Virginia Financial Success Network
Virginia Community College System

Transcript of Webinar

YouthBuild Webinar Series

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

Wednesday, February 10, 2016
PAULA SCOTT-DEHETRE  OK. Good afternoon. This is Paula Dehetre with the Virginia Community College System office in Richmond, Virginia. And the name brand that we've assigned to our Workforce Innovation Fund grant is the Virginia Financial Success Network, and the tagline, as you can see in our logo, is, "Building careers, growing credit, and decreasing debt."

We have the fortune of having a project that is type C, which is a goal of replicating an existing model or program, and our grant was a five-year grant set at a funding level of a little under $12 million. Our evaluation firm that we're working closely with is Public Policy Associates of Lansing, Michigan.

The heart of our project and the model that we are attempting to replicate is the Working Family Success Network model. You can see their little logo there in the top right corner, and the crux of this model is an integrated bundled service delivery to be carried out in our One-Stop centers or American job centers. And that service delivery is focused around three pillars, those being the typical services you receive in a One-Stop center, employment and training. Added onto that, seeking out work and income support for our customers, and finally financial literacy.

Our elevator pitch, if you will, is really to help to lift people out of poverty. This is a research study where our WIOA clients that are coming into the One-Stops that are found eligible for the WIOA program are then randomly selected to be part of this research study once they consent. And for the sake of time, I hope that you'll look back later to this link on YouTube, which is a three-minute video that describes very succinctly what the study is all about.

Just for an overview, this grant, we finished our planning year, and we have wrapped up the first quarter of our performance year. Now in the midst of our second year – second quarter – excuse me. VCCS serves as the grant recipient and fiscal agent for WIOA funding in the Commonwealth of Virginia, and we are working with six of our 15 local workforce investment areas in this research study. We entered into an MOU with those organizations, and as you can see, the six different regions outlined on the slide are very demographically and economically diverse.

Each of those areas received funding to hire a financial success coach and also has grant support for some of their case management costs. And these coaches are utilizing a software of the service with the customers to aid them in searching for employment, setting up training, finding themselves eligible hopefully for work and income supports, and a very special emphasis on building their financial literacy skills.

We are tasked with serving 1800 clients over a three-year period. Our clients will be, as I said, WIOA eligible age 18 and older, to include veterans and their spouses. So we hope that we will touch on some of our older youth as well, 18 to 24. We've outlined here what some of our recruitment strategies are. We spent a lot of time in the beginning of our planning year designing the video that I recommended you take a look at. We designed a hard copy passport, if you will, for services that the customer can carry with them, and later in my slides you'll see a link to that PDF so you can see exactly what that is. It's just like your passport that you'd use to travel internationally.
We've been trying to reach out to our existing clients in WIOA since July of 2015 and then of course approaching all of our new customers that come into the One-Stop centers. Again, the special feature of this project is that it is a random study focusing with one-on-one coaching and financial literacy skill development.

Our key partners, besides our six local areas, are, as we mentioned earlier, our evaluation firm, Public Policy Associates, a company out of Durham, North Carolina entitled MDC, and MDC is really the national expert in the Working Family Success model that I mentioned earlier. And finally the vendor that we've been partnering with for the software as a service is Solutions for Progress, which is based out of Philadelphia.

We're partnering with education, workforce, and business leaders in those six communities, and in addition to that, this model is also being implemented in four of our 23 community colleges under a different funding stream. They're supported by the philanthropy achieving the dream, and our hope is that over the life of this study that we'll be able to prove that the model does in fact work and we'd like to make it sustainable and build capacity in all 15 of our local areas as well as our 23 community colleges.

You can see on this slide all the outcomes that we're aiming for. We have our typical WIOA measures that you and I on the call all measure, and in addition to that we're focusing on financial literacy types of skills, helping people to apply for public benefits, increasing their net worth, improving their credit rating, achieving significant financial events once they build their assets after attaining employment, outcomes like that.

Some of the successes that we feel have been meaningful are that we are – we have created this new type of coach in Virginia called the financial success coach. In our community college system we're very much advocates of the coaching model. We have 9 or 10 different types of coaches, whether it's coaches for veterans, coaches for high school students, and now for financial success.

And colleagues of mine here at VCCS created a certification credential program called the Virginia adult career coach, and that's an online distance program as well as some classroom training that all of our coaches statewide are invited to participate in. And so our financial success coaches are either already certified or are in the process of completing their certification so that they're well poised to assist our customers.

Our next success is utilizing this software called the Benefit Bank as well as My Budget Coach. And frankly, that's the huge component of the $12 million budget. That's a sizeable expense, and hopefully will pay off in the end. The Benefit Bank is powered by the vendor Solutions for Progress. It's an online service that provides benefit eligibility as a screening tool. It helps the customer to apply right there with the coach at the computer. It's an IRS certified tax assistance and filing service.

So folks right now are coming in to file their tax returns for both federal and state taxes. My Budget Coach is a cloud-based suite of financial coaching tools and a curriculum that can be
used remotely or with the in-person with the coach. It's a 12-month module where the client can learn how to establish a budget, get out of debt, set up a savings account, all the things that you really need in order to become financially sound. And this system will also help us to collect and analyze data and measure our client outcomes and organizational effectiveness.

As you can see, some of the work and income supports that our clients will be applying for include SNAP, TANF. They can fill out the FAFSA form, if they're looking for student financial aid, and a number of other supports that we hope to build out in the system in the months to come.

I talk about our success of return on investment. We're hoping that a lot of folks, as they file their taxes, will be pleasantly surprised to see tax returns come back to them that they were unaware they were eligible for or an earned income tax credit. This system allows folks to file back for three years. So if you hadn't filed in the past, you thought you didn't make enough money, you'll be able to reap those assets.

I list a number of challenges here we've found. It's been an interesting opportunity to be involved in the research study, but we wish we could have our planning year back as a do over. But we're – we've learned a lot from that, and as I mentioned, a few other items here that we'd be happy to talk with you about in more detail. So I'll stop there and look forward to any questions that you might have.