



May 2019 Peer Sharing Call on IT Sector Training and Employment: Key Takeaways

The May 2019 Peer Sharing Call on IT Sector Training and Employment provided an opportunity for Strengthening Working Families Initiative (SWFI) grantees to share their experiences developing IT sector trainings and employment opportunities for SWFI participants. TA coaches facilitated the small group call, and this document provides key takeaways from the call on:

- How to structure IT sector education and training opportunities for SWFI participants
- Working with employers to provide work experience for SWFI participants
- Strategies for engaging IT sector employers in SWFI job training and placement

Slides from the call follow the key takeaways.

How to structure IT sector education and training opportunities for SWFI participants

Grantees discussed how they structure their IT sector education and training opportunities for SWFI participants:

- Providing tiered levels of training allows grantees to effectively target participants with varying IT backgrounds. For example, a lower tier training could focus on Microsoft Office Suite, with the end result being a [Microsoft Office Specialist certification](#), whereas a higher tier training could focus on Amazon Web Services (AWS), with the end result being an [AWS certification](#).
- It is important to be responsive to participant needs when it comes to developing education and training opportunities. One grantee noted that they initially structured their IT training programs as yearlong seminars, but have since modified them to be short-term, boot camp style classes to help participants complete training more quickly, and within the remaining grant period. To support participants in the condensed trainings, the grantee hired additional instructors for each boot camp. This allowed teachers to more closely track participant progress and help low-performing grantees get back on track. The trainings that have been condensed and accelerated include healthcare administration IT, cybersecurity, and basic network training.
- It is important to develop the soft skills of SWFI participants, as grantees reported that some employers prefer applicants with better soft skills over those with more technical knowledge. As such, some grantees have encouraged their SWFI participants to take internal customer service and soft skills trainings as a way to break into IT careers.
- Some grantees use software like the [PAIRIN](#) tool, which assesses individuals' soft skills, to help tailor coaching activities to program participants' strengths and weaknesses. In addition to using these tools, monitoring participants' attendance and progress is key to making sure all students are excelling in their trainings.



Strengthening Working Families Initiative

Strategies for engaging IT sector employers in SWFI job training and placement

Grantees indicated that many IT sector employers have stringent hiring standards and require credentials or relevant work experience—even in a tight labor market. To ensure that SWFI training addresses employer and industry needs and provides the best opportunity for participants, grantees can engage employers to review and provide input on training curricula, necessary technical and soft skills, and required credentials. Involving employers in classroom training or in the development of work-based learning activities also builds stronger employer connections to the program, helps participants gain knowledge of industries and employers, and opens doors for program participants. Grantees offered insight into the ways that they involve IT sector employers in SWFI job training and job placement:

- Employer advisory committees and community industry round tables are excellent forums for gauging employer and industry needs; they can also inform SWFI training programs by highlighting industry standards for credentials and certificates. Some grantees hold their own employer advisor meetings, whereas other grantees attend already established statewide meetings. Connecting to already established forums is advisable whenever possible as that limits the burden on employers, who often are asked to serve on multiple engagement committees.
- Meeting with employers of various sizes can provide a useful perspective to grantees. For example, some grantees reported that it is easier to get SWFI participants into IT sector careers at companies that focus primarily on IT functions because they have more capacity to train inexperienced employees. Larger companies are often looking for candidates with a high-level of commitment who can grow within the company. Smaller companies that are not necessarily IT-focused but that have IT functions often expect applicants to possess greater technical skills. Knowing the differences in hiring practices between small and large companies allows grantees to prepare applicants to meet the various hiring standards.
- Having employers formally agree to partnerships with grantees benefits both parties. One grantee asks employers to sign a formal agreement of support for SWFI, and to commit to interviewing SWFI candidates. Employers benefit from having the grantee provide highly vetted applicants that have already gone through various IT trainings. Furthermore, if an employer was unable to find suitable applicants for certain positions, the grantee could direct qualified SWFI participants to apply for those positions. Finally, these partnerships allow employers to conduct presentations and participate in grantee events that showcase their company. However, grantees should make clear that the formal agreement does not require employers to hire SWFI participants to make employers feel more comfortable signing.
- Discussing goals and expectations up front with employers is key to building strong partnerships for future work experience opportunities. Furthermore, working with one employer to organize a small-scale pilot program is a great way to bring other employers on board. Grantees can use a successful pilot program as evidence for how new partnerships can benefit both employers and participants.

IT Sector Training and Employment

H1-B SWFI Grantee Peer Sharing Call

May 2, 2019

SWFI TA Team



IT Sector Training and Employment

H1-B SWFI Grantee Peer Sharing Call

May 3, 2019

SWFI TA Team

Agenda

- **Welcome and Introductions**
- **Brainstorming on IT sector training and employment**
 - Education and training opportunities
 - Challenges in developing training opportunities
 - Gaining work experience
 - Engaging employers
 - Employment strategies

Welcome and Introductions

- **Jess Harding, SWFI TA coach**
- **Action for Boston Community Development, Inc.**
- **City of Long Beach Pacific Gateway Workforce Investment Net**
- **Community College of Aurora**
- **Moore Community House**
- **OIC of Broward dba OIC of South Florida**
- **Total Action Against Poverty in the Roanoke Valley**
- **Vermont Technical College**

Welcome and Introductions

- **Nickie Fung, SWFI TA coach**
- **Alachua Bradford Regional Workforce Board dba CareerSource**
- **City of Phoenix**
- **Memphis Bioworks Foundation**
- **OAI, Inc**
- **Rochester Rehabilitation Center**
- **The WorkPlace**

Brainstorming on IT Sector Training and Employment

- **What education and training opportunities in the IT sector are available to your SWFI participants?**
 - **Do you work with IT employers to develop your training curriculum?**
 - If so, how have they contributed?

Brainstorming on IT Sector Training and Employment

- **What challenges have you faced in developing training opportunities in the IT sector?**
 - **How have you addressed them?**

Brainstorming on IT Sector Training and Employment

- **What opportunities are available for your SWFI participants to gain work experience in the IT sector before entering the job market?**
 - **How did you develop these opportunities with employers?**

Brainstorming on IT Sector Training and Employment

- **What strategies have you used to engage employers to better understand their IT hiring needs?**
 - **How have you addressed their needs?**
 - **Are certain types of employers more receptive than others?**
 - Which ones and why?

Brainstorming on IT Sector Training and Employment

- **What strategies have you used to help connect your SWFI participants to IT-related jobs?**
 - **Have you developed formal or informal agreements with employers to hire your participants?**
 - **If so, how are those working?**

Thank you!