



Effective Strategies for Retention & Completion –Webinar Notes

Joint Webinar for H-1B One Workforce and H-1B Rural Healthcare Grants

Date: March 28, 2023

Attendees: 64

QUESTIONS FOR PANELISTS

What strategies and structures did you implement to retain participants?

- **Technology**
 - Using technology has led to great retention numbers and has helped with participant engagement. For example, implementing online training and programming has helped some participants who were having issues attending in-person due to transportation problems or traveling long distances.
 - Creating a laptop loaner program to address participant connectivity issues. The connectivity issues are flagged early in the enrollment process to ensure that the participants have the tools need to complete the program.
 - Promoting more virtual engagement and offering participants the ability to meet with coordinators virtually and complete paperwork online.
- **Community Partnerships**
 - Developing a partnership with local adult education centers as well as the community college system.
 - Aligning training partners, leveraging resources, and staying connected with partners to keep them abreast of what programs are being offered.
- **Program Elements**
 - Adding soft skills training as a program requirement to help participants learn the skills needed to succeed after completing the program.
 - Developing a robust job placement assistance program that includes mentoring from industry professionals.
 - Hosting networking events to introduce students to potential employers. These events increase engagement and enhances their overall outlook on the program.
 - Inviting local, prominent guest speakers to address the students, hosting fun events and activities such as picnics and holiday parties to increase engagement and create a true community.

What lessons have you learned or changes have you implemented from when you started your grant?

- **Recruitment and Application**
 - Substantial changes have been made to recruiting processes. Mandatory assessments were added to the program to test the students' aptitude and ability to be successful in class.
 - Students are required to compose a 500-word essay on why they want to be involved in the training class as part of the application process, which can later be used as an accountability tool. When students begin to falter, they are brought in and reminded of the essay that they composed.
- **Participant Engagement**
 - Began using an individualized service plan with each student to address their short- and long-term employment and educational goals. This assessment plan is used to identify students who need soft skill training.
 - Began offering online programming focused on improving communication and job skills.
 - Added monthly check-ins for students completing online trainings.
 - Invited former students to share their training and employment success stories. This encourages students to work hard to complete the program and obtain employment.
 - Coached students about career pathways, helping them understand that though they may enter at an entry-level position, they can upskill to obtain the job that they desire.
- **Accountability**
 - Each training class is assigned a case manager who serves as an accountability partner.
 - Students are no longer allowed to complete assessments virtually or in a home setting due to suspicions of cheating. Additionally, the number of required assessments were increased to include a critical thinking assessment designed by an employment partner.

When thinking about grant applications and setting up the budget, do you have a distinctive thought process about staffing?

- Grant writers were crucial in identifying the appropriate program staff and including an appropriate number of case managers needed, as well as including supportive staff like recruiters and employment specialists. Case managers are critical, as they are responsible for forming relationships and properly communicating with participants and tracking and documenting progress.
- Considered longstanding partnerships with organizations and the community to ensure that the outreach and recruitment efforts are not difficult to navigate.

What are some critical components of effective support systems?

- Regular meetings, or case conferences, with career advisors, program managers, and the training providers to discuss individual challenges and barriers, brainstorm solutions and reduce

duplication of services while conducting cohort trainings, allows issues to be flagged and addressed on an individual level, if necessary, and identify any trends across participants.

- A mentorship program, in which each student was assigned a mentor who currently works in the industry. In addition to mentoring, students have access to daily tutoring sessions, available in person or virtually.
- A community of learning, created by students, where they support one another by meeting weekly at local restaurants or someone's home for study sessions or to unwind.
- Effective assessments at recruitment and enrollment to identify candidates who are committed and prepared for success. It is easier to address participants who may not be ready for the program early on by explaining that the program may not suit their needs at this time.

What methods help you effectively track participants? Are there specific ones for tracking? When do you start to see a trend? How are you figuring out that you are having success?

- Success is confirmed by finding a job, although there can be a lot of small successes that occur along the way like securing transportation for a student who experienced car trouble.
- Success can also be seen through certification completions. Students can receive multiple certifications and have been outperforming the industry standard by passing multiple certification exams.
- Graduating and employment are the two primary goals that are assessed to determine the success of a training or program.

Are there any warning signs that you have noticed that point to the need for more engagement?

- Training partners can be your best asset as they can provide notice that a student has stopped attending class or their grades have started to drop. Coordinators will reach out to the student to determine their needs and refer them to partners who can assist them with things such as childcare, transportation, or housing, which are critical for students to be successful.
- Not staying connected with career advisors/case managers can be a huge red flag. This is an issue that should be caught early. It is important to let participants know during the enrollment process that it is important to stay connected with their career advisors/case managers so that issues can be troubleshooted as the students matriculate through the program.
- Case conferencing is important for getting all involved parties in the same room such as career advisors, program managers, training providers to discuss students who may be falling behind.

Note that there was additional discussion among the grantees, please watch the webinar, linked in the WorkforceGPS Resource.