TechHire Community College Cohort
August Peer Learning Group Call Summary

For TechHire grantees moving into their Period of Performance (PoP) Extension, the technical assistance team created a Peer Learning Group (PLG) Cohort Call Series to help guide grantees through the remainder of their extended grant period. The cohorts are separated into two groups: community colleges and workforce boards, with nonprofit grantees able to join one of the two cohorts. In August 2020, the first of three TechHire Cohort Calls was scheduled to share how grantees have pivoted during their PoP Extension and to discuss implementation strategies in the final months of their grants.

DISCUSSION TOPICS AND GRANTEE RESPONSES

The format of the call was based on three discussion questions:

1. How have you pivoted during the PoP Extension?
2. How have you reallocated staff during the PoP Extension?
3. How are you phasing out your staff? All at once at the end of the PoP Extension or gradually?

Objectives of the PLG Call

- Share proposed or revised work plans grantees have developed specifically for their PoP Extension

- Discuss strategies and approaches grantees will be implementing in their PoP Extension, which may include online/virtual training, job placement, retention strategies, and sustainability elements

- Form small cohorts to continue dialogue among grantees and assist with challenges in the execution of their plans

Responses varied, but overall, grantees noted a shift from recruitment to placement. One grantee shared how they have hired an employment specialist and transitioned past TechHire staff to new grant-funded (federal and state) positions at the institution. Unique ideas surfaced, ranging from leveraging social media skills to starting a "job club" for TechHire alumni. These ideas showcase how grantees have a full focus on job placement for their completers.

Additional insights on the transition from face-to-face to online training show the shift continues to be successful and will likely remain during the rest of their PoP Extension. However, remote certification testing continues to be a challenge, as students need equipment to be able to sit for the exam.

At the conclusion of the call, grantees openly selected topics and determined the frequency of future calls. Grantees voted to hold the call every month until November 2020. Calls were scheduled for October 27 and November 17, after which grantees will turn their attention to the TechHire Final Celebration Webinar. Potential future topics include working with workforce boards, potential grant funding, closeout guidance, and sustainability planning.

TechHire Community College Cohort
September Peer Learning Group Call Summary

Now, three months into the TechHire Period of Performance Extension, grantees are implementing their changes and strategies to maximize their outcomes. In the first Peer Learning Group Cohort Call for community colleges, the technical assistance team and grantees discussed how the grantees pivoted their activities for the PoP Extension and how staffing will be shifting over the course of the extension. For the second TechHire PLG Cohort Call for community colleges, the technical assistance team created an agenda based on the real-time needs of the grantees (as indicated by a Q&A session during the call).

Objectives of the PLG Call

- Share proposed or revised work plans

- Discuss strategies and approaches grantees will be implementing in their PoP Extension, including online training, job placement, retention strategies, and sustainability elements

- Form small cohorts to continue dialogue among grantees and assist with challenges in the execution of their plans

- Discuss options for creating student supports to help ensure students obtain certifications, reestablishing or forming business partnerships/relationships, onboarding new staff, and developing Registered Apprenticeships

CREATING STUDENT SUPPORT TO HELP ENSURE STUDENTS OBTAIN CERTIFICATION

Grantees discussed three diverse approaches to implementing student support into programming. First, Polk State College shared how they have a bootcamp-style training model (five weeks) immediately at the end of the last module of classes to ensure a captive audience. The bootcamps, done in-house with staff and faculty, are focused on preparing students to be ready to sit for their chosen certification.

Another grantee mentioned they have students go off site to a certification testing site to sit for the certification exam. If students don't pass the exam, the grantee offers a refresher course, which is intentionally kept to low enrollment. The course is paid for out of the support services budget, to assist with exam preparation for the students' next attempt.

Finally, another grantee mentioned how their academic remediation department reaches out to past participants who have finished the training but have not passed the certification exam.

Additionally, the grantee incorporated instructional support mechanisms and embedded them into the curriculum to help ensure successful pass rates for IT certifications.

DEVELOPING REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIPS

One TechHire grantee is an awardee of a U.S. Department of Labor Scaling Apprenticeship grant and shared how they are focused on the trades, not IT. Therefore, overlap between the initiatives doesn't exist. However, the career pathway approach used in TechHire helps to design the infrastructure used in the Scaling Apprenticeship grant.

With their PoP Extension, another grantee explained their new rationale for developing cybersecurity youth apprenticeships at their institution. Employers are interested in and need to hire apprentices for entry-level positions in cybersecurity. Apprentices would allow them to meet their current needs as well as develop the apprentices into long-term hires.

REESTABLISHING OR FORMING BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS/RELATIONSHIPS

In the first call, grantees discussed their challenge with the loss of business partners due to the current economic issues. However, several grantees shared positive efforts on reestablishing or forming new partnerships. One grantee has expanded their TechHire advisory board, by merging it with other IT initiatives at the college, as well as their IT department's advisory board. Recently partnering with their state's Tech Council has also benefitted the program and its connection to businesses in the area.

Another grantee explained how they have successfully moved their internships from face-to-face experiences to remote internships. While students are grateful for the opportunity, there are mixed reviews, as the digital divide continues to cause several challenges. Additionally, due to the inability to process direct payments to students, they are experiencing financial complications. A solution came from the group to allow reimbursement to come from the employer versus the college.

ONBOARDING NEW JOB PLACEMENT SPECIALIST

Due to the current shifts in the economy, a current job placement specialist on the call stated that their work is the same with different outcomes. The specialist mentioned that a lack of job openings and employment opportunities continue to be a challenge. Professional development workshops and internship opportunities are still occurring, but the landscape of employment remains an issue for completers.

NEXT TOPICS

The next PLG calls were scheduled for October 27 and November 17, and then grantees will turn their attention to the TechHire Final Celebration Webinar. Potential future topics for the October call will include working with workforce boards, potential grant funding, closeout guidance, and sustainability planning.