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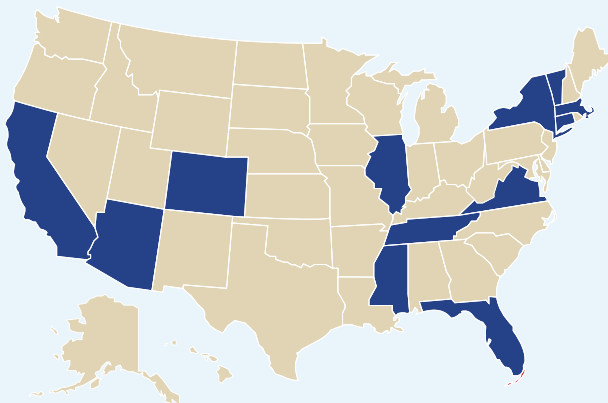
Training and Credentialing Strategies to Support Working Families

Strengthening Working Families Initiative

The U.S. Department of Labor established the Strengthening Working Families Initiative (SWFI) to help parents gain the training and education needed to increase their skills to obtain or advance in jobs in high-growth industries that often rely on visas to hire skilled foreign workers. SWFI grantees aimed to increase access to education and training by mitigating barriers that parents face, especially barriers to child care. To achieve SWFI's ambitious goals, grantees also sought to create sustainable local changes to help families navigate the workforce and child care systems after the grants end.

Mathematica's SWFI technical assistance (TA) team supported grantees in these ambitious efforts. This brief shares grantee strategies and lessons learned through TA and coaching activities.

Grantees: 13 nonprofit organizations, local workforce development boards, institutions of higher learning, and municipalities in 12 states



Required partners: Workforce entities, education and training providers, child care services, business entities

Target industries: Primarily information technology (IT), health care, and advanced manufacturing

Timeline: 2016–2021; grantees were providing services in the context of the public health emergency that began in March 2020

Grant amount: \$4 million maximum per grantee

SWFI grantees offered a variety of training programs to participants in key target industries such as IT, health care, and advanced manufacturing. Some grantees partnered with established training providers in their communities, such as community colleges and providers approved by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Adult and Dislocated Worker Program. Other grantees chose to provide training directly, using existing training programs they had offered before SWFI or developing new programs exclusively for their SWFI participants.

Although many participants completed training and gained credentials, grantees said that it could be challenging to recruit and retain participants in some training courses, convince participants to take credentialing exams, help them manage test anxiety, and confirm whether they had earned credentials. This was particularly challenging during the public health emergency that began in spring 2020. In this brief, we present some strategies that grantees designed and implemented to provide trainings that met participants' needs and supported them in achieving credentials.

Strategies and lessons learned

Provided options for short-term trainings and stackable credentials to improve participant recruitment and retention. Some grantees found it difficult to recruit potential participants and retain them in longer-term SWFI training programs. Parents were concerned about the time commitment involved and were unable or unwilling to commit to training programs that lasted for six months or longer, given their parenting responsibilities. To better recruit participants and retain them through program completion and credential attainment, many grantees worked with employers and partners at institutions of higher education to develop shorter training options and stackable credentials that met the needs of SWFI participants and employers. Examples of stackable credentials include helping participants train for and obtain their certified nursing assistant (CNA) credential and then continue on to receive their licensed practical

nurse (LPN) certification while earning money as a CNA, or helping participants with a CNA credential continue on to receive electrocardiogram (EKG) and phlebotomy credentials.

Short-term trainings to improve recruitment and retention

The Community College of Aurora added short-term trainings that could be completed in one semester or less including the IC3 Digital Literacy Bootcamp, a mental health certificate, and an accelerated IT training. They also added a data analytics certificate for immigrant students with bachelor's degrees from their home countries. The accelerated IT training condensed a yearlong program into a semester and provided wraparound services, such as in-class tutoring to support students. The grantee reported that these trainings increased enrollment and contributed to higher completion rates.

Moore Community House developed a shorter-term training program called Women in Trades 101. During this two-week class, participants received Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) 10-hour training and forklift operator credentials.

Vermont Technical College began offering three-month, part-time evening classes in SolidWorks (a solid modeling computer-aided design and computer-aided engineering computer program) and computer numerical control (CNC) machining, and two-week full-time courses in welding. These short-term training programs were aligned with participants' goals of gaining credentials quickly and beginning work.

Helped participants get ready for training and employment. Some participants needed soft skills training to ensure they could succeed in training and subsequent employment. To address this need, grantees developed specialized in-house training programs. For example, Alachua Bradford Regional Workforce Board (doing business as CareerSource North Central Florida) developed a six- to eight-week entrepreneurial training program that featured mentoring and job skills training. Staff believed it helped participants get ready for training and work by improving their understanding of an employer's perspective.

Identified high-demand industries and occupations and provided relevant training. Several grantees that provided training in multiple H-1B industries noted that it was easier to recruit participants for training programs and to find employment for them in health care compared with other industries. These grantees also reported that health care training programs, such as for CNAs and clinical medical assistants (CMAs), tended to be short term and required less of a time commitment from potential participants. Grantees used employer connections and in some cases used labor market data to identify positions that were continuously in demand in their local labor markets. Grantees then provided relevant trainings for these industries, including working with training partners to offer trainings at times that were convenient for participants and offering these trainings in-house.

Training for high-demand jobs

Total Action for Progress (TAP) found that the CMA credential was in high demand in its region, with many hospitals and doctors' offices hiring CMAs. Most CMA jobs provide benefits and follow a regular workday schedule, which tends to work well for SWFI parents. When TAP was limited by the number of times per year and time of day the CMA training was offered in its region, it decided to offer the training in-house. By conducting the training directly, TAP was able to control training quality and instruction and could hold classes during daytime hours to better accommodate Head Start parents—its core participant base.

Incorporated online and hybrid learning models and provided participants with targeted support. Starting in March 2020, the public health emergency presented new and unexpected challenges for SWFI grantees. Previously, most training sessions had been conducted in person, but the new reality required that many grantees move to online or hybrid learning models. Several grantees worked with their SWFI training providers to transition in-person training programs to online and hybrid formats. For programs with clinical components, online training was paired with in-person clinicals with a small number of individuals physically in a class following social distancing guidelines. Some grantees noted that online training helped remove barriers to participation by eliminating the time and expense

of travel to training classes. Some grantees also offered flexible schedules to help participants progress on their own schedules while juggling training and child care. At the same time, some participants attending online training needed more hands-on monitoring. Staff frequently emailed and texted participants to remind them about assignments and to provide emotional support, mentoring, and tutoring. Grantees also provided resource guides and trainings for the virtual technology and provided laptops and other resources to support participants' ability to engage in online learning.

Online learning

City of Long Beach, Pacific Gateway Workforce Investment Network began offering online soft skills and technology training for participants before they started their online CNA courses. Staff said that that type of training was very helpful in setting participants up to succeed in their online courses and that they planned to continue this training in the long term.

City of Phoenix began offering an online Computer Support Tech bootcamp training. The Computer Support Tech bootcamp program was intended for anyone with basic computer user skills who was interested in obtaining a job as an IT professional or PC Technician. Participants obtained the CompTIA A+/Network+/Security+ certifications. Instructors continued to support participants remotely as they prepared for their industry certification exam. Staff reported that many SWFI participants completed this training and gained credentials.

Incorporated credentialing exams at the end of the training program when possible. Grantees indicated that it was sometimes challenging to convince participants to take credentialing exams because many participants experienced test anxiety; some others did not understand that after they completed the training program, they still needed to take and pass an exam to receive the credential. When possible, some grantees incorporated credentialing exams into their training programs so that they could support participants in receiving credentials and record these for their outcome data. Some grantees also partnered with training providers to administer credentialing exams on-site at their training facilities. For example, participants who completed introductory Microsoft trainings completed the credentialing exam on-site at the end of the weeklong training.

Provided incentives to participants for taking credentialing exams and sharing the results. Grantees needed to record credentials for their performance reporting, but this could be challenging to track if participants had already completed SWFI training. Some grantees offered incentives to participants to take credentialing exams and report back on the outcome. For example, some grantees provided gift cards to participants who provided documentation that they had passed a credentialing exam and obtained employment. Grantee staff noted that when they offered gift cards as an incentive, more participants were willing to provide the documentation, and staff could better account for their outcomes.

Leveraged mentors and graduated participants to support training success and credential attainment. To support current participants, several grantees leveraged past participants and mentors working in the industry for which participants were being trained. Mentors were able to help current participants understand the level of commitment required by the training programs, provide real-life examples of individuals working in the fields, and facilitate job connections. Other grantees used closed Facebook groups to connect past and current participants. Participants could discuss training classes and child care and celebrate successes. Connecting with alumni in high-wage jobs helped motivate participants to complete training.

Mentoring to support success

Memphis Bioworks Foundation connected with an LPN mentoring network to serve as a resource for its LPN SWFI participants. Each LPN SWFI participant was assigned a mentor who was working or had worked as an LPN. These connections provided participants with support and information about working in the field.

SWFI Brief series

This [series of briefs](#) presents strategies and lessons learned through the provision of TA and coaching to SWFI grantees by Mathematica and its partner, the Urban Institute. The briefs cover the following topics:

- Recruiting parents for entry into middle- and high-skilled employment
- Training and credentialing strategies to support working families
- Supporting parents with child care during training
- Expanding employer engagement and job placement
- Integrating workforce and child care systems and promoting sustainability
- Setting achievable training and employment goals and demonstrating progress

To learn more about how Mathematica provides program TA, see [this brief](#) on providing TA to grantees that helped families navigate the workforce and child care systems.

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