WorkforceGPS

Transcript of Virtual Event

Workforce Innovation Fund Technical Assistance:
Engaging Employers to Hire Individuals with a Criminal History

Tuesday, August 22, 2017
LINDA LAWSON: Welcome everyone. Thank you for joining the call. We look forward to having a robust conversation today!

This is the virtual technical assistance series on Engaging Employers to Hire Individuals with a Criminal History, and we have lots of workforce innovation fund grantee staff and partner staff on the line. We're glad you can join us! My name is Linda Lawson, and I am a TA lead for the WIF project from Maher & Maher. And we're welcoming Eric Seleznow to the call. Eric has a wealth of experience working with this population and with employers around getting folks hired who have a criminal history.

This call is designed to be an engaging discussion and relies on you as participants to talk and to contribute. So please join in the conversation. We want it to be a casual and organic conversation. If you join in as much as you can the call will be better for it.

This is a two-part series, with the first call today, and the next call on September 15th. I will send out a new invitation for the September 15th call. Today we're going to learn about what you are doing, what you're struggling with, what are some of the strategies you're using, what are some of the tools you're using, and so that's the conversation today. And then the second call we have a couple of invited guests to join who will bring some specific expertise, and Eric will talk about that later.

[Roll Call removed from transcript]

This call came about because we had a business engagement event, a TA event in the spring, and from that this was one of the issues that was elevated as being a difficult challenge that some of the grantees are facing. So this call is in response to the business engagement feedback we got from grantees back in May. Without further ado let me turn it over to Eric Seleznow to get us started.

Eric, take it away.

ERIC SELEZNOW: OK. Great. Linda, I'm going to assume I'm coming in loud and clear, and if I'm not, I'll -- I'm sure you'll hop on the line and tell me that I'm not. All right.

So good afternoon, everybody. Wow. In the middle of August, in the middle of summer, right before Labor Day you all are making the time to hop on a call to talk about this very important issue of serving people with criminal records and criminal histories.

Really tough issue, but I want to thank you for hopping on this call. Happy to talk about it now and again later in September to get a little bit better understanding about how to do this. It's a challenge for workforce agencies all over the country, urban, rural, suburban, colleges, workforce boards, other providers. Some folks do this work well working with people with criminal history. Some don't. There's a lot of different people in this space on a lot of different competing ideas.
So what I hope today to do is to bring I guess a little clarity on your thinking. I -- we would like to spend a lot of time today thinking about what are some of the common challenges amongst all of you, and we'll see whether there are or are not or you may be having unique, specific, discreet problems which we can address as well.

And then the next call, as Linda said, we're going to bring two gentlemen I know from throughout the system, Newton Sanon from the OIC Organization in Southern Florida who's been doing this work for a while and is having a lot of great success working with employers, and another individual, John Rakus, former criminal justice professional who's now been a consultant for years and so national expert.

We'll bring both of them on to sort of brainstorm some best practices for all of you. But thanks to Maher & Maher for organizing this. Thanks to all the coaches who work with the sites as well, including the team from Jobs for the Future, and thanks to all of you for making the time today.

So look. So this is tough work; right? And all of you work with people with criminal records, whether you know it or not. There's probably a lot of people you all work with, and you don't even know they have criminal records. And some of you are probably purposefully doing outreach to those communities.

You may have some grants or other partnerships in your communities where you reach out to them, but look. There's 70 million Americans with convictions. There's many cities and areas in this country where -- and zip codes certainly where 70, 80 percent of the people who live in them have had some sort of contact with the criminal justice system.

So this is tough work and still relatively new to the workforce system, although many of us have been struggling with this for many years.

So, how do we work with people with criminal records whether they're just transitioning out of a county jail, a state prison, a federal facility? They're coming home again. They walk into a One-Stop employment center. They end up on a college campus. They work with a community-based organization and people who are just struggling how to deal with them.

I spent almost just about 25 years in jails and prisons. My mother would always remind me to say -- to remind people that I was working in them, not living with them -- living in them. But my first career was in the criminal justice system. I worked in a couple of state penitentiaries, and then I spent a lot of years working in a county jail system in Maryland, Montgomery County, Maryland.

From there I was fortunate enough to work in one of the best work release reentry programs in the country where I was an employment coordinator, and I did that for another 15 years. So all totaled within the criminal justice system, I spent about 24, 25 years. Then something very weird happened to me.
Because I had such a big mouth and I was an advocate for employers to hire ex-offenders, they ended up putting me on the local workforce investment board, and back then it was called a PIC. But it's been transferred under WIA and I was on the board and then through a number of other incentives I won't go into, I ended up being the director of a county workforce investment board, and I did that for about eight years in Montgomery County, Maryland.

We had a model with an economic development agency partnered up together doing workforce and economic development together. But since I came from the corrections system prior to that, our One-Stop employment system, our partners at the community colleges, and others were very connected with serving this population.

We opened a One-Stop employment center in a county jail. Some of you are in jurisdictions I see where you may have access to those, but we were trying to move the workforce system and the local criminal justice system together. If you're a local area, your county council members, your county commissioners, your county executives oversees workforce and WIOA and oversees probably the sheriff or the county jail system or something like that. So we thought it good to merge those at the local level.

After I ran a local workforce board, I went to the state of Maryland for the governor and I ran the state workforce investment board at the state level. Also worked with education, community college, community-based organizations, and others. I think you all know how that works.

I then worked for a nonprofit for a little while, and then the last four years up to a few months ago I was a deputy assistant secretary at the Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. Probably saw some of your grants come across my desk while I was there, but certainly we at the department -- when I was at the Department of Labor, we invested $82 million into working in offender reentry programs and wanted to continue that work.

So I come to the workforce system from the criminal justice system, and I think what I brought with me and what I think is very helpful is to be bilingual, bilingual in both criminal justice and workforce. I think both systems use different language, have a different idea about employment, have a different idea about what an assessment means and job training, and so there's different views. So it always helps to get to know your certain partners in the system.

But what I wanted to spend the first part of this conversation with you -- and I may ask Kansas and Virginia to help me a little bit, but I would like to find out a little bit more about our challenges or your challenges, I should say, and what you're working with now. Is it getting people to interviews? Is it getting employers to accept people? Is it making sure people show up to meet with their counselors? The intake process? Is it we have no trouble getting them a job. It's harder to keep them -- getting them to keep a job?

And I want to ask all of you sort of to summarize what some of your experiences were, both good and bad because I'm sure you're having some -- hopefully some successes as well. But I know that Kansas has a long history doing this work, and I'm just wondering if our friends from Kansas and -- could talk a little bit about some of the processes that you've done. I know you've
done some work with voc rehab and that you have a substantial number of people with criminal records coming through your system.

So, Kansas, if you could *6 us for a minute, I'm just wondering if you have any observations about what's going well and what are some of the challenges coming from Kansas. And, Virginia, I'll go to you all next.

AMANDA RAMSEY: Hi. This is Amanda from Kansas.

MR. SELEZNOW: Thanks, Amanda.

MS. RAMSEY: So I'm just going to summarize what I've learned because I'm pretty new to the system itself, but there are some really amazing things going on relating to individuals with criminal records. We've got some programs that actually are able to do some employment prep and enroll them in WIOA while they're incarcerated and getting ready to transition out. And so they expend some of their WIOA dollars that way and connect with them.

We also have a coordinator who is able to kind of help place them once they leave prison, and wherever they've gone, she kind of establishes a network, making sure that they've got a job and some of their other needs are met and then all the people in that location [inaudible] move to are talking and coordinating for the best outcome for that individual.

And as it relates to VR, we've got a project right now where -- we have a couple projects right now with our VR partner. One is called End Dependence Kansas, and they're following I believe a Jamestown model where it is a prescribed method of procuring individuals with disabilities for release and then post-release activities. And they are really ramped that up recently, but I don't really have tons to report on that yet.

MR. SELEZNOW: OK. All right. Great. And if you were to summarize some of the challenges that you think you folks are having, could you summarize that into 25 words or less?

MS. RAMSEY: In relationship to our project with WIF or --

MR. SELEZNOW: Well, yeah. You came on this call for some reason, to learn a little bit more about it. So what would you like to spend some time learning a little bit more about?

MS. RAMSEY: I don't know that I have an answer for that. Maybe the couple of providers that have joined us from Kansas would be better apt to answer that question.

MR. SELEZNOW: OK. All right. Well, that will be part of what I'll address in a few minutes. OK. Great. Amanda, thank you so much. Virginia, if you could *6 and, Amanda, if you could *6 and go back to mute for a minute, but, Virginia, the number of programs that I've been familiar with across Virginia in different places. I know there's a very strong one up in northern Virginia. I don't know the exact area you serve, but I'm just wondering if you have any observations about things that have gone well or challenges that you have. *6, Brock, or whoever's representing Virginia.
All right. We'll move on from Virginia as they find their mute button, but I want to open it up to many of you on the call. Linda has told me you had a previous call in the spring or a meeting where this issue comes up, and, again, whether you're a workforce board or college or community-based organization, you're undoubtedly going to serve this population at some point.

And a point I would make is there's really two different approaches; right? There's the reentry approach, which is when we're dealing with people who have recently transitioned out of serving time. In your communities, it could be people who spent six months in a county jail. It could be people who spent three to five in the state penitentiary system, or it could be somebody who's returning to the community after serving time in a federal prison.

So they often end up walking through our doors because I know many -- (inaudible) -- former offenders, hey, when you get out, go visit your local One-Stop center. Some do. Some don't but -- and sometimes people just find their way from the community into your program.

So the other side of this is not just a reentry piece, but it is dealing with people with criminal history. So as is often the case, your staff or you are working with people at the point of entry, whether if you're a One-Stop center or college or community program or whatever, and they've been out for 5, 7, 10 years and they have a criminal record that will come up in a background check.

Maybe they'll disclose it to you. Maybe you'll find out the hard way when they come back from an interview and the employer calls you and says, hey, please don't send me anybody like that anymore. But dealing with somebody with a criminal record who's been out 5, 8, 10 years is very different than somebody who's transitioning out within the last six months.

So two slightly different approaches that I'll talk about, but I'd like to hear from you for a minute. So I want to hear what are some of the challenges going on in your area? How would you like to spend our time together today and our next call a couple days down the week? It's really a couple days down.

It's really important work. Very challenging work, and you really do have to have some expertise in dealing with this population. Oftentimes you see traditional workforce agencies just trying to serve ex-offenders, former offenders just like everybody else, and sometimes you can't do that. It requires a little expertise.

So hopefully, I can help you with that. So if you could unmute, *6, let us know who you are and what sort of concerns you have and what you'd like to learn from our conversations, I'll stop now and hear from somebody. New Orleans, I want to hear from you. *6 to unmute.

MS. KLEMPNOW: I think -- this is Jennifer Klempnow from the Upjohn Institute, and I think our biggest challenge working with ex-offenders is they just don't want to stay to work once we get them on the job. So I'd love to hear some advice or anybody else that's working with ex-offenders solutions to that problem.
MR. SELEZNOW: OK. So job retention is a common problem. I know that was one of the things that frustrated me most when I did this work in the field was getting people jobs and then three weeks later they'd fall off the job. Thirty days later they'd fall off the job. Very frustrating. There has been some work that's been done around that area and ways to increase job retention. I'll talk a little bit about that later this morning, but thanks for that, Jennifer.

Any other issues that come up from you folks out in the field? We'll take a couple more. So don't be shy.

VIRGINIA SAMPIETRO: A couple of -- hi. This is Virginia in not the state of Virginia but Virginia in Connecticut, and I was just wondering about the issue that ex-offenders are blocked I guess from certain types of jobs and whether that is really legal, if it's just an employer's choice.

One is that we're running an HHS healthcare grant, and many occupations, for valid reasons I guess, are not open to people with criminal histories, but then another is also work in a defense contractor. So I wondered if anyone had any information about that.

MR. SELEZNOW: Sure. We'll talk about that. Virginia in Connecticut, I think my first observation is this. I'm sure a lot of folks are probably shaking their head on the call. So look. One of the issues with this work, and this is what people in the criminal justice system default to and think first, is they think public safety; right? When I was working in correctional agencies doing employment work, our whole frame, our whole lens was public safety.

We have to make sure that we protect the public, and a job placement, you should be thinking about public safety when you do that. Now, there are -- and certainly in a post-9/11 world and background checks and drug testing and all that, there are a lot more bars and barriers to certain jobs. Typically, patient handling positions, you don't want to put somebody with a drug background working in a CVS pharmacy; right?

You don't want to put somebody who's had a sex offense driving a school bus. You don't want to put somebody who has a theft charge being a retail fast food clerk; right? So there's some commonsense things that I think our staff and we need to think smartly about job placement because we're trying to -- we're trying to protect our communities too and get these people working and being productive is really good, noble work.

But we don't want to make -- we don't want to make stupid job placement decisions; right? So that's one part is we got to be smart about assessing the person we have in front of us, what led them to their conflict with the criminal justice system, and then finding them a position that's consistent with that.

The other thing, to answer your question more specifically, Virginia, I think is yes. There are occupations that have bars on them. There's been some work from the American Bar Association, and there's some work at the American Bar Association. Department of Labor just put out a contract. They're developing a state-by-state clearinghouse of barriers.
There are licensing restrictions in some states, and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, at least in the last administration but there's a number of rules out about discrimination about ex-offenders and what we can discriminate them against and what you can't. Typically, it's licensing or requirements of a job.

So if it's a defense contractor and they don't allow that as part of their federal government contract, not much you're going to do about that. If it's a healthcare where it's a patient handling position, sometimes there's going to be a state prohibition about that. Some states -- so you can check that out on your state licensing website.

I would also say that sometimes people say, oh, we can't hire ex-offenders. Employers will say it. Businesses will say, and they're totally wrong. They absolutely can hire people with convictions. They choose not to, which is a difference. So sometimes you can gently push back on that. Sometimes it's not going to be worth the effort.

Sometimes there's just discrimination against ex-offenders which will lead me to my next point, Virginia, which is what is really most helpful in this work is having relationships with employers, somebody that you know, somebody that trusts you, somebody that you can go, look, I've got Mary here. Mary just did a year and a half for some major shoplifting. She had a drug problem. She's been in treatment. She's trying to get her life together, and I'll work with you to make sure Mary is a good employee who shows up every day on time.

And having those relationships with employers and building a cadre of employers you can work with is one way to get around that, employers who trust you and are willing to take a risk on somebody. I'll come back to this issue in a moment, Virginia, but that's an excellent question.

Anybody else on the line have some other issues they want to talk about?

MS. DAVIS: Hi. Good afternoon. This is Hillary Davis with the city -- Office of Workforce Development with the city of New Orleans. And so I -- this is a very good call. Last month or the last time we had a call I had a question specifically about how to engage our jobseekers with backgrounds with companies.

And so my question was is -- so I know that now it seems like it's easier -- I've noticed that it's easier to place candidates with backgrounds with smaller companies. They have the flexibility and the ability to hire someone and work with them one on one who may have a background, but that doesn't provide the person with benefits, so health benefits, dental, all of the perks that you get by working with a larger company.

So my question is, how do you work with larger companies who may have more restrictions? And it could be company-based restrictions as well as personal biases with recruiters against candidates who do have -- who have backgrounds.

And then my second question is, I've noticed that we will place candidates who have backgrounds but there also may be some issues of drug abuse. So they'll beg, oh, I really want to get this position.
We'll work with them and then it's time to drug test and they fail or they will start on maybe a short-term project. We have the north terminal project here with the airport, which a lot of our -- the candidates coming from our grant, they can go work on that project under work experience for eight weeks and then they have a chance to be picked up by a local construction company.

But of course they go through their own process with that particular company. So they'll spend the eight weeks. They'll get drug tested on our end. They'll pass. Everything will be fine, and then when it's time to get picked up by a company, they can't get picked up because they fail the drug test.

So I'm noticing that is happening more frequently with some of our reentry folks. So just wanted to talk a little bit about what that looks like and maybe if other organizations have had success with placing candidates who have backgrounds with larger companies that offer the opportunity to earn a higher wage as well as different benefits that could help them with removing barriers that they have.

MR. SELEZNOW: OK. Really excellent questions, all 27 of them, Hillary. Those are great.

MS. DAVIS: Sorry.

MR. SELEZNOW: No. But really good ones. Really good, good issues and questions and very real life challenges that you have. It sounds like you guys are putting -- and I know New Orleans has been looking at this issue for many years and sounds like you guys have made some great progress.

So look, I'll just give you a quick observation, and we'll go on to some others. I used to try to stay away from large businesses when I did this work. I mean, I personally placed in my program 2,252 ex-offenders over the 15 years I did this work. Actually, they were adjusting offenders because they were just transitioning out. I worked with a lot of employers. I worked with a lot of people with criminal histories.

And 75 percent of the employers I dealt with, maybe 85 percent were small, medium-sized businesses just for the reasons you mentioned. Easier to get in the door. Easier to make friends with the boss. Easier to help them meet their HR needs because I could supply them somebody who is getting drug tested, who would show up on time, who had basic tools to get started, and generally had a good attitude and was clean for a while because they were just walking out of jail. And there was also much better mentoring opportunities in these small and medium-sized companies.

You are right. They are sometimes more challenge in benefits and healthcare and things like that, whereas larger companies aren't. I think the places where I've seen success dealing with large companies, again, it's outreach and partnership. So sometimes it's the mayor bringing together a group of 10 or 20 companies and trying to enlist their support.
Sometimes it's the board, the local workforce board bringing companies in or starting an initiative to do this. Detroit did Hire Detroit at one point, and 70 percent of the people looking for jobs in Detroit were people with convictions; right? So they had the mayor behind that effort. And so there's often -- there's larger strategies, Hillary. I'm sure you've probably already done some of these or tried them but where you really try to get some juice behind you to bring some of these employers together, get some commitments.

And I think that not asking employers to just hire everybody you send them, but you're saying to employers, you tell us what you need. We will try to screen and find the appropriate people to meet your workforce need. And you're still going to have, I think -- that may be an access to larger companies if you can do something like that. Either your board takes the leadership, your mayor, the governor, chamber of commerce, somebody does that. In many places more and more groups are interested in serving this population.

The challenge that presents to us is we don't want to screw that opportunity up; right? So how do we make sure people are passing drug tests or we're making the appropriate referrals, people who are skilled and qualified for the jobs that we say we're going to help them fill?

And so that sort of brings us back to one of the issues I'll talk about in a few more minutes as well, which is preparation and coaching people with criminal histories and ensuring that your preparation of those clients, putting them through job readiness classes, telling them what employers are concerned about, talking about drug use and drug tests, talking about being straightforward about their convictions because it will likely come up at some point in a conversation.

Some of you may be in ban-the-box states where that becomes an issue later on, but a real key is your assessment of the individual, your preparation of that individual, and you having partnerships with employers where you actually have a relationship. And, Hillary, you or one of your staff can call the CEO or the hiring manager, the HR. I used to try to avoid HR like mad too but couldn't always do that but maybe getting a relationship in that HR office and say, look. We have high-risk people; we have some good ones in here.

Working with your community, we can maybe make a dent in this, and let's see if we can form some partnerships. And then what I used to do in those cases, I would train my employees; right -- my candidate. I'd find the very best customers I had for those opportunities first so I would have a good relationship with the employer, and they'd be more willing to take risks down the road.

And, Hillary, your question about -- I think it was you that brought this up, which is -- or no. Jennifer I think brought this up is getting jobs but getting them to keep jobs over a certain period is a little bit more difficult. We're getting them a job, but then after they're on the job training, they end up coming up dirty on a drug test. I mean, that is all the ability to how your program is structured.

Can you have some sort of ongoing staff -- I don't want to say mentorship because that's not the right word, but staff checking into people, with people once a week saying, hey, are you showing
up on time every day? Are you doing a good job? Remember you got a drug test coming up in a few weeks. Sort of coaching people through that process. If you have the staff resources to do that, it helps. So those are just a few quick strategies. I'm sure, both Hillary and Jennifer, I didn't answer your question in detail. I'll get back to that before we get off the call.

Let me take some other questions or issues right now. Anything else -- anybody else on *6 to mute that wants to bring up a particular issue or concern? OK. Great. All right.

So look. All of these issues are really good; right? There's bars and barriers for folks. There's just people who are living in some very rough conditions out on the street. You all see that every day. They may have spent time in prison. They're living back at their grandmother's house or their former -- back with their husband or a boyfriend, or many of these folks are -- may be in unstable housing situations, which is not going to bode well for stability on employment.

Some people have had long-term alcohol or drug addiction issues, and now, they're coming out again. Hopefully, you're getting them once those have been addressed to some degree or you have the ability to do an assessment to see if somebody has an active drug or alcohol situation because you don't really want to deal with them that much if that's going on.

One note I want to make real quickly is on sex offenders, and there's a wide variety of certain sex offenders. You may never know what the person's charge is, but there's a wide variety of very serious stranger to stranger, really difficult family, parental, and children sexual offender situations.

I want to urge you all that, if you have sex offenders, that you should connect them with other community-based services through probation or parole or through the court or through mental health services. You do not deal with people with sex offenses the same way you deal with other offenders in getting them jobs.

If they have been treated for sex offense issues, if they are in treatment, that's another matter in which you can begin to work on employment. But typically, you want to take those cases very carefully and consult with other professionals on sex offender management before you place them on employment. Those are special needs cases. Just wanted to flag that for you. I'm not saying you should bar those folks. You just need to get other people's support and assessments before you decide to work with them.

But your basic run-of-the-mill offender, if there is one, look. 75 percent of the people that get in trouble with the law get in trouble because of drugs or alcohol or some other secret in their life, and most of the people that come in are minor, non-violent offenders that need a lot of structure in their life and to get it together.

So there's a basic general -- and we don't have enough time to go into all the details of the good questions, but there's a general prescription for some of this. And let me just go over them for a minute. Then I'll open it up for conversation again because I'm sure we haven't finished that but -- so look.
One of the first things that is most important is the preparation of your group of folks that you -- that come in with convictions. If you have folks come into your programs together or there's a cluster of a group of people with criminal records you have, you might want to operate a special class or training segment you have for them so it's preparation, coaching, and job readiness for people with criminal histories.

So you would want to cover what employers' expectations are. You'd want to cover transportation. How are they going to get back and forth because transportation is a notoriously big problem for many of the folks that we serve? You want to coach them into how to answer a question about their conviction, if it comes up.

You want to coach them about how do they answer the question on a job application if it says, have you ever been convicted of anything other than a traffic ticket, of which the correct answer if they have is yes. Will explain in interview. I'm sure you all know that. But if you can get a small class together of people with those convictions, get somebody who's skilled at providing an in-house program, that preparation, employer expectations is really important.

One of the other things that I've always put in those programs at the end of that is, OK. Now, you got a job. How do you keep a job? And it's really providing the client, which is -- as much information as possible that they can use to keep a job. I mean, I'm convinced most of these men and women really do want to work.

They really do want to keep a job, but because of lack of stability in their home life, in their community, the stresses of day-to-day living or some other particular incidents; they're not great problem solvers. They often just fall off the job, and it can often be prevented with a little bit of counseling, a little bit of preparation, and a little bit of checking in with folks over time. I know not all the programs on this call have the ability to do it, but if you do have an ability to organize five or eight or 10 people together in a class, put them through a 28-hour, 32-hour sort of training program it's going to position them better to get that.

One of the other critical things about the preparation part is follow up. So oftentimes in the one -- when I first went to the One-Stop system, what I was surprised about it, they did this assessment. They did this work with them, and then they said, OK. We're going to get you a job over at this manufacturing plant, and then they put them in the job. They said, see you later, and in 90 days they might check to see if they were employed so they could exit them from WIA or WIOA.

I don't think that's going to cut it with this population or frankly a lot of folks that we serve. I think there has to be some more follow up initially within the first two weeks of getting somebody a job, maybe the first every two weeks for a month or two, if you have the luxury to have staff to do that, and certainly every 30 days thereafter checking in with either the employer to say, how's Johnny doing, or checking in with Johnny himself and saying, Johnny, this is -- how are you doing? Are you getting there every day?

Any problems you're having, and do some problem prevention? I've seen data on programs where that's actually increasing job retention. I know when I did this work, my fall-off rate was
at about the 60-day mark. People did really well for their first 30 days. Their last 30 days they'd start missing work.

They'd start showing up late. There'd be some problems, and we knew we needed to intervene more in that second 30 days on the job. So we would do more calls to home, more calls to the job to check on those folks, if you have those relationships with employers. So the preparation and planning and coaching is really important.

The next thing, as I already spoke about it briefly, is the business engagement sort of work, and that's the hardest part of this work, developing job leads, getting relationships with employers. It's really hard for these folks to go in cold to do interviews. They're not going to compete very well against other folks. If it's a state or county area that allows them to ask a question about have you ever been a conviction, it's tough for these folks to do it.

I think we need to train them that it's a reasonable question for people to ask, and if you give a reasonable answer, many employers can understand that. Some won't, but many will. But again, I get back to the point what works best for me and the program that I worked in was we had a strategy of finding groups of employers that we could work with. Not just employers who -- we didn't go to just construction companies because we know they hired ex-offenders.

Heck, I had people on my caseload that were computer programmers and accountants and IT people who also had convictions; right? So it wasn't just we were going to put everybody in a construction job or a fast food job or a restaurant. So we tried to customize the job to what the person's skills were. But going out and making those employer relationships, educating them a little bit about how you work, educating them about the issues and challenges for some of the clients you serve is very helpful.

And I don't know if any of you -- I'll ask this question, and maybe when I stop talking so much, you can respond. I have a -- I have throughout my career used the work opportunity tax credit and the federal bonding program. These are programs that are not used all that extensively, and they could be. They're not panaceas. They're not the answer, but there are strategic uses for that that can sometimes sweeten the pot and help employers make the decision to use them.

And again, the work opportunity tax credit is a federal program. It takes about a minute and a half to fill it out for the employer, and they get up to $2400 tax credit for hiring somebody with a felony conviction. Also works for veterans and people with disabilities and other groups. And then there's the federal bonding program which you go to the Department of Labor website or your state bonding coordinator to learn more about it.

But let's say you're working with an employer who says, well, I might hire your person, but I'm concerned that they have a conviction and they're going to steal from me. And then you can say, well, gee, I happen to have this special program that it doesn't cost you anything.

It's just me filling out a form, and I can bond them for up to $5,000 just to make sure your comfort level is assured to give this person an opportunity. I happen to use that a lot. A lot of
other programs don't, but I did it with employers who were uncomfortable where I tried to ease
their comfort level about theft or something like that.

But a combination of those two things, which is, hey, we're working with Mary Sue. We're
going to be providing her some support within the first 60 days on the job. By the way, here.
We have a tax credit that could help you and we can get them bonded in case you have any
concerns. It's seamless to the employer.

You or your staff do that work, and sometimes how you present that can be effective in working
with employers. But none of that is more important than making I say friends but I sort of --
professionally but sort of making relationships with employers who are willing to work with you
and your customers. How do you do that? Many of you have done job development. You have
people who are experts about that. What we don't want to do is ask employers to give us a
charity case and hire us because it helps your fellow man. I don't think that's the right approach.

I think the workforce system at large, colleges, workforce boards, and others can bring a lot to
the table in helping them solve their pipeline issues. This is just another untapped resource and
pipeline, and if we do our job in getting our folks prepared to show up every day on time, be
good workers, be team players, and follow directions, I don't care whether they have a conviction
or not, that's helping local employers, particularly now that the labor market is tightening.

So I think our story is is we have a contribution to make to filling -- to helping employers solve
their employment skills needs, and I think making relationships and getting to learn as much
about that business, that supervisor. When I did this work, I was trying to make a match, and it
wasn't just a match that was good for my client. It was also a match good for my employer client
because they were both my clients, the person who walked through our One-Stop or my program
and the employer on the other side.

And so I always tried to make appropriate matches to both, not just slam somebody in a job
because there was a vacant job and I wanted her to take it -- I worked with male and female
offenders as well -- because I had an employer I know it would be a good match. They would
get each other. This employer would be patient, or this person had the skills to meet this other
employer's needs. So getting to know employers on a more intimate level I think always helps.

The other part -- and I'm sure many of you do this -- is partnering and support services. You
always can't do it alone. There might be other organizations who can provide assistance,
whether it's a veteran's organization. Can be other community-based organizations for support
services.

I know those of you with workforce boards can provide some support services, but certainly it's
always good to have good partners, substance abuse programs, mental health programs, others in
your community. Again, I sense that some of you are already partnered with them, but when you
have particularly some customers that have some questionable backgrounds or concerns and
you're not real comfortable about putting them out on a job yet, maybe get some other sort of
assessment help before you determine how to approach them.
And I think that sort of leads in -- and whether that's community-based like AA resources, your health -- your local health department with substance abuse resources -- that's going to be the most -- the biggest thing you're going to run into, mental health issues or maybe it's just somebody who needs emergency food and housing. You run into that a lot too. I'm sure you already do that.

And then probably last -- not lastly but next to last is some of you will be working with probation and parole, I hope, and we really encourage you to really strengthen those partnerships with probation and parole. They can be very helpful. Many people who are on probation and parole get really petty technical violations and that will often send them back to jail and there is no need for it.

Working closely with probation and parole staff can help you prevent some of those things, making sure people are working, getting paid, meeting their obligations under their probation and parole. It's a good partner to have if you're working with customers who are also on probation and parole.

And I guess the last issue is that job retention issue that came up earlier. Part of our workforce system often does face them and place them; right? We see somebody and do an assessment and we say, oh, there's a job, any job, and you put them in a job. And these clients also say -- when you say -- when you ask them, what do you want to do for a living, they say, I don't care. I just want a job. Well, that's not true. That's not true for anybody; right?

They really do want to figure out what they want to do. So I think we need to help somebody. Maybe they got some training when they were in jail. Maybe they did janitorial work. Maybe they did kitchen work. Maybe they worked in a furniture shop or a sign shop or even a license plate shop. Those are metal working skills; right -- that we're figuring out what somebody has some skills and experience in so we're making a good match; right?

If somebody doesn't like their job and just takes a job to get a job, they're much less inclined to keep it. I know you know that, but sometimes our staff and the pressure just to place somebody in a job just places them anywhere. I think we need to make -- (inaudible) -- placements. That's how it's going to add to success in retention.

I've already spoken briefly about the ability to have some sort of follow-up plan once you get somebody in a job. Again, making sure people aren't slipping back into drugs or alcohol, making sure they're being punctual, dependable on the job, make sure the employer is giving a decent rating, make sure you're giving warnings about slipping back into negative behaviors because these folks get out of jail, whatever, and then really quickly they fall back into those behaviors.

I think the biggest challenge that you have is for people who have been out of jail five, six, seven, eight, 10 years, and they're simply hampered by the bars and barriers. They've shown that they can stay out for five, six, seven, or eight years, that they're getting by somehow. We're not really sure how, but I think that's a real selling point with an employer is that I have somebody.
They were in trouble a long time ago, but they've been out of trouble for seven years now. Their biggest problem is a barrier, is answering the question on a test. I think that's the customized placement with an employer that can be very helpful with that population or certainly working a little bit more closely with them on how they have been out, what they have been doing, and trying to get them reconnected to their work.

So I know I'm talking fast, and I'm going over a lot of material. I'm going to stop there and get some feedback from you all to say, Eric's full of baloney. It doesn't work in our area. We've tried it. That doesn't work. This works, but let's open up the conversation a little bit. I think you need to *6 if you're not on mute, and I'd like to hear back from some of you about either agreeing or disagreeing or examples of what I've just been talking about. I'll stop there.

Anybody? I hear someone. I'm going to start calling on people if I don't hear any brilliant volunteers, and actually, Hillary, I'd really like to go back to you in New Orleans because you asked some really good questions. Have there been any taskforces at the mayor level or the board level, or have there been any other larger effort to organize employers to work together?

MS. DAVIS: Yes. So we did -- there has been some things that have been created on a government level with the mayor's office as well as I know that they're working on reentry and criminal reform here in the state statewide. So that is something that they are working on. There was a study that was conducted about two years ago stating that 52 percent -- and the outcome was 52 percent of the African American males in the city of New Orleans were under or unemployed.

So the mayor just created what was called the Economic Opportunity Initiative, which was designed to help provide with job readiness courses, and with that came a level of support. So you have career advisors and people -- as well as trainers, and you develop -- the candidates develop relationships with the trainers, and so they feel comfortable coming back and saying, hey, I have a problem or this isn't working for me. And then they also help with job placement.

So those initiatives are going strong, and we have had buy in from anchor companies such as Ochsner Health System. It's the largest health system in the state, and I know that they have done some things with helping to review each candidate on a case-by-case basis. So yes. They are a hospital, and yes.

There are certain things that you can't have if you're going to work directly with the patient, but if you're not, if you are maybe cleaning -- you're EVS, you're environmental services, so you're cleaning the hospital or maybe you're driving, they can review and they have been reviewing on a case-by-case basis. So that does help.

But my question was specifically centered toward -- because my population that I'm working with is construction, advanced manufacturing, I get a lot of candidates that are interested in going to -- they're interested in going to plants. So plant work pays very well. As I'm sure everybody on the call knows, it pays well, and there are also the things that you have that are better benefits.
I know a lot of our candidates are interested and they tell me, well, yeah. I've been working with the staffing company, but I want to be able to have benefits. So a lot of plants offer that long-term stability that a lot of folks are looking for. But the barrier comes when they can't hire somebody with a certain background or with a background, period. So that's kind of been the challenge there with a lot of plants.

MR. SELEZNOW: Yeah. I've had some success -- some dealing with companies that had that barrier, and it was often -- it wasn't a legal issue as to why they barred them. They're not really allowed to bar them unless there's some sort of legal bar or contractual bar, something like that.

Oftentimes I've talked to a couple of companies and they said, oh, we just didn't think we were allowed to hire anybody with a felony. I said, well, where's the rule? It's certainly not EEOC. And they say, oh, we don't have a rule. Sometimes companies rethink that. Sometimes they don't.

MS. DAVIS: Oh, OK. And that's good to know. And my background, my personal background is in HR and recruiting. So I have a lot of relationships here in the city with HR personnel as well as recruiters. I know specifically I was working with a non-profit company that has a lot of federal contracts. So I knew the hiring manager very well. She's a personal friend of mine. So just introducing her to the program, she was like, oh, this is great.

And then we get to a point where we can bring on one of my candidates, and it's like, oh, actually, yeah. They're going to be going into the homes of older people. So unfortunately, we can't have somebody with a background at all. And it was a whole list of things that they couldn't have. So that does prevent you in certain spaces. So just trying to work around that.

But I agree with you. I have seen a lot of success with smaller or medium-sized companies, and what I've been doing with them is engaging them in the commerce and other small business initiatives that helps them with their bottom line.

So if healthcare is a problem, oh, well, I hear that they're having this particular event centered around how to get healthcare for smaller businesses. Maybe that will be an opportunity for you to go. And because I'm with the city, I think that that lends a lot of credibility to when I give that information to smaller businesses and medium-size businesses. So that does help.

MR. SELEZNOW: Yeah. Sure. And I would say, if you're in a larger urban area, particularly working for the mayor's office or have that connection, that's very helpful. And some of you other sites, you're smaller. We have eastern Kentucky that's a local area. We have Herkimer Madison and Oneida. If I'm pronouncing that incorrectly, forgive me. And we have some other sites that may not have that sort of approach to doing it.

So I want to hear from some of you folks. And Connecticut, by the way, down in Belvelantos (ph) district, which is the New Haven region -- I forget which workforce area that is -- I know they're doing a lot of work in Connecticut with people with criminal histories and ex-offenders. I think that's in the eastern part of the state as well, and then up in the Hartford area they are. So
Connecticut there's some other resources there. But I wanted to hear from some of the other communities about this as well. Anybody else? Virginia? Connecticut? Pennsylvania?

MS. SAMPIETRO: Hi. This is Virginia in Connecticut. We actually don't have a specific grant or program for ex-offenders. But we do ourselves obviously work with some because we have two or three prisons in our region.

But you're right. Both Hartford and Workforce Alliance, the New Haven area, have special funding to serve that population.

MR. SELEZNOW: There could be ideas from some of those folks up in those regions. I know that's an interest of the governor. Governor Malloy just invested I think a One-Stop employment center in the women's prison up there at the state level, and I know there's a One-Stop employment center in the New Haven City Jail. What town are you in, Virginia?

MS. SAMPIETRO: We -- we're in the eastern Wyndham County and New London County, and actually, you're correct. The women's prison is in our region. So we're working with OIC that comes into our American Job Centers to do workshops to receive referrals that -- of women coming out of that prison through that program.

MR. SELEZNOW: Yeah. One of the challenges -- that's a good point. One of the challenges I would flag on that is that, if you're near -- right. There's a difference between county jails and state prisons. So a lot of you deal with people who are in and out of the county jails in your region. That's a specific group, and then there's also people coming out of the state or federal prisons.

Typically, they go back to other areas of the state. So if you have a prison in your jurisdiction, regrettably, most of the people who are in the state prisons are probably from about 10 different zip codes, for the most part, from your local -- from your state. But those folks often go to the other corners of the state, not only in your area, but if they come to your area, you definitely want to serve them.

And my only suggestion to you, Virginia, is, to the extent that you can train somebody up to be a specialist to work with these folks, it does require, I think, a unique set of skills to work with these folks, some unique assessment skills and some unique skills with employers to be able to do this work.

So always better to have a person sort of specialize. Some people would disagree with that because I know we want to treat everybody the same, and any of our staff can help them. That's true, but sometimes these folks have higher needs and a little bit of expertise. Anybody else?

MS. SAMPIETRO: I agree.

MR. SELEZNOW: I'm sorry? OK.
MS. LAWSON: While others are thinking, Eric, this is Linda, and I had a question about the use of temporary services or temporary employment and how that works. Do folks have success with that? Is that a foot in the door? Are there problems with temporary placements? Just wondering if that's a player in the employer realm of hiring folks with criminal backgrounds.

MR. SELEZNOW: I have some thoughts. That's a great question. I'll let folks on the call answer that. Anybody want to take that one on the call before I open my big mouth? All right. Well, then I'll take it.

Back in my younger days I was totally against working with staffing agencies, and sort of the program that I worked with prohibited it because they wanted us to be honest and open with the employer about where the people came from. Sometimes staffing agencies didn't do that. I then later on in my career worked with staffing agencies, and it worked beautifully.

I had the agreement with the staffing agency that we would want to make sure to be honest with the employer and disclose information when asked, and so we engaged with the staffing agency and it worked well. It worked well as a way to get somebody in the door and almost as a transitional job to get a track record going and to impress an employer or not. And so that was often an entryway into full-time employment.

Employer would also say, wow, I really like Mary and Johnny. They're doing great work. We want to hire them, and then we would say, OK. Mary and Johnny tell them what their situation is, and they say, well, now that we got to know you, we don't care. We're going to hire you because we like your work.

I've seen many success stories like that. I've also seen people who failed in their temporary staffing and were never offered a job, and so that sort of didn't work out for them either. And many times it was a great entry strategy in there. I don't think you should use it a whole lot. I don't think you should rely on it, but it has its place on occasion in our system if your local rules permit.

Again, all of this work is partnerships; right? Partnerships with employers, partnerships with staffing agencies, partnerships with probation and parole, partnerships with other providers. It's a lot of work. I think there's a large net of people that need to work with this population, particularly if your numbers are high.

I don't think there's anybody else in their communities offering great employment work. I mean, maybe in large urban areas there's other non-profits and what have you that do this work, but for the most part many people don't know where to go. So they find themselves coming into the One-Stop system and the public workforce system and trying to navigate, figure that out. So again, under WIOA and under your grant it's a permissible activity. I think it takes some special attention to do that and a purposeful effort.

And I ran a state workforce board and a local workforce board for many years, and I will tell you the boards, business-led boards always supported this work. And to get your board behind this work and to be advocates and ambassadors for it is really important, and same way if you're at a
college to get the president of your college engaged in this sort of effort as a member of the community or a leader in the community. I think that's really an important and critical part of this.

And parenthetically, I might add as a result of some of my work in Maryland, my vice-chair of my state workforce board was the CEO of Johns Hopkins Hospital, and Johns Hopkins Hospital, one of the premier medical institutions in the country and many of you have probably heard their story because it's old now, but they made a commitment years ago to hire 100 former offenders each year.

And they've done that consistently since, and many of them in good jobs. Many of them in -- obviously, all within compliance of the law or licensing, but hospitals and healthcare -- I think Kimberly brought it up -- it's -- or Hillary brought it up. I'm sorry. It's a great opportunity. Cleveland Clinic does the same. National Fund for Workforce Solutions works primarily in healthcare and has a similar experience.

So I think healthcare facilities are reasonable to work with. Again, there's some preparation, planning, and conversations that need to be had, but Hopkins figured it out. Their HR folks figured it out. They had some screening. Also talk about a company in Michigan called Butterball Farms. They're in manufacturing. They don't make turkeys; they make butter, but Butterball Farms is a food processing manufacturer. Very good plant jobs that Hillary was sort of saying a lot of our folks like.

They started hiring some former offenders, but they just -- this is an employer who really believes in giving people opportunities but weren't -- wasn't sure it was safe, wasn't sure it was the right thing to do. They weren't sure. So they as an employer got connected with local criminal justice staff and state staff and workforce folks, and they -- this company's HR people went out to the state prison that was feeding most of the people their jurisdiction to learn about the training they got in jail, to be educated, and now 27 percent or at least last time I checked with Bonnie, their HR manager, 27 percent of their workforce were people with convictions.

So their CEO went all in to say, hey, it's more of a plus for us than a minus. We get a good, reliable workforce. We get people who are interested in working. We get people who are interested in staying around for a while, and while they do have some problematic cases, they also have problematic cases with people they hire right off the street without convictions. So Hopkins and Butterball Farms are two really good examples of companies that have engaged in it, but they need people like us to help navigate them in and to see the benefits of hiring former offenders. Lots of opportunities.

All right. I'm going to go along to a wrap up momentarily. Before I do that I want to flag any other questions or comments from you folks on the phone. OK. Linda, do you have any other questions for me before I wrap up real quickly and turn it back over to you?

MS. LAWSON: No. This was great, Eric. You gave a lot of good information, and just so folks know, we are recording this and transcripting (sic) it.
And so just in, oh, gosh, maybe three or four days I will send out an e-mail -- or excuse me -- an invitation, an Outlook invitation for the next call, which again is on September 15th at 1:00 p.m. Eastern Time. And in that invitation I'll include a link on the Workforce Innovation's website to the recording of this call and the transcript and then also some resources that Eric will talk about.

MR. SELEZNOW: Right. Thanks. All right, guys. So it's been a great call. Sorry I was talking at you so much. I'm just trying -- this is a really important subject. Just trying to throw a lot of information on the table for you. You'll probably get some. Some you won't. Use what's helpful. Ignore what's not.

I would say some of the things that I learned -- are the issues -- always employer engagement, preparation of folks, getting them -- how to explain and understand their criminal record in the context of employment. I think job retention is always going to be a good question and an issue during the preparation work up front to make sure people know what their expectations and requirements are of working for you, particularly once they get a job. We know that follow up and monitoring is important.

Hard to do but a really important part of ensuring people try to keep their jobs. Sometimes it's easy to get somebody a job but it's really hard to get them to keep it and sometimes that may be the need for your focus.

I'm sure there's other things that I'm not covering, but I think those were the big takeaways as you think about how to organize and engage employers, develop relationships with employers, focus on preparation and job retention training. We have the work opportunity tax credit and bonding of which there's more information. It's not a panacea, but it is a tool in the toolbox that can help in some cases. And then certainly training up your staff to do that.

There's some resources out there. The National Institute of Corrections had the offender workforce development training. Many of your jurisdictions may have participated over the years. They still do that from time to time, and you'd want to Google National Institute of Corrections offender workforce development and see if they're still doing that training near you or in your state.

I would also say there's a couple of resources that I think are really good from the National Reentry Resource Center, and there's also some on WorkforceGPS of the Department of Labor. So if you go to WorkforceGPS reentry, there's some promising and best practices there, but Linda's going to send out a link to a really good webinar that by the National Reentry Resource Center. It's called Engaging Employers, A Sector-Based Approach to Employment for People with Criminal Records, and it highlights three jurisdictions across the country and tells their story on how they handled this situation. A very good webinar for you or your staff to sort of listen in on.

You're also going to get a link to four brief case studies, the Birmingham area where it's a focus on employers, Santa Cruz also a focus on employers about building futures and hiring people with criminal records, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania which is Pittsburgh region about banning
the box and eliminating labels and bars with criminal records, and a California case study of business and community leaders.

So those links will be coming, all of them easy reads. If you only have time for one, I would recommend the webinar. You just click on it and listen while you're sitting at your -- answering your e-mail. I think it's a very helpful piece for you, and what we plan to do the next time is Linda and I will digest some of the conversation today. We'll try to focus it more.

In September, September 15th, I'm going to invite Newton from OIC and John Rakus to join us to talk about some other best and promising practices for about half of that time, and then we'll follow up with any questions or comments that you may have. So thank you for spending the time with us today.

I'm sure we only answered some of your questions. I'm sure if you reach out to Linda with other specific questions, we can get back to you with an answer. Happy to talk to you one on one, and with that I'm going to turn it back over to Linda. Linda?

MS. LAWSON: Yes, thank you Eric. That was terrific. Lots of great information. Hope you guys found this valuable. As Eric said, you have my e-mail. If you have questions or want specific information, please e-mail me, and I'll pass that along to Eric and make sure we address it on the next call.

Again, I will be sending an Outlook invite probably towards the end of this week once we get the transcript back from this call, and that Outlook invite will be an invite for September 15th at 1:00 p.m., which is the second call. And in the body of the invitation will have the link to this call so you can go back and listen to it or read the transcript, if you want to refer back.

And it will have the homework assignment Eric talked about, which is to go to the Justice Center and view the video on Engaging Employers Around Sector-Based Approaches and then to review the four case studies he mentioned.

So that will be coming your way. And in the meantime I hope you all have a great week and we thank you for joining and thanks for your participation, especially to Hillary and Virginia and the others of you who spoke up. We appreciate it. Bye now.

(END)