Code Louisville – Kentuckiana Works

Transcript of Webinar

YouthBuild Webinar Series

Meet the Workforce Innovation Fund Round Two Grantees:
Grant Project Presentations

Wednesday, February 24, 2016
RIDER RODRIGUEZ: Sure. Yeah. Rider Rodriguez with KentuckianaWorks, the workforce development board for Louisville or Jefferson County and then the surrounding six counties around Jefferson County. The director of sector strategies and we got Code Louisville off the ground as a bit of an unfunded experiment that we used to learn a few lessons ahead of applying for the WIF grant. Once we got the WIF grant, had the good fortune of hiring Becky to lead it the rest of the way and really help it fulfill its potential.

BECKY STEELE: project coordinator for Code Louisville in addition to being sector strategy coordinator for the IT sector for KentuckianaWorks. And I joined the team in March of 2015, and we've hit the ground running. He said a little bit about KentuckianaWorks.

We have an additional staff member named Robin Smith. She is our student enrichment coordinator who serves as a hybrid career counselor as well as a targeted demographic group facing employer facing person. So we can get into that a little later. Code Louisville is funded for $2.9 million. We are a WIF grant round two organization. Our evaluation type is quasi-experimental, and our evaluation firm is the University of Kentucky.

Our innovative model takes a couple of different approaches, but the main goal is to help hundreds gain skills to start their careers somewhere within the software development life cycle, which doesn't necessarily mean that they'll be software developers but they can be doing any support role within the software industry.

And we do that by combining online education with in-person guidance and accountability structure and human and basic needs support. We adopted a blended MOOC approach, which is massively open online content through now two different learning platforms to deliver software development training for adults.

So our barrier is GED/high school diploma onward. And we offer a series of 12-week cohorts where adults can retool and reskill to make a transition into a new career within the software development life cycle. And the beauty in that is our largest group of students, they're the career changers. They're the 25 to 35 who has some sort of industry experience, and they can bring those wonderful skills with them.

Quick overview of the project. Definitely the most important component is our mentor base. Our mentors volunteer their time. They are software developers. So they do this for a living. Kind of the second big piece to the puzzle is quality graduates. We require that students go through two 12-week sessions with us with a one-month break in between, and we have some very specific guidelines to a few of the characteristics that we think makes a quality graduate. And then of course they would have nowhere to go if we didn't have hiring partners who are looking for this type of talent. So those are the major components of the program.

As far as what makes the program work, we do not have an assessment. We do have 20 to 30 hours of pre-work, and it's literally taking videos and code challenges. So the beauty in that type of model is that it's literally up to the individual. If they take the courses and they like what they just did, then they enroll in the program.
If they take the courses and they do not like what they've done, they may not necessarily want to start with Code Louisville, but we can point them in the right direction. We maintain a 10 to 1 student/mentor ratio, and we meet once a week.

So once a week they've been learning full-time on their own, 24/7 access to the online curriculum, but they show up once a week on the day of their choosing to meet with these industry mentors and get unstuck, from a technical perspective. And that session is very impactful and very informal. There's no instruction whatsoever. It is literally let me help you understand the concepts you just learned, or let me help you debug that [inaudible] of code.

Of course I mentioned the curriculum is 100 percent online. We use two learning platforms, Treehouse and Lynda.com. The main deliverable in addition to completing the curriculum is to have a coding project portfolio, and in this industry your coding project is as important or more important than a written resume.

So that's really what we're shooting for. This is definitely a show me industry, and a lot of these open source software languages do not have certifications that you can earn. So what you can do is usually all you have to vouch for you. Of course we have the target population. We target specific sectors, and then the credentials are your software portfolio.

Some of our key partners are our IT advisory panel, which is a group of education, industry, and business leaders who meet with KentuckianaWorks on a quarterly basis. We run our kind of compass needle by them, make sure that we're pointed in the right direction for the skills that the talent they're looking for should have. We also partner within KentuckianaWorks with our other organization, for example, our Kentucky Youth Career Center that helps young adults earn their GED.

Well, that's a great stepping point into Code Louisville, and we make program referrals for individuals who may not have a fit within software development. Louisville Metro Government of course does a lot to support the Code Louisville initiative, and we are continuously forging higher education partners. I think I mentioned the IT advisory panel, but they're really the founding board. We want to make sure that the people who will be hiring our students have a say in the direction we take. So that's definitely a critical key partnership.

And then our business partners consist of business development, communities and organizations, of course the industry, workforce development, education, and that's K through 12 and through higher education, as well as economic development.

Our proof of concept, our goal is to have 850 graduates hired by September 30th of 2018 with an annual retention rate of 40, 50, and 60 percent during our three go live years. Our expected outcomes for year two are to have 100 students having gone through the program and gotten hired working somewhere within the software development life cycle, at least 40 percent rate, and that target is September 30th of this year.

Our actuals to date are 35 working within the software development life cycle, and our current cohort has an 89 percent retention rate. That means 89 percent of the adults who started our
program are still doing it, which is great. We're 75 percent of the way through. So we're pretty sure that we will exceed our expected outcomes for year two.

Some of our celebrated successes -- and we do take the time to celebrate these as a staff and as a program -- I have a background in engineering. I'm a process engineer by training. So one of our favorite things to do as a staff is what's called a brain mesh, and we get together and use continuous improvement tools to solve our program-related problems or make improvements. There's a few examples of that I could give, but one was actually approving the pre-work. Pretty much any problem we can just take a tool out of the toolkit to solve. We do it in those sessions.

Recruitment of mentors has been a huge success. Definitely was a lot of meetings in person and showing up to industry events initially, and Rider got us off the ground as far as that goes. We're to the point now, though, that our graduates are being hired and they're coming back to mentor. So we've got a continuous cycle with regards to the recruitment of mentors. Our scale has been very successful as well. We have a typical cohort size of 250 adults enrolled per cohort, and that has remained consistent throughout.

We leverage some pretty tech-savvy tools, and this comes from the software development industry. We make a point to expose our graduates to the things that they might be using in real life. So Asana is a task management tool. Does a phenomenal job with serving as a digital syllabus. It has due dates, and we can lay out a structure. So that way even though they're learning on their own time, they have a roadmap to follow with due dates so the accountability is there.

Slack is an online 24/7 virtual community. All of our mentors are on our Slack channel as well as all of our current and former students. So that is our online ecosystem where you can go for help and encouragement and resource sharing outside of the training room. And then GitHub is where our graduates host their code. That is their repository. That's the project deliverable I referenced earlier.

We have completely abandoned the ability to use "Because we've always done it that way" as a reason for the way we do things. That has revolutionized the way we view the program and the way we make decisions. So we no longer see that as a viable answer. And we do a value add sanity check, and what I mean by that is the things that we do on a quarterly basis, we look at those things. And if we ask if there's any value added by doing that thing and the answer is no, we abandon it and replace it with something that does add value to the program.

Some of our challenges have been the employer and industry engagement, not necessarily from a partnership perspective. I think that the industry is hungry for new talent, but we have some mind shift changes that we're working on with our employment community to get them to take a chance on an unconventional hire, someone that may not necessarily have a computer science degree but has the skills, none the less.

So we're working with the industry to adopt that mindset because talent is talent, from our perspective. Funding for technical training needs, this actually is a challenge as it relates to our
sustainability plan, which we are working on now that the program is kind of firing on all cylinders.

And then accessing supportive services, and what I mean by that is, for those of you involved with workforce development agencies, you know that you have a certain amount of money for training dollars and you have a certain amount of money for supportive services. And traditionally supportive services have meant textbooks, certification fees, things of that nature.

But we're trying to completely turn that on its head where instead of maybe using supportive services to use a textbook or for a student to use a textbook if they're enrolled in WIOA, that they would instead get a Chromebook. So we're looking for ways to adopt our existing structure to satisfy the 21st century type of student.

Oh, I apologize. That was my last slide. Thank you.