Strategies for Integrating Techhire and WIOA Resources and Processes

INTRODUCTION

H-1B TechHire Partnership projects contribute toward the objectives of local Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs to improve access to training and employment for people who face barriers to employment, and to connect those individuals who have completed training and attained relevant in-demand skills to employers seeking a skilled workforce. This alignment positions TechHire grantees to leverage WIOA funds and processes to support their TechHire grant, benefiting both the TechHire project and the local workforce development board.

This brief shares strategies that two TechHire grantees have used to successfully integrate WIOA resources and processes into their TechHire projects to amplify and sustain efforts that connect participants with employment opportunities. One grantee, Clackamas Community College in Portland, Oregon, prepares students to be computer numerical control (CNC) operators, mechanical maintenance technicians, or certified nursing assistants through classroom training plus internships and other work experience placements. The other, Workforce Connection of Central New Mexico, offers IT training to residents of New Mexico’s Bernalillo, Sandoval, Torrance, and Valencia counties through classroom or online training that results in an industry-recognized certificate. The different agency models (one a community college, one a workforce board) and range of H-1B industries represented by these two grantees demonstrate that WIOA-TechHire collaboration is possible regardless of agency type or target industry.

CLACKAMAS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Clackamas Community College has partnered with local workforce development boards for over 10 years to ensure that its training programs are aligned with employers’ needs and that graduates are connected to employment. The college is a service provider for its local American Job Center (AJC) and appears on Oregon’s Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) to receive WIOA Title I training funds through Individual Training Accounts (ITAs). In 2007, the Clackamas Workforce Partnership and college leadership recognized the opportunity for collaboration, says TechHire Clackamas Program Manager Tom Brown. “They realized that nobody was going to take outcomes away from each other,” says Brown. “In fact, we will be able to support each other’s outcomes. ‘This is going to be good for me’—that was the feeling on both sides of the fence.”
Coordination between WIOA and TechHire Clackamas was intentional from the inception of the grant. Both TechHire Clackamas program managers had previously worked for the college at the AJC. The original program design leveraged student support services available through WIOA but, when WIOA funding was reduced in early 2019, the college brought support services in-house—and, in fact, the college provides support services for students receiving ITA-funded advanced manufacturing certificates, even if they are not enrolled at the college for the training. TechHire Clackamas has also leveraged state on-the-job training funds, coordinated through WIOA staff.

WIOA staff are present on the Clackamas campus 40 hours a week to assist students with accessing WIOA-funded services. The campus staff is a combination of supervisors and case managers who rotate their days on campus or back at the AJC, so that no single individual needs to be on campus at all times to ensure coverage all week.

Referrals between WIOA and TechHire Clackamas go both ways. WIOA staff can promote the TechHire training, since the college is on the ETPL. For instance, students can participate in the short-term (11-week) TechHire advanced manufacturing training at the college and then use WIOA ITA funding to pursue longer CNC operator or other specialty trainings. Going the other way, individuals over age 29 who attend TechHire information sessions get referred to WIOA to learn about training options, including the nearby Worksystems, Inc.’s SNAP Employment & Training (E&T) “Career Boost” program.1

WIOA and TechHire Clackamas also collaborate on employer services. TechHire staff engage with employers directly to facilitate employment and internship placements. They may also refer employers in this network to the AJC to post job openings on the state job-matching system if the position can’t be filled with a TechHire participant. For the high-demand and competitive advanced manufacturing industry, Clackamas Workforce Partnership has employer services staff dedicated to serving employers in this field. TechHire Clackamas staff have educated them on the TechHire curriculum and the capacities of its graduates so these specialized WIOA staff will come to the TechHire program first with job openings. Finally, the three workforce development boards serving the Portland area (Clackamas Workforce Partnership, Workforce Southwest Washington, and Worksystems, Inc.) collaborate to convene quarterly employer meetings by industry. TechHire is a standing item on the agenda to provide updates and announce when the next group of students will graduate.

These close partnerships with local workforce investment boards have added value for the college for over a decade. The key to getting started, says Brown, is bringing everyone together
in the same room to review each agency’s metrics and outcomes, and from there it should become apparent that while community colleges and workforce agencies have similar goals, they each have unique missions and approaches.

WORKFORCE CONNECTION OF CENTRAL NEW MEXICO

In New Mexico, TechHire staffers see similar opportunities for leveraging WIOA-funded employer services to support individuals who participate in TechHire programs.

TechHire New Mexico, which is based in Albuquerque, is operated by the Workforce Connection of Central New Mexico, a workforce intermediary serving Bernalillo, Sandoval, Torrance, and Valencia counties through five AJC locations. The AJC offices are the worksites for employees of multiple agencies, including Service Employment and Redevelopment (SER), a Santa Fe-based provider of WIOA services for adults; Youth Development, Inc. (YDI), an Albuquerque-based provider of WIOA youth services; as well as the WCCNM employees who operate TechHire NM.

Early in TechHire program implementation, TechHire NM staffers realized that business consultants from WIOA adult programs were talking to the same IT employers that TechHire sought to engage. Recognizing an opportunity to streamline the efforts of the two service providers, TechHire NM trained all of its job-development professionals to speak to employers about both TechHire and WIOA-funded employer services, so they could offer a variety of solutions to meet a business’s needs. They found that TechHire and WIOA funding could be braided to cover all of an employer’s training needs.

Here are two examples of how WCCNM has braided WIOA and TechHire funding:

- A certified but unemployed IT worker joins TechHire NM and completes the required soft skills and entrepreneurship coursework. After getting connected with a job at Company X, the worker enrolls in a WIOA on-the-job skills upgrade training program to develop an expanded set of skills.
- TechHire NM funds a one-to-two-week incumbent worker training program for a large group of employees at Company Q, and then, as needed by the employer, WIOA provides up to six months of on-the-job skills upgrade training to help workers reinforce the skills they learned in the earlier training program.
As of July 2019, TechHire NM and its WIOA partners had co-enrolled 31 TechHire NM participants in the WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker program, and they had co-enrolled 11 WIOA Youth participants. Those co-enrollments yielded a total financial impact of more than $239,000 in leveraged resources for the TechHire NM program. This shows how TechHire NM is augmenting WCCNM’s employer engagement efforts, and why WCCNM is eager to sustain the TechHire model. The resources and attention from TechHire are helping make IT a priority area for central New Mexico’s sector development strategy.

For TechHire NM staff, successful co-enrollments of individuals in TechHire and WIOA involve TechHire career advisors helping students navigate their training options and job searches, with funds from WIOA ITAs paying for the IT training of individuals who choose to pursue training from a provider on the state’s ETPL.

“Co-enrollment can maximize the opportunities available to participants and to employers,” says Tawnya Rowland, TechHire NM’s program director.

There are some barriers to co-enrollment. For example, extra paperwork is required, and employees must engage in oversight to make sure that there’s no duplication of grant-funded services. But those drawbacks are outweighed by benefits such as these:

- TechHire NM has developed **connections to IT employers, and WIOA Youth services staffers can leverage those connections** to create opportunities for youth participants to meet work experience requirements.
- Each program offers the other **cost-sharing for training tuition**. This support from TechHire projects can be particularly helpful to workforce systems at the end of the fiscal year or for providers not on the state’s ETPL.
- Both programs’ efforts to reach out to employers in the IT sector help with brand awareness and placement.

To encourage referrals and co-enrollments, TechHire NM makes **presentations to workforce partners weekly**. More referrals have gone from TechHire to WIOA than vice versa, but TechHire NM has received eight co-enrolled participants from YDI’s YouthBuild WIOA youth grant program, after the training focus of YouthBuild was expanded beyond construction to include IT.

“There is something unique about individuals who are interested in pursuing training and careers in technology that differentiates them from other parts of the population that want to be, for example, truck drivers or teachers,” says Rowland. “They’re motivated differently; they’ve

"TechHire has highlighted the value of communication and collaboration among all the partners . . . . One of the biggest values that TechHire has brought to the table is promoting the integration of workforce center programs and helping to break down these silos.”

- Tawnya Rowland, Program Director, TechHire NM

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already mentally prepared.” She also notes that many applicants who self-refer to TechHire NM score 6 or 7 (out of 7) on the ACT WorkKeys Applied Math, Graphic Literacy, and Workplace Documents tests, indicating that they have higher levels of foundational skills than the average applicant.

CONCLUSION

Both grantees recognize the value proposition of WIOA-TechHire integration, particularly in the area of employer services. TechHire program managers at both grantees actively invest in educating their WIOA colleagues on TechHire offerings and collaborate on employer outreach. In this way, they multiply the value-add to employers and contribute to their mutual program metrics. On the jobseeker side, both grantees have identified ways to braid TechHire and WIOA funding to defray training costs for individuals as they move up a training ladder. Beyond the TechHire grant period, these strategies for integrating TechHire and WIOA services could provide avenues for grantees to sustain their work growing the workforce for H-1B industries in their regions.

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1 Each state operates a Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) program supported with funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. SNAP E&T programs provide SNAP participants with the skills and education they need to find a good-paying job that leads to self-sufficiency. See: https://snaptoskills.fns.usda.gov/.