WHAT WORKS FOR TECHHIRE GRANTEES:
OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY TECHHIRE GRANTEES IN RURAL AREAS

TIP SHEET

Our H-1B TechHire (TH) Technical Assistance (TA) Team recently moderated a peer-to-peer conference call on “Opportunities and Challenges Experienced by TechHire Grantees in Rural Areas.” Led by TH TA Coach Christy Montgomery, this call provided grantees with a forum to share lessons learned and promising approaches for TH participants in rural communities and for select grantees to interact directly with their TH colleagues. The tips and strategies highlighted below are based upon information shared during this discussion and offer insight into the challenges and current approaches taken by TH grantees.

Challenges:

During the discussion, grantees noted a number of challenges impacting their TechHire programs. These include:

- **Broadband Access**: In several of these communities up to 60% of the population does not have access to high-speed broadband internet.
- **Workforce System Partnerships**: Turnover among case management staff at a local one-stop can greatly impact a program’s ability to engage participants across multiple counties and can pose partnership challenges.
- **Recruitment**: Grantees need diverse recruitment strategies to engage the pool of program participants they need.
- **Leveraging Participant Contributions**: Grantees are looking for ways to get their students involved in promoting, marketing, and designing TechHire programs.
- **Serving a Large Geography**: Grantees would like strategies to provide effective transportation support and to design programs for students across wide geographic areas (e.g., through shifts in class times, distance learning opportunities, and developing student cohorts).

Tips and Strategies Highlighted by Rural TechHire Grantees:

- **Broadband**: Some grantees, including BridgeValley Community and Technical College, have adopted flexible scheduling for courses which center around one lab that has a set schedule. James Sprunt Community College holds some classes at the local library, which makes computers available for student use.
- **Partnerships**: Partnerships do not work when the collaboration is based only solely on the funding. Several grantees, including the Full Employment Council, encouraged their peers to engage partners with a common mission and show them how collaboration can help them meet their goals.
- **Engaging Business**: TechHire grantee BridgeValley Community & Technical College invites business to “Lunch and Learn” opportunities in which the college shares information about the program and highlights how business can support these efforts. In some cases, students bring resumes and practice interview skills with business leaders.
• **Transportation:**
  - James Sprunt Community College noted that one solution they have identified is to work with local public transportation to arrange for additional pick-up sites for students. It’s a win-win for the community college and local transportation, which benefits from higher ridership.
  - Another strategy is to move classes to community organizations or religious centers to help provide greater access to classes.

• **Student Cohorts:** Older workers and other participants often learn better in group settings with peer support. Several programs have worked to facilitate group learning and lab space at local libraries and other community spaces where students have peer support to complement online learning.

**What Are Grantees Still Trying to Figure Out?**

• **Employer Engagement:** Grantees noted that they often do not have access to large IT companies and are interested in learning how to work closely with small companies and how to take advantage of remote opportunities to support both training and placement. They are also trying to get better buy-in from local workforce boards. Please share your insights on these issues with other grantees here.

If you’re a rural grantee and want to share your own successes or best practices, share your story with your fellow grantees here.

Please check out Colorado’s Regional Sector Partnership Convener Training Workbook here. Starting on page 12, this resource describes Holding the Launch Meeting, which describes how to set up the room so focus is on the employer’s needs. This workbook also has some good sample invitation letters, etc.