The America’s Promise Roundtable: *Promising Practices for Participant Retention and Job Placement* gave grantees the opportunity to hear from two grantees: Amy Meyer, Grant Director from United Way of Central Iowa and Amanda Duncan, Grant Director from Workforce Alliance South Central Kansas, as they shared strategies and tips to sustain participant retention and increase job placements. [Click here](#) to review the entire presentation (May 16, 2019).

**Tips from the America’s Promise Roundtable Discussion**

**Participant Retention**

Open and transparent communication is beneficial for both the program and participants. Before a participant begins training it is important to set expectations for both the grantee and participant and talk about goals and how those goals will be measured. This will create an opportunity for participants to ask questions and share any concerns they may have and build trust between the case worker and the participant. Another important aspect is clearly communicating the training schedule and work schedule requirements to each participant. This will give participants the opportunity to share any scheduling conflicts that may arise and ensure a good match between the participant and the training opportunity.

**Build Relationships**

Building relationships with participants is crucial for encouraging retention. When possible, ensure participants keep the same case manager from the beginning to completion of their training. This helps build trust and will increase the likelihood that participants will share challenges when they occur. Case managers who have rapport with their clients are in a better position to problem solve and suggest supportive services to help keep the participant in training.

Participants may be reluctant to share personal challenges, or they may not realize how a small challenge may become a barrier to success. Try to obtain relevant participant information during the intake process to help understand any challenges or obstacles that may hinder a successful outcome. Instruct case managers to ask questions that can elicit information about the participant’s support system. Sample questions might include:

- If your car breaks down, do you have another way to get to training or work?
- If your child gets sick, do you have someone that can take care of them?
- Do you have an emergency fund for unexpected costs?
- When you get hired, do you have appropriate clothes that you can wear to work? Will you need any special equipment like medical scrubs, safety goggles, or steel-toed boots?

Identifying challenges that may keep a program participant from successfully completing their program of study, is the first step to finding solutions. Be creative - it may be necessary to look for support services that can be leveraged outside of America’s Promise grant funding. Some communities have an information and referral service such as 2-1-1 that can be used to help find support for clients. These referral services can connect you or the participant to appropriate health and human service agencies.
and community organizations that can often provide additional supportive services such as physical and mental health resources, support for persons with disabilities, or rent assistance. Taking the time to research what services are available in your community will help ensure you will be prepared to assist program participants with any challenges they are facing.

**Job Placement Strategies**

- Walk through job applications with participants to ensure they are being filled out properly and past experiences are framed to meet the employer’s needs. This can be especially helpful when English is not the participant’s first language.
- Follow-up with participants after each step of applying for employment (submitting the application, completing and interview, thank you cards, etc…). Ask questions to determine if any additional support is needed and gather feedback for future participants.
- Follow-up with employers after every interview to help build relationships and ensure that the participant is a good fit. If the employer decides not to hire someone, find out why and brainstorm solutions for future placements.
- Explore embedding training programs at the employer’s site. Benefits include: lowering the costs for the training provider as they will not need to purchase training equipment; participants are able to gain experience on the equipment that the employer is actually using; and participants can become familiar with the workplace environment they may be entering.
- Consider implementing on-the job training or an apprenticeship model. These types of work-based learning opportunities allow participants to earn wages while they are training and provide a hands-on experience in the workplace that can help build confidence in the participant.

**Additional Participant Retention Tips**

- Develop a training agreement that includes the cost of the program that is being paid on the participant’s behalf. This will help the participant understand the value of the training and provide an incentive to stay in the program.
- Celebrate successes! Create a list of training completers that can be posted for others to see. Include that list in a newsletter or email to encourage current participants to stay in the program.

**Additional Resources**

**Tips to Enhance Participant Retention**

This toolkit is intended to inform America’s Promise grantees about strategies to increase participant retention and improve completion rates that lead to employment in their field of study.  
https://h1bap.workforcegps.org/resources/2018/09/20/15/48/Tips-to-Enhance-Participant-Retention

**Job Placement Checklist**

This Job Placement Checklist helps you to see what you can do to improve your job placement efforts in the later stages of your grant; prioritizing your placement needs without taking away from your other duties; expanding your job placement team and creating internal performance measures.  
https://h1bskillstraining.workforcegps.org/resources/2016/02/26/11/44/job-placement
SWFI Retention and Engagement Tip Sheet

This tip sheet – from the H-1B Strengthening Working Families Initiative (SWFI) – highlights strategies that grantees can use to help maximize the engagement and retention of participants. Tips and examples are from SWFI grantees and other related programs in the following areas: building relationships with participants, structuring programs to meet participants’ needs, and using behavioral interventions to keep participants engaged.

https://h1bswfi.workforcegps.org/resources/2018/07/10/21/07/SWFI_Retention_and_Engagement_Tip_Sheet