the future. So we want to make sure that we are reaching service members even earlier in their careers. I know it sounds strange. And we're not talking to them about, hey, are you ready to get out of the military? But it's more, how prepared are you? We cover things in the realm of professional services that are also inclusive of, like, financial wellness, for example.

So a very holistic approach that we take to make sure that we're looking at that military family and supporting them the best that we can so that they are successful. Whether that time comes 2 years from now or 20 years, we want to support the veterans of the future. So just wanted to circle back to that point in terms of why we are looking at and have such a desire to reach a younger audience. We know that there are a lot of younger service members that we are not yet reaching. As much growth as we've had this year, we still have a long ways to go.

I just wanted to share that for context in terms of our holistic approach. I'm sure as you already guessed employment education are certainly our top two focus areas, and then connection to those veteran resources, financial wellness, and then also mentorship. So wanted to share that so that you know what all those professional services are centered around. But it doesn't stop there. We also have some very specific program opportunities that we offer to our participants in addition to that one-on-one, action-plan development, as we call it, and connection to resources.

Here are some great program opportunities we have. Everything is free. We always look to connect to our participants with things that are of no cost to them. So we're really fortunate to be in this space where we are partnering with several other entities to offer these services. The first few that you see here examples on this screen, they are certainly education pathways. We have IBM SkillsBuild, professional certificates through Coursera, and then an entire library through Skillsoft to name the education ones.

Again, this is in addition to the one-on-one services. And then also just wanted to quickly mention a mentorship platform that we launched this year, as well as a robust lineup of military virtual programming. So our military virtual programming actually spans across the USO. It's not just transition, it's also entertainment -- family programming, MilSO programming. So for us, we've been able to amplify one of the silver linings of last year really take a pivot into the virtual space.

And we found much success in terms of serving a large audience there. So this year we've had over 3,000 people attend star transition programs. And here are some examples up on this screen of those. I just want to quickly share another thing about our delivery. And then I want to share some best practices that we have found. But, please, anyone who needs to chime in and speed me up, I'm trying to be good about keeping an eye on time. But you all let me know. Okay?

So just one other thing about our delivery mechanisms -- we are also consistently working on improving our technology and leveraging technology. So anyone who comes to us can access the USO mobile after the portion of the app that is specifically dedicated to our Pathfinder Transition Program, which is great and amazing. Talk about making it accessible and then talk about making it something that works for a younger audience. At first, we were a bit worried that people wouldn't want to use the app. But we are so happy to see that more and more engagement is happening there.

Really it just makes it easy to connect with your transition specialist and sort of gives a concierge approach to sharing with them the resources and connections and such that I've been talking about. So last note here I want to share, I said I would lift up some best practices as well. Our support doesn't end with those great program opportunities or even the connections and the actions app. But we really follow up. Again, the secret sauce is that one-on-one, very personalized approach.

So we stay in touch to ensure that those connections were successful -- did that work out? Have your needs changed? which happens quite often. So we can adjust course along the way. And really we want to make sure that we are helping them find the best fit for them. So when it comes specifically to those program opportunities that I outlined -- like those educations platforms, for example -- some of our best practices have been creating what we call, soft barriers to entry.

As I mentioned, everything is free. So I think sometimes when things are free, we have to be really intentional and think about how our participants will have to get in the game, because that really goes hand in hand when it comes to being invested and more accountable for their success and really seeing that all through. So some of the soft barriers we've incorporated aside from program registration itself, we want you to also engage with your transition specialist. Do that action plan with them.

For the education platforms I mentioned, we also require an interest application. And hand in hand with that is a learner agreement. We like to call it the USO learner agreement. So just wanted to lift those up as best practices that we've seen to really get them to be more invested and accountable for their success in those specific program opportunities. Hopefully, I didn't speed it up too much there. I will see if you, Christian, or anyone has questions for me.

MR. LAGARDE: Yeah. For sure. Since you're on, Danielle, let's just go ahead and hand off to you Ann's question. So Ann's question, as you saw in the chat, was she's talking about -- and this is a common problem for rural initiatives, rural grantees, rural things like that. Put the rural lens on, if you will, on this. And she was describing that they're too far away from major bases and have a significant population of military spouses.

She'd be interested in – (inaudible) – of displaced homemakers. She's trying to hire a part-time recruiter right now and would like to find a returning parent. With your thoughts -- or, Ann, this may not be direct to what USO's doing with the military spouses and such -- but are there any strategies that you use that could maybe translate and articulate to what Ann is thinking about as far as recruitment of those displaced homemakers?

MS. HARO: Yeah. I definitely appreciate the question, Ann. And it may sound strange, but I feel like we too see the same challenge of reaching those military spouses who are not near a major installation, or who are spouses to national guard and reserve members, because they can be located all over. I mean, for us, it was a bit easier because we were able to just amplify our presence as a global organization. But I realize that's not the case for everyone. And especially for smaller organizations, it's certainly a huge challenge.

For us, our success was being able to pivot virtually. We are also looking to in that lineup of military virtual programming, also offer opportunities to take a fun spin on what essentially is going to be an orientation session. So that's sort of a brand-new thing that we are kicking off in the month of October. It's called Education Kick Start. It just gives people the opportunity to come get to know us and hear what we're about. I don't know if that was at all helpful.

But I think just any way to use technology, use a virtual space to really amplify. And we can only hope that they are opening their eyes and opening their ears to see what is happening in the virtual space. I know that's also quickly becoming challenging because it is so jam packed out there with people are trying to share. All well-intentioned, but I would imagine it can sometimes be overwhelming as a job seeker.

MR. LAGARDE: Agreed. Karin, I know of Chicago not a rural town, not a rural area, but you may serve some rural populations just in the reach of your board. Any thoughts on that question about recruitment of displaced homemakers or the question that Ann gave us? Thinking about that with a rural context.

MS. REEVES: Yeah. We don't really have a rural population. We do have some remote areas within the county. In terms of trying to reach those displaced homemakers, we would really rely upon leveraging our different communications channels. And in some of those instances, it might make more sense to connect through community-based organizations and using community leverage.

MR. LAGARDE: Definitely. Great. Community-based organizations are just a treasure-trove sometimes for those populations of when to serve. The final question I believe we have from the group was, can you expand on how the USO service offerings complement and are different from other programs or transitioning service members, like the vets program or skill bridge?

MS. HARO: Yeah. Absolutely. What a great question. We serve to really supplement and augment those and help someone navigate all of those different opportunities. We help them think through, is skill bridge a good fit for me, for example? Timing-wise, when should I think about applying for that? And actually, I love the topic of skill bridge because this is one of our MVP, or Military Virtual Programming sessions, as we offer an information session so that they can learn about skill bridge and what is it and is it the right fit for me?

So we really do amplify programs like that that are available and refer them to those programs. I think someone had the question earlier -- not in this context certainly, but about data and outcomes and tracking. So we are just really excited to start -- we've been making big strides in the direction of working with those programs more intentionally, so that it's not so focused on us, but really connecting them to those resources and seeing what the follow-through is after that. Bottom line, we work to collaborate. It's all about collaboration.

MS. CADWALLADER: Danielle, this is Ayreen. I also had a question to just put into context. If our grantees wanted to connect with USO, how would they do that?

MS. HARO: Sure. I can give you -- I should have put this on the slide. My apologies, everyone. I can type it in the main chat. But I'm happy to share my email address and also our transition email address. And just reach out to us and we can talk about what your specific situation is or questions or see what we can do.

MR. LAGARDE: Fantastic. Thanks so much. We have 4 minutes left. We love this, right, Aaron? When participants answer questions to other participants in the chat. So thanks Meredith and thanks, Ann, for keeping up that dialogue between us. I see Karin in there answering some of Ann's questions about the Facebook affinity groups and things like that. So we appreciate the conversation today. We appreciate the chat. As far as resources -- and one thing before I get to the resource section -- there was a question.

I think it was a private question about how many Americans quit their job in July 2020 and 2019? So in comparison to 2021 -- which we said was approximately 4 million -- July 2020 it was 3.1. And then July 2019 it was 2.4 billion, so quite a shift over the years during the pandemic and then the continuation of the pandemic as well. All this information came from the BLS.

I mean, our slide deck, you'll see there's a link in the footnotes to where we got our data from, which is the slide you're seeing right now are other resources around engagement. So there's a resource for maximizing social media for recruitment and engagement, very similar to what Karin was talking about with that TikTok Takeover. There's an outreach and recruitment strategy to identify long-term unemployed, a TechHire recruitment guide, and I believe one from the Youth Apprenticeship Readiness Grant, YARG, the effective recruitment.

These are going to be linked in the WorkforceGPS page. It's also going to be linked in a PowerPoint, which is going to go out to every attendee as well. There's another one about outreach, and another one about recruitment for SWFI grants, and then our Closing The Skills Gap Community of Practice. We have one final poll that we want to throw out there. And this is for everyone that's on the call. What other topics do you want to see addressed in future webinars? For engagement, outreach or recruitment, operation system, partnership development, etc.

And, thanks, Jon, for expanding that. As you see the topics in there, please click through. We definitely tailor all the content that we deliver through technical assistance in real-time and based on the needs of grantees. So this is very helpful. The next webinar coming to a theater near you will likely be one of the topics that you're choosing now on the poll. So we'll leave that up for a couple seconds here to get everyone to answer. And then we'll close out all on time.

But I see that the dial is still moving, Jon, so we can't close it yet. I see numbers still coming in. I see program design of sustainability is leading the way here. And I'm not surprised. The Scaling Apprenticeship is starting to end. Closing the Skills Gap is getting real close to that midpoint scenario. So we'll leave it up for another couple of seconds here. Let's lock that poll in, Jon, at what we have here, since we're right at the top of the 3:00 hour. We want to thank both presenters, both Karin and Danielle for participating.

Contact information has been shared in the chat. Saving the date for the next round of technical assistance, we have "Effective Mentoring in Registered Apprenticeship" webinar coming up on October 19, "Meeting Challenges of Postsecondary Partnerships" on the 27th of October, and "Future Lessons from Apprenticeship Work" coming at the end of November. So please save the date for that. You'll be getting invitations from your TA provider, I'm sure on all of these.

Here's the contact list. I know Karin and Danielle put it in there. But it will be on the slide deck as well for those who haven't attended or listened to this recording. If you want to ask any questions or get any more detail, both Karin and Danielle open themselves up to be doing that. As Ayreen just said, the webinar recording will be coming soon, so keep an eye out for that for everyone who attended.

The last part, Jon, I'll leave it to you to give the details about the evaluation. Thanks, everyone, for attending.

(END)