

Workforce³One

Transcript of Webinar

Integrating Sector Strategies and Career Pathways, SS Peer Learning Group

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MARTIN SIMON: Good afternoon. This is Martin Simon with the National Governors Association. I'll be facilitating this call today. Welcome, everybody. We'll get started shortly.

LAYLI OLIVER: This is Layli Oliver from Maher & Maher. I'll be running the technical side of the call today. We're going to wait just a few minutes, let a few more people dial in before we get started. And I'll be making this announcement periodically, but the way this call will work is Martin and – (inaudible) – that he's brought on today to discuss this topic will give a brief presentation. And once they're done we really want to encourage people to join into the conversation. During the presentation I am going to put all the phone lines on a blanket mute. And to unmute yourself to participate in the conversation, you'll just have to hit *6 on your phone.

OK, Martin, it's 3:00 now. You want to go ahead and get started and I'll put the blanket mute on. And again for all the participants, when it's time to start our conversation portion, just hit *6 and you'll unmute yourself.

MR. SIMON: Well, good afternoon. Again this is Martin Simon with the National Governors Association, where I'm director of economic, human services and workforce division –

OPERATOR: All guests have been muted. You can unmute your line by pressing *6.

MR. SIMON: You probably all heard that interruption, so again I'm Martin Simon with the National Governors Association. This is the second in a series of calls we're having on integrated sector strategies and career pathways. Actually that's the topic today. It's on sector strategy – and this is just for review for those of you that are joining for the first time, this discussion is part of a larger Employment and Training Administration initiative called sector strategies TA initiative. This is a national effort to increase the number of states and regions that are actively engaged in sector strategies.

The first time that such a network's been created, the focus on sector strategies is part of a national movement within the workforce system. It's a way of leveraging the significant body of work that's already out there around sector strategies and the experiences in states and regions across the country. And we know that many of you are not new to sector strategies and may have participated in the first call in this series back in November and in the calls last year.

What we're finding is that there's still a pretty good hunger out there for information on how to fully implement sector strategies. These are called peer learning group calls. And they're designed to be an opportunity or forum for you to have an in-depth discussion with your peers from across the country. So that's an important part. We're going to emphasize this occasionally throughout the call, that these are discussion calls. And they're only successful if you participate.

We'll present some best practice information to prime the call. But what we really want is an honest and open discussion among those of you that are on the call. And we have quite a few

people that have signed up for this. It's close to 100. And so while it would be nice to do a roll call to find out who's on, that would take up all the time we have today.

But what I'd like to do instead of that though to just get an idea of the distribution across the country, is to call out the six Department of Labor regions. And if you're from a state within that region, just call out your state. I'm sorry, that's not going to work since you've all been muted. So I've got to follow the protocol here –

MR. : Shawn Gomez (ph) from Ohio.

MR. SIMON: Well, I guess – let's see if this works. What about region one? Any folks from region one on the call? OK. Region two? I guess the muting is actually in place.

So we will go back to the script here and the program. And what we've identified is two states that we think are doing leading work in integrating career pathways into sector strategies. And that's the topic of discussion today. Sector approaches and career pathways have evolved on a parallel track in many states and regions across the country. As these approaches have matured, many states are integrating them into industry partnerships as a key component of their talent pipeline strategies.

In this session we're going to focus on how states are progressing with the integration of career pathways and sector strategies, and how you can capitalize on the workforce innovation and opportunity act in advancing this integration. As you know the provisions in WIOA call for states and regions to implement career pathways and sector strategies.

Today, to get the conversation going, we're going to hear from Colorado and North Carolina. Originally Stephanie Veck, who's the director of the Colorado Workforce Development Council, was going to join us but she has a conflict and we're fortunate to have Emily Templin Lesh, who's the assistant director for policy and industry partnerships, with the Colorado Workforce Development Council.

Our other practitioner today is Dr. Dion Clark. She serves as the North Carolina Works! career pathways director in the North Carolina Department of Commerce. Prior to this she served as the senior policy adviser to governor Pat McCrory and the executive director of the women's resource center in Alamance County in North Carolina. In her role as career pathways director, she works with local workforce teams to develop a regional and sustainable approach to matching employee training to employer need.

So with that brief background on our two practitioners today, I'm going to turn it over first to Emily to talk about the Colorado experience, and Emily if you want to share a little bit more about your background. So Emily, take it away.

EMILY TEMPLIN LESH: Great. Thank you, Martin. And thank you for the opportunity to the U.S. DOL and Maher & Maher for the opportunity to be on the call and to share and learn. So my background, I am the assistant director for the Colorado Workforce Development Council, which is our state workforce development board in Colorado.

And I have been focused on industry engagement and career pathways in Colorado for the past five years or so. And so here in Colorado, I'll just go ahead and give an overview about the work we've been doing related to sector partnership driven career pathways.

And so here in Colorado we have a long history of sector partnerships. For over 10 years now the state has invested in and focused on sector partnerships as a key strategy for engaging businesses from one industry collectively.

And then just in 2013, so just three years ago now, we launched the next generation of sector partnerships. So at this time we brought together regional teams from across the state to identify their priority industry areas and this resulted in the network of sector partnerships across the state that we have today. So today we have an active network of over 20 sector partnerships in the state.

And so in Colorado the thing that – there are a few characteristics or elements to a sector partnership that we have defined. And so they are regional partnerships, they are focused on one industry, so multiple businesses from one industry are working together. And the public partners play a really important support role in sector partnerships. And so public partners from the workforce system, education and economic development.

And so over the past three years we have launched a sector partnership model that does not focus on grant dollars or funding, but really focuses on sector partnerships as being a way of doing business, and a really critical strategy for doing business across the workforce, education and economic development systems at the regional level.

And so I wanted to provide that background about sector partnerships in Colorado before I dove into the career pathway piece. But here in Colorado we have actively engaged in and are working actively to connect and to ensure that sector partnerships are driving the development of career pathways.

And so while our sector partnerships across the state don't all focus on workforce and talent issues or career pathways, they also focus on other issues, so other economic development issues, things like supply chain networking and removing other regulatory barriers. But talent is one of the cornerstones to partnerships across the state and something that all businesses collectively working together have identified as a really key need and priority.

And so when it comes to career pathways and the career pathway work, we see career pathways as a key strategy for solving and working to address the talent needs that our industries in Colorado are facing. And so career pathways in Colorado, we have set a framework for career pathways which you can find in our career pathways step by step guide. And so this is a resource that we have developed for our regional sector partnerships, and regional sector partnerships for developing and implementing career pathways.

And this was developed by – this guide and framework was developed by an interagency working group at the state level that also engaged with many of our local partners. So partners

from across our community college system, Department of Education, Department of Higher Education and then Department of Labor and Employment, were very engaged in the development of and guiding the development of our career pathways step by step guide.

And so just a little bit – I'll just provide a quick overview about our approach on career pathways. And so we really have come to collectively state as partners across state agencies and also at the local level, that it's really important that career pathways emerge out of two ongoing conversations. So one was employers and the target industry. So that's where that sector partnership really plays an important role. And also one was education and training, institutions and workforce, that are really ultimately responsible for the development and implementation, and responding to the needs of businesses using career pathways as a framework.

So the steps in the guide are very broad. So the big buckets are that the first step is really to build a sector partnership or an industry group. But we really have been working on that sector partnership – (inaudible) – that we need to build out and prepare support partners. So that really gets to the work that's done within the education and workforce system to really engage in the development of career pathways and to support industry and identification. The third step is to identify critical occupations. So what are the top burning occupations that employers are having a hard time filling. And then identifying the competencies for those occupations.

And these steps are things that really require clearly close coordination and utilizing labor market information to complete. But the real piece that we have found so valuable here in Colorado is that engagement with business, which is why building the sector partnership is the first key step. So one example is our northern Colorado healthcare partnership is going through this third step of identifying critical occupations right now.

And collectively as healthcare providers in northern Colorado, they've identified a need to bring on over 400 medical assistants in the next 18 months. When you pool the data, and we had this conversation with the northern Colorado healthcare providers, the data shows that there are 40 medical assistant positions that will be open in the next five years.

And so healthcare clearly is a really dynamic industry right now. I love to use this example about the real value and the important of engaging businesses, and businesses being at the cornerstone of the career pathway conversation.

Because clearly that firsthand data and information from the healthcare providers in Colorado helps guide us and helps guide the public partners in workforce and education in a very different direction than the labor market data. And so then the fifth step that we have is really continuous improvement. So this is about an ongoing conversation between businesses from one industry, together with public partners from workforce and education.

And that response and the action that is taken after listening and hearing from businesses is really where the value of the career pathway comes in. Because it's not just about mapping out the critical occupations, and what education is needed or training is needed to get to those critical applications, and the salaries of jobs that can result from specific training, but it's really about the public partners listening and responding along the way.

So some examples of responses that we have seen along the way are – again I'll go back to northern Colorado for an example here, but the NoCo manufacturing partnership has now fully implemented this step by step guide, or fully followed the step by step guide, and is working right now to implement a career pathway action plan.

And so throughout the process of identifying critical occupations and competencies, and really having the businesses lead and drive those conversations, it was identified that the engineering – that the businesses, the manufacturing businesses were not hiring engineers out of one of our main big four-year universities in Colorado. And that four-year university was in the room.

And so what came out of that conversation, and that real conversation about the need – that employers drove about their needs, and the knowledge, skills and abilities that they need in an engineer every day, the education partners were able to work together and identify opportunities for further partnerships.

So right now as a result of this process, one of our community colleges is working to develop a pre-engineering program that will feed into – and so they already had a skeleton and a program that really met the needs of a pre-engineering program. And so they're working to ensure that there is an articulation agreement and that someone can clearly articulate from the community college into the four-year program at the four-year university.

And so that is a great example of how as a result of listening to employers, the public partners were able to respond and are responding to the employers' needs. And those connections and that outcome of the two-plus-two program between our community college and the four-year is not something that would have happened otherwise, or a conversation that would have happened otherwise.

And so we're really in Colorado approaching the career pathways work and our sector partnership driven career pathways work as really being about systems change, and as strategies, sector partnerships, and career pathways, as being really critical and important strategies to leverage change across our workforce and education system in an alignment with the needs of businesses. So there's my kind of introductory overview, Martin.

MR. SIMON: Great, Emily. Very valuable information. I like the way you anchored it in some really concrete examples. I want to ask one question before I turn it over – (inaudible). How important is it to have a state framework and partnership across the agencies to successful implementation of your career pathways sector strategies initiative?

MS. LESH: Yeah. Great question, Martin. And so I'll answer it from one perspective, but then please ask questions if I'm not getting exactly to what you are looking for here. And so in Colorado we have a, as I mentioned earlier, a career pathways alignment group, which is a working group of partners from across our education system. So Department of Education, Department of Human Services, Department of Higher Ed, Department of Labor and Employment. And that alignment of state partners has been really instrumental and critical to building support for career pathways across the state.

And so I would say that that alignment has been really extraordinarily valuable from the perspective of the local – we're asking folks to align their efforts at the local level and at the regional level.

And so they're able to look at us and we're able to – the state partners are able to come out with a unified message around this is the work that we're doing in alignment work, to provide that unified message to whether it be the community colleges, it would be the school districts, etc., whoever the local or regional partner is. And so it's really that unified message has been really critical.

I was just going to say, I'm not sure if you want also, the step by step guide I think has been really valuable to us here in Colorado. But I also think it's work that we are very happy to share. And U.S. DOL has also had some tremendous resources with their career pathways guides. And so there are a lot of resources out there that can be used.

MR. SIMON: Thank you for sharing the information on the resources. I think that'll be valuable information. So Dion, I'm going to turn it over to you. As I said earlier, Dion is the North Carolina Works! career pathways director within the Department of Commerce. Dion?

DION CLARK: Thank you, Martin. I appreciate the opportunity to be on the call. Can everyone hear me OK? Just wanted to make sure. OK. Thank you, so much. I'm excited to talk about what North Carolina is doing with career pathways. Like many states in the country, we had career pathways for upwards of 10 years now in different forms or formats. But one of the things that the three major players in career pathways and workforce development got together and thought about was some process to standardize what we consider to be a career pathway.

So my boss here at the Department of Commerce, the community college system, and the K12 system, got together and began to push for a standardization process. So the lead workforce agency in this state is the NC Works Commission. That's our statewide workforce development board.

Last summer the NC Works Commission passed – approved a set of eight criteria by which local teams could apply to have career pathways certified. And so what I do in this role, those three entities, the commerce, community colleges, and the K12, applied for a foundation grant. We got non-state dollars, non-governmental dollars, to create my position. And I have an assistant, a research assistant. We got foundational dollars for these two positions. And what we do solely, 40 hours a week and then some, is we think about certification and getting that message of certification out.

In North Carolina we have 23 local workforce boards, 58 community colleges, and 115 LEAs. And so we've asked that local teams comprised of those three entities, that's pretty much a requirement in most circumstances. And then those local teams can add on to those community colleges, chambers of commerce, economic development boards, local officials, elected officials. In fact I just met with the North Carolina National Guard this morning.

And they want to lead a team to develop career pathways. Again we allow other entities to lead those teams, but we still ask that they minimally have the community college, the workforce board representation, and the high school representation on it. Those local teams are developing pathways that can be certified through the NC Works Commission.

One of the questions that we often get is, why should I bother, we already have career pathways at our high school, at our community colleges, things of that nature. And so I stress – I try to stress to the local teams whenever I get the opportunity, that standardization, getting it certified through the NC Works Commission is a standardization process. It says to existing employers and to potential employers that we have the infrastructure in place, the mechanism to train your workforce.

To this point we've had one local team submit an application and move through the process. They're just now at the point where when the NC Works Commission meets again the first weekend next month, we believe that they will be certified. And then we have two additional regions who have submitted applications. And they are in the review process and likely to be approved sometime after the March meeting.

So about the certification process of career pathways, the NC Works Commission developed eight best practice criteria. They have to do with work based learning, collaboration, career awareness, data driven, to establish that the sector is in high demand and the jobs will be high wage.

Some of the early challenges, the early obstacles for us that we actually think we're working well to overcome, have been that in a lot of instances high schools and community colleges have actually worked very well together to develop career pathways. But they have only served 9 through 14, or 9 through 16, that kind of youth age bracket.

One of the requirements for NC Works! certification of pathway is that it provides the same or better, greater services for adult workers and for dislocated workers. The other thing is that we ask for again those big three to work together to develop pathways.

And by and large we've seen pathways be developed in one of two ways, the high schools and the community colleges together, or the community colleges and the workforce boards together. Bringing the three together has been a challenge.

And it has been a challenge again because it's easier. There's money for it, there's an appetite for it, there's a history for serving those youth workers through career pathways. But we've held the line on making sure that we provide those same services for adults and dislocated workers.

Our career pathways, another challenge that kind of feeds out of that one, is that we've established the career pathways which are germane to the job, not the sector. So sometimes we will hear someone say an energy pathway or a healthcare pathway. But our career pathways are not really specific to the sector, but to a career trajectory within the sector.

And so sometimes within a sector, some people have tried – some local teams have asked about for instance a nursing aide pathway, creating a pathway for nursing aide. And so we say to them, the pathway should cover the gamut of careers in nursing, the most entry level career in nursing, and the most senior level, even up to an undergraduate degree or beyond.

And so changing that dialogue and changing that mindset has been a challenge. But again we seem to be getting that message across that we look for certification along a continuum, and not just a continuum with the worker, from the youth worker to the senior career worker, and then the continuum of job opportunities within a career pathway.

Additionally in terms of sector strategies, our certified career pathways has to be employer-led. And so the application for certification is on our website, is on the NC Works Commission website. But the certification requires – the application requires that the local team list each and every team member, and that they get the team member to sign off.

And they have to bring a group of engaged employers to the table. And so we ask for things like meeting notes and documentation of interactions with employers to ensure that the employers are leading the charge. That has been somewhat of a challenge for us in the state, because as I say, some of the pathway work had already been done.

And so our community colleges and high schools at some point tried to get employers to just sign off. Letters of support, we get a ton of letters of support. We value letters of support, but we have resisted letting those be the primary demonstration of employer engagement.

We've asked to see meeting notes. We actually have asked for things like making your employers chairs of committees or chairs of subcommittees. We've had mixed response on that. It's worked very well in the urban areas, but not necessarily as well in the rural. But again we do feel like we're turning the tide on that.

The way we do the evaluation process, we have really tried to not retain all the power of the certification process at the state level, sometimes to the local area's chagrin. Because we ask that local – the certifications be regional in nature, that an NC Works! certified pathway be regional. But we have refused at the state level to define what a region is. And some of our local workforce board of directors would much prefer that we define it for them, but we're unwilling to do that.

So in the northeastern part of the state, three of our 23 workforce boards got together and developed a regional pathway. Just recently we received an application out of the Charlotte area, where Charlotte and two other workforce boards got together, that's three boards in total, to develop a regional pathway.

But we had another instance in the triangle, the Raleigh Durham area, whereby Raleigh submitted one pathway that they planned to localize or extrapolate to the other two workforce development boards, and the other two did the same. So Raleigh submitted IT, Durham submitted health finance, and – (inaudible) – submitted advanced manufacturing. But once all three of those certified pathways are approved, then they will localize each of those to cover that

three workforce board development region areas, such that each of those workforce boards will have three certified pathways according to our space requirements through WIOA.

We've really taken WIOA's admonishment to heart to try to use – we've leveraged pretty much our entire ideas about workforce development for a generation on sector strategies and career pathways. Over the summer we applied for a grant from the U.S. DOL and we did receive \$5.25 million from the Department of Labor.

And in our application we told the Department of Labor we were going to use that for pathways. And so any of those local teams made up of the workforce boards, community colleges, and K12s, can apply for a planning grant. But only implementation – and those are up to \$30,000 – implementation grants can be up to \$330,000. But we are only expending those monies on local teams that get pathway certified.

That's a big list for us because when we said that to the U.S. DOL, we did not have a single certified pathway in the state. Technically we still don't six months in. But again we have one that we believe will be certified in the next two or three weeks. And then two additionally that are in the hopper. We've given out 11 of the planning grants, the \$30,000 planning grants.

And we've had two local areas apply for the implementation funds. Again local teams can apply for the funds, but they won't be dispersed until the pathway is certified. So we basically leveraged that \$5.25 million on sector strategies and career pathways because we believe that's the best way to do workforce over a long period of time.

One of the things that is going to be probably the last thing for us, but the part that is most iterative and the part that is least figured out is the evaluation of the success of the pathway. So one of the eight criteria is evaluation, assessment and evaluation. But we've given the local areas a lot of leeway to develop their own evaluation processes.

Because we recognize that the evaluation in the smaller rural areas will not look anything like what it looked like in Charlotte or Raleigh and some of the bigger urban areas. So we're working through what we think the evaluation should look like and what an indicator of success should look like. But we've asked the local areas to focus quite a bit on the number of enrollees along the pathway, the number of exiters, and the number of those exiters who then land into high wage, high demand jobs.

So that's kind of an overview of where we are. We haven't asked people to stop calling all things pathways because everybody calls everything career pathways. But we value branding; we care about the branding. And so we have really been pushing the idea that NC Works! certify career pathway. And we've just kind of held that up as the gold standard for pathway creation in the state. So that's pretty much it for me, Martin.

MR. SIMON: Thank you, Dion. That's again very, very good and concrete discussion of how you've approached it in North Carolina. I had the advantage of being in your state when you introduced the certification criteria for career pathways.

And so to hear about how it's evolved over the last year, it's great. I know in North Carolina your sector strategies and career pathways evolved somewhat along separate paths. How did you bring those together so that it's really part of one strategy in terms of how you engage business and feed that information back to the education and training systems?

MR. CLARK: So you're exactly right. They did kind of evolve separately and that there has been some challenge in that. A couple things that we've done is we pressed and pressed and pressed for the local teams to work together regionally, to the extent that we've – I wouldn't say threatened – but we've earnestly cajoled them not to think about developing pathways, county-wide pathways.

Again we won't define regions, but we'll say that the pathway is bigger than a county. And so in that regard we forced the local teams to look at the employers, not just the one or two, three or four in a sector that they're comfortable with, but the ones beyond, the ones that are beyond their local county may be stretching out into a three, four, five, six county region.

The other thing that we've done is with some of that U.S. DOL money, we wrote into the grant one career pathways facilitator. We hired out for eight staff persons, one career pathways facilitator for each of our eight prosperity zones. Our state is broken up into eight prosperity zones. And again we have 23 workforce development boards. So within those prosperity zones there are several workforce boards in each prosperity zone.

The role of those facilitators is to make sure that the employers are engaged up front, that we're bringing the employers to the table – and as I was saying to the National Guard this morning – not just the larger employers, but that we reach out to the smaller because North Carolina is a small business state. More than half of our industry is through small business. So we really have made a focus of reaching smaller employers and mid-level employers in terms of on the job training, apprenticeship, work based learning, job shadowing, and things of that nature.

That has forced the local teams to take a sector approach, as opposed to some of the ways that we've done it traditionally. We forced the local teams to look at all the employers within a sector. We haven't given them a minimum number of employers that have to come to the table for any given certified pathway.

And that's because again it looks very different. The number of employers is going to look different in our rural areas than our urban. But we have really pushed the local teams to connect with employers of different sizes, of different numbers of employees. And that's forcing them to think about it from a sector approach.

And also thinking about it from a regional approach, they have wanted to hit some of those regional benchmarks. And so they've had to be then creative about the number of employers within a sector. And a lot of it for us, Martin, has been repetition. I mean just literally to repeat as needed, because certification has become an important and valuable too.

The workforce boards, I met with them yesterday, they want to have pathways certified. They know that we have one being certified in a couple weeks. They want that. And we're not moving forward to certify any pathway outside of that commitment to the sector strategies.

MR. SIMON: Great. Thanks, Dion. Let's open it up to questions, comments, sharing, from those of you that are on the call. I know we have a lot of people on the call. So I think you're unmuted, so we'd like to hear from you.

MS. OLIVER: Remember, to unmute yourself please hit *6.

MR. SIMON: Well, as you're thinking about your questions or comments, let me pose a question. And this is to Emily and Dion and anyone on the call. What are some of the key challenges that you see or you're already encountering in your state or region as you try to implement the WIOA provisions on career pathways and sector strategies and their integrations? Sounds like someone wants to jump in here.

MR. CLARK: Martin, this is Dion. I'll jump in to talk a little bit about that. WIOA has – of course you know there have been some delays at the federal level with getting all the information, the regs and all of that. So a lot of the workforce board directors have been – the local workforce board directors have been reticent to press forward until they've known for sure that this is the way the state is going to go.

So what we've tried to do, we try to be a steady voice. We try to really be consistent in our messaging that we believe career pathways are the way, and as well as to identify Section 101 of the WIOA act, lets us know that career pathways is one of the resources that we should use or one of the tools that we should use to advance our sector strategies and to meet the WIOA commitment.

So we just try to be steady, to be repetitive, almost to the point of ad nauseum. I've taken this show on the road in so many counties and so many conferences. We did have a big conference back in September of last year where we introduced the pathways model to those big three players, those representatives from each of those big three. And we talked about it in the context of WIOA – (inaudible).

So mainly it's been getting the information out and just kind of really repeating and reciting a clear and consistent message, we think.

MR. SIMON: Thank you, Dion. Anyone else? Go ahead.

MS. LESH: So Emily here from Colorado. And we are – we're really working to use WIOA, and in particular the guidance around career pathway development and sector partnerships in WIOA, as a tool to really take the work that we have been doing around sector partnerships and career pathways further. And so it's really enabling – we're really using it as a lever to enable us to move further faster with the work that we're doing in Colorado around sector partnership driven career pathways.

MR. SIMON: So it's an extra incentive to – and motivation, is what I'm hearing you say, Emily?

MS. LESH: It has. Yes. And we also have had a series of state bills and state legislations passed over the past – that have passed over the last few years, and particularly last year. And so in combination with state legislation, it's really – WIOA is really enabling us to move forward with this work. And so really moving towards sector partnerships across the state, developing career pathways.

MR. SIMON: Thank you. Any of you that are on the call have anything to share on that, how you're addressing these provisions? Anything you can share that might be of value to others on the call?

TODD COHEN: Hey Martin, this is Todd Cohen. I've got a question, if you don't mind. And others can think about that, what you just asked.

But I'm curious, and this is probably maybe North Carolina first, but think about the local partnerships that seem to be working, and you mentioned maybe colleges workforce – (inaudible) – I'm curious when it comes to sort of the convening organization in those partnerships.

Have you seen one of those organizations perform particularly well? Does it matter? Is it different by region? I'm just curious of what you could kind of offer in that sense of how those groups work together, and who might take a lead, who might not, anything that you've seen. Still there? North Carolina?

MR. SIMON: Dion, are you still on? Take a shot at answering Todd's –

MR. CLARK: I am here. Sorry. I'm having some operator error with the mute button, but I am certainly here.

So to that question, let me just talk briefly about the certification process itself, the career pathways, and then the grant, the 5.25 million that we received from the U.S. DOL. We put in a stipulation because I'm housed in the Department of Commerce and those grant funds came to the state Department of Commerce.

So we put in a stipulation that only the workforce development boards could apply for the grant funds, and that they would have to be the fiscal agent. And again that includes the big three, the workforce boards, the community colleges, and the K12s. But workforce boards would have to be the fiscal agent.

After the certification process itself, we did not put that stipulation in place because we know that across the state sometimes the workforce board can be the strongest of the three entities. Sometimes it's the community college. It wouldn't necessarily be the LEAs of the K12s because they only serve that smaller group. So they probably would never be the lead – they could – (inaudible) – so they would be the lead agency because it requires services to adult and dislocated workers as well.

And again, I met with the National Guard this morning. They wanted to be the lead group. We don't have any problem with the different partners, one of them taking the lead. Because across the state it looks different in who spearheads the initiative. But as it pertains to our grant funding, we wanted that to be the commerce agency or the entity that gets funds from commerce so we can have better fiscal oversight.

And it has seemed to work that way with the certification as well. The workforce board directors have taken the lead thus far. We have a small sample size. Again we only have the three applications that have come in, even though we've given out, like I say, 11 planning grants. So we anticipate an application from each of those 11.

But we've had three applications come in. And from my correspondence, I work closely with all three of the entities, K-12, community colleges as well. But for the most part the leadership I think has been taken by the workforce development board. It seems to have worked. What happened for us a lot was at the beginning people tried to – or one entity in the local team tried to explain to us why their situation was unique and different, and why they couldn't include the workforce development board, or why they couldn't include adults and dislocated workers. But we kind of held the line.

And people want to be certified and they want those implementation dollars that follow certification. So it seems to have helped our group to get into not necessarily lockstep, but to be willing to work with us. But by and large I would say that the workforce development board has seemed to be the leader, but they don't have to be. And we're excited to work with any of the entities if they take the lead on the project.

MR. SIMON: Thank you, Dion.

MR. COHEN: I think it may be helpful to get that criteria too. If we can share that out, that would be helpful. Thanks.

MR. CLARK: Be happy to. I'll send that email. I'll email that out to Martin. And Martin I'm sure will get it to everybody on the call. I'd be happy to do that.

MR. SIMON: Yes. Well, I will definitely pass that on. Again I would reach out to those of you that are on the call. Any comments, questions, or anything you want to share about what you're doing in your state or regions around the integration of career pathways and sector strategies?

MR. : This is Eric (sp) from Department of Education. I have a question more related just to implementing sector strategies in both Colorado and North Carolina, particularly in your more rural regions. Did you find that businesses and employers were eager and willing to convene and to travel to meetings and whatnot? Or did you find yourself having to be creative in getting people to the table to actually implement the sector partnerships?

MR. CLARK: This is North Carolina. For us, we found that the employers are more than willing to come to the table. What they're not willing to do is come to the table for the community college and then the workforce board separately and then the K12 separately. And

so one of the things that we've tried to do is assure them that we're not doing that anymore, that that's one of the purposes for the NC Works! certification.

The collaboration requires that the three entities coalesce before they engage the employers and have the employers doing that type of repetitive work. Again the one facilitator for prosperity zone two, served the role in the liaison and monitoring that so that we don't overwhelm the employers. But when you give the employers some sense of structure and organization, they've been more than willing so far to come to the table.

MR. SIMON: Emily, any thoughts on that?

MS. LESH: Yeah. That's a great question. So we have – I think that's a really common question overall. And in Colorado we have really approached that very strategically. So as the state workforce development board, we've really leveraged some of our business leaders that serve on our workforce development board to help carry the torch and the message of why it is so important for businesses across the state to engage in the sector partnerships. And so that has been one strategy that we've used. We've also really engaged closely with our statewide industry associations, to partner with them, to also help carry this message forward.

And then the other thing, which actually may even I would say be the most important, if that's possible, is that we've really guided our regional sector partnerships and the public partners that are convening sector partnerships across the state to find those industry champions that are strong business leaders in their community, and have a bit of stickiness to them, so to say.

So that they're people that are leaders and that other businesses listen to, that they're well-respected in their communities, and that they're bought into sector partnerships. So they're really working to proactively identify those people as champions for partnerships, and really leveraging their support for launching a sector partnership and the need of a partnership to recruit and engage other businesses.

And then I'll just also add that another great resource that we have on our website that other states should feel free to use is the Colorado regional sector partnership convener guide and training workbook. And so this workbook walks through step by step how to approach the launch of a sector partnership. And so you'll see that up front that finding those champions and finding those business champions is one of the first really critical things. And using those champions to really build out a robust network of employers and businesses to engage. Sorry, go ahead Martin.

MR. SIMON: I'll let you finish, then I'll ask a question.

MS. LESH: OK. So I was just going to say that you can find that resource at our sector's website, which is sectorssummit.com. So there are actually two S's in the middle there, so s-e-c-t-o-r-s-s-u-m-m-i-t.com. And there's a toolkit section on there. And in that toolkit section you'll see an area for launching sector partnerships, which is where you can find our convener guide, and you'll also see a section or career pathways, where you'll find our career pathways step by step guide.

MR. SIMON: Thank you for giving the links to where they can find the information. Your comment about sticky champions prompted a question on my part. Both you and Dion emphasized the importance of business engagement to success of both career pathways and sector strategies. How do you sustain that business engagement? That's an issue that comes up frequently in both discussions about career pathways and sector strategies. If you both have some comments on that, that would be great.

MS. LESH: Yeah. So I'll dive in here, and then Dion. So another really good question. And building off of my comments around finding those champions is really finding those champions and really continually developing the champions.

And what we have found in our most active and advanced partnerships is that those industry champions are actually – they're actively identifying ways to recruit and to sustain industry – to recruit businesses and sustain that industry and business engagement. And so one approach that we've actually worked to develop, but really it was led by our NoCo manufacturing partnership, is the stair step approach. So really clearly outlining opportunities for engagement at all different levels.

So engagement can be as simple as attending one meeting or it can be as simple as providing input around what type of jobs and occupations you are going to have open in the next 12 months. So there can be that really light touch engagement. But it can also be being the chair and champion of a sector partnership, which is more intensive, where you're actively leading the group forward.

So providing a spectrum of opportunities for engagement in a sector partnership, we have found to be really valuable. And really our businesses, we've found our business champions across the state have helped to outline the stair steps or menu for options for engagement – (inaudible).

And I will say – so I'll point you just to another resource here, the NoCo manufacturing partnership has their own website, which is nocomsg.com, n-o-c-o-m-s-g.com. And you can find on there outlines of some of the work that they've done and some of the opportunities for manufacturers to engage.

And I will just say that this website is something that they – as I said in the beginning have started off, we have provided no grant funding to the sector partnerships across the state. And this is a website that their industry leaders have stepped up and funded. And that helps to recruit and bring other funding to their partnerships, which is exciting to see, and we believe a really critical element to sustainability.

MR. SIMON: Emily, you shared some very valuable information and referenced a few websites. If you could send those along to me, then I could pass them on and make sure that those that can't write fast enough like me can actually get the information. Dion, anything that you want to add to sustaining business engagement?

MR. CLARK: Sure. Our NC Works! Commission, the workforce development entity of commerce, just recently got new members. Our previous president, Kip Blakely, is the vice president of HAECO International. They are an aircraft parts manufacturer. And he was our champion.

And recently in October we had the statewide conference on all things commerce, all things workforce development and training. I did three presentations at that conference. One of those was with Kip. And what we did instead of just the standard lecture for an hour, hour and a half, he and I sat down in armchairs and did a one hour recorded interview. I interviewed him kind of in the style of Oprah Winfrey. I interviewed him and we talked at length about the employer piece and why it was important.

One of the things that Kip wanted to convey, and really did an outstanding job of conveying, is that it's a mutually beneficial relationship. And I have stressed that with our team, with the workforce board directors and the community colleges, to remember that.

When you ask employers to do on the job training, the apprenticeships, job shadowing, they're not doing you a favor. This is a mutually beneficial relationship. And it was nice to have an employer say that.

He talked about how they had developed a career pathway whereby they had you people, high schoolers, getting training in the high schools, and then getting that on the job training, graduating from high school, going directly into the aircraft manufacturer, making \$25,000 a year, and some of them making \$50,000 within five years, with nothing more than the high school degree and then that training after at the community college.

Again we put that on video. And the people there were very impressed. And the video has been now – it's ready for distribution all over. Happy to share that video of the interview. But it just gives the employer perspective. Kip and HAECO, the corporation and the VP, they got it. They got it and understood why career pathways is so important. And he really conveyed that a lot.

I think I might have that posted on the workforce Twitter. But I certainly can share that video. It's very large, but I can share that with you, Martin. And maybe we can put that out. But he's not the only one, but he has been one of the best. Any time I call and ask if he can come out and talk about it. And so we hatched on the idea to put it on a video so that we can share that broadly even outside the state, so that other employers get the sense of why it's important.

It takes time. It takes time to build solid pathways. And Kip talked about how it has taken about four years to get their high school pathway up and running to where it was bearing fruit. And he talked at length about how the alternative was HAECO was considering leaving the state.

And now rather than consider leaving North Carolina, leaving the Greensboro area, the triad area, now they are finding really almost an endless talent supply from building a career pathway in the high schools and the community colleges. So that's been just one example of the employer engagement piece where they champion the work that we do for them.

MR. SIMON: Great. Thank you, Dion. That was a very good example. And if you want to pass that video along, we'll pass it along to the participants in this learning group.

Well, I think we've run out of time. It's 4:00. Emily, Dion, what great presentations and very valuable information. I love the way you mixed your strategic approach with the concrete examples and the step by step processes. Dion, I see that you've already sent me the eight steps that you described. And any other information, links that either one of you can send along, we'll make sure that this learning group gets those.

For those of you that joined the call today, as I said earlier, this is the second topic in this series that is focusing on state advancing sector approaches and capitalizing on WIOA. The next topic, the third topic, is going to focus on defining high quality sector approaches. So I hope you'll join us for that.

Layli, is there anything that you want to say in closing?

MS. OLIVER: No. Just thank you, everyone, for participating. And we hope that you'll join us again for this and our other peer learning group calls.

MR. SIMON: Thank you, all. Have a good day.

MS. LESH: Thank you, all. Thanks, Martin.

MR. SIMON: You're welcome.

(END)