WORKFORCE ACCELERATOR FUND

Secrets of Success
PROMISING PRACTICE BRIEFS

The Workforce Accelerator Fund (Accelerator) was launched by the California Workforce Development Board in April, 2014. Accelerator seeks to improve job outcomes for California residents with barriers to employment by driving improvements in the workforce service delivery system. With flexible seed funding, technical assistance, and an initiative-wide community of practice, Accelerator creates a space for innovation in which workforce practitioners can prototype new solutions, scale what works, and share learning.

What is success? Trying something new and wildly successful, of course. With an innovative initiative like Accelerator, trying and failing can also be a success. What was learned? How could we have done something differently? Many projects experience mini "fails" along the way. They put their innovation thinking hats back on and pivot their project to get around a barrier or bump in the road in order to get back on track towards their goal.

We have learned so much from the (number) of Accelerator projects in the past five years, even those that don't fully meet the goal or objective that they set out to accomplish. For more information about past projects, what they set out to do, and what they accomplished, see the **Accelerator 1.0-2.0** and **3.0-4.0** dashboards on **the initiative webpage** along with the internal narrative evaluation of those projects.

We have learned from Accelerator as a whole that including an "influencer" on the project team, individualized technical assistance, and various forms of networks can support and lift projects up; helping them navigate the barriers, identify the small successes, and implement best practices into the workforce system

Secrets of Success is a series of promising practice briefs showcasing three elements that have been key to the effectiveness of multiple Accelerator projects:

- o The Influencer Role
- o Technical Assistance
- o Networks

Each brief will describe the promising practice and share real-life stories from Accelerator grantees that have successfully incorporated it into their projects.

![Workforce Accelerator Fund logo]

Secrets of Success: A Three Part Series
#1: The Influencer Role

Introduction

The primary goals of the Workforce Accelerator Fund (Accelerator) program include the replication and scaling of successful innovations as widely as possible throughout the state's workforce system. A body of research exists that emphasizes the importance of influencers in bringing about systems change.[1] Accelerator has promoted the role of the influencer as a key project design element within the "New Business As Usual" and "System Change" project types. In these, applicants have been required to formally identify an influencer, either an individual or organization, on their proposed project team. This is a person who can effectively bring successful elements or projects in whole to implement into any part of the workforce system, thus bringing about a "new business as usual" and system change.

This brief will discuss the role of influencers in three Accelerator projects, including a discussion of the multiple types of influence, characteristics of effective influencers, and the various activities through which they achieve their end goal of integrating an innovation into a system so thoroughly that it becomes the "new business as usual."

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[1] **https://orgmapper.com/elect-empower-enhance-how-identified-influencers-help-you-enact-successful-change/** and **https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/tapping-the-power-of-hidden-influencers**

Types of influence

Influencers in Accelerator projects are either internal to the project team, i.e., actively involved in the design and implementation of the project, or external, i.e., an outside individual or organization that has some interest or participation in the project.

They also derive their power to drive change from a range of sources:

- o Leaders of organizations or public agencies wield formal or **structural influence** by virtue of their positions of power. They are seated at the table where policy decisions are made and have the authority to direct adoption of new practices.
- o Individuals with informal or **personal influence** have gained authority through their force of personality and/or their lived experience. When they speak, their colleagues listen because they trust their judgement and have confidence in their knowledge.
- o Finally, some change agents have **professional influence**, derived not from any position they hold at the moment but from a cumulative history of particular kinds of professional roles or accomplishments. Examples include a college professor who has highly relevant research experience or a workforce practitioner who holds a volunteer leadership role in an influential professional association.

Characteristics of an effective influencer

While there are different types of influencers, all individuals and organizations that are effective in the role share certain core characteristics.

They have **authority within a sphere that is broad enough for them to actually effect change**. Thus, someone with structural influence must have a position at a sufficiently senior level in an agency or organization that is big enough to hold sway within the systems in which it operates. An individual who derives power from force of personality or lived experience must command a sphere of influence that is big enough to matter. Similarly, effective professional influencers have experience or hold a role that is highly relevant and broad-based.

They **authentically believe** in the innovation. In efforts to drive systems change, there is no substitute for genuine passion.

They care about the project deeply enough to actually **work on its behalf**. This is of particular importance with personal and professional influencers, since their advocacy is not a requirement for their day jobs.

Typical influencer activities

There are multiple ways that influencers promote the agenda of Accelerator projects. The most common roles they play include:

- o **Opening doors** for project staff to engage with key system stakeholders, policy makers, and funders;
- o **Direct advocacy** with policy makers and funders;
- o **Systems integration** (in the case of those with structural influence);
- o Promotion of and dissemination of information about the innovation through **thought leader activities**, such as conference presentations, panel appearances, and publications.

SPOTLIGHT 1

Richmond Workforce Development Board
Influencer: *Sal Vaca, Director*
Internal/external: *Internal*
Type: *Structural*
Workforce Accelerator Fund Project: *RichmondBUILD Academy*

RichmondBUILD is a construction pre-apprenticeship/renewable energy training program, initiated in 2007, for low-income individuals; 95% of participants are members of historically under-served minority communities and 50% have a history of justice involvement. The Richmond Workforce Development Board (WDB) places graduates into jobs; the program achieves a 90% placement rate with an average starting wage of $18.33 per hour.

When it was originally launched, RichmondBUILD was an anti-violence program and the WDB's focus was thus on a quality experience and good outcomes for participants. With the flexibility of Accelerator funding, the agency was able to test out program enhancements and new training models. The results have been excellent, and workforce board staff now have complete confidence in the quality of the RichmondBUILD program. Participation in the program elevated the WDB's expectations of staff and expanded the sense of possibility for outputs. Responding to the Accelerator program's call to change the system, WDB staff then began to think about the other layers of the county workforce system and wonder how they might create more impact.

> **"By institutionalizing RichmondBUILD and the role we play, we created a template and a process that are now part of every single project in this city."**
>
> **– Sal Vaca,**
> **Director of Workforce Development, Richmond, CA**

Since January 2016, when Richmond joined the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) Cohort, the city's top strategic priority has been to make itself more

equitable in its internal function and community services. WDB staff recognized an opportunity to profoundly extend the impact of RichmondBUILD by moving it out of its narrow identity as an anti-violence program and aligning it with the city's equity agenda.

Sal Vaca has been a key influencer on behalf of RichmondBUILD. By virtue of his position as Director of Workforce Development, he has both a seat at the table where city policies are created and deep insights into the rationale behind them and the means by which they are carried out. Previously, developers seeking approvals for construction projects were asked to discuss hiring RichmondBUILD graduates rather late in the approval process and only on a case-by-case basis. Thanks to Mr. Vaca's influence, RichmondBUILD is now on the critical path to approval for all development projects in the city. "If they are going to get their project over the finish line," he states, "they need to work with us." In addition, all publicly funded projects are required to hire RichmondBUILD job candidates.

How did this influencer succeed? He first demonstrated to other city leaders how the program, previously siloed as a violence prevention strategy, had the potential to advance Richmond's equity agenda by leveraging Community Workforce Agreements to drive the creation of jobs for the city's residents, including youth. He then worked with his colleagues to institutionalize the program into city practice through several means, including a citywide labor agreement that integrates RichmondBUILD as a feeder for job candidates on all city-financed development projects. He then worked to minimize resistance among developers and city administrators by persuasively demonstrating the value that RichmondBUILD offered them, in the form of well-trained local hires, community goodwill, and alignment with city policies.

SPOTLIGHT 2

Los Angeles Valley College
Influencer: *Andra Hoffman, Chair of the Los Angeles Valley College District Board of Trustees*
Internal/external: *External*
Type: *Personal*
Workforce Accelerator Fund project: *Strengthening Working Families*

Participants enrolled in Los Angeles Valley College's (LAVC) workforce programs do not match the profile of the traditional college student: they are in their 30s, 40s, and even 50s; 46% of them have children; and many have experienced long-term unemployment and its accompanying hardships. A traditional student services model fails utterly to meet their needs.

LAVC's Strengthening Working Families initiative—a collaboration between the college's Workforce Training Department and its on-campus Family Resource Center (FRC)—launched with a pilot project in 2016. Through the initiative, LAVC has embedded holistic family supports in its Workforce Training Academies and has significantly enhanced services tailored to the needs of workforce participants, such as mental health supports.

> **"Everyone listens to Trustee Hoffman because she can speak so authentically from her own experience."**
>
> **–Amber Angel,**
> **Program Coordinator, LAVC Family Resource Center**

The initiative has been a solid success. Since its implementation, the placement rate for graduates of LAVC's workforce program has climbed to 97%. Strengthening Working Families received a 2018 Bellwether Finalist Award in a national community college competition. The Workforce Training Department was designated as the City of Los Angeles Workforce Strategy Center, charged to work with the entire system of American Job Centers in LA to pilot and share innovative workforce training programs. LAVC is currently in the midst of creating a network that will embed

holistic family supports into workforce-training academies at the remaining eight colleges in the Los Angeles Community College District (LAVCCD).

According to Dr. Doug Marriott, Dean of Adult/Community Education and Workforce Development, "Our true story is that we had multiple influencers who moved this work forward." He and others on the LAVC team chose to highlight the contributions of Andra Hoffman, current President of the LACCD Board of Trustees.

Ms. Hoffman has worked for 20+ years at Glendale Community College, where she currently oversees the Career and Transfer Centers. She takes advantage of both her position as Board President and her professional connections to showcase LAVC's model of holistic family supports for student-parents. Among her recent efforts are: holding a 2019 Board of Trustees meeting at the LAVC FRC, including student-parents in advocacy delegations visiting Sacramento, and presenting the story of the FRC at national meetings, such as the Women in Leadership in Higher Education conference at the Harvard Faculty Club.

The increased visibility that Hoffman creates is of critical importance. "We have no categorical funding, so visibility for fundraising purposes is essential," states Marni Roosevelt, Director of the FRC. "President Hoffman's work to create awareness of our model throughout the district and beyond is a huge contribution."

What makes Hoffman such an effective influencer? Lived experience as a student-parent of two, earning her bachelor's degree over the span of 22 years, is partly responsible. When she speaks to funders and policy-makers about the need for and effectiveness of the program, she does so with compelling authority. That experience is also the source of the passion she brings to her influencer role, which she has voluntarily assumed. Hoffman's influence also derives from her professional accomplishments, including election to the policy-making California Community College Trustees Board of the League (CCCT), and her past tenures as Director of Government Relations for Glendale CC and as Chair of the LACCD Legislative & Public Affairs Committee. FRC Program Coordinator Amber Angel is herself a

student-parent who graduated in six years at LAVC and was featured in a PBS Weekend News Hour report on the Family Resource Center. "Everyone listens to Trustee Hoffman because she can speak so authentically from her own experience," Angel states. "It is crystal clear that she knows what she's talking about."

SPOTLIGHT 3

Trans Can Work
Influencer: *Human Rights Campaign*
Internal/external: *External*
Type: *Professional*
WAF Project: *California Trans Work Place Project*

The landscape for LGBTQ inclusion is changing every day. In the U.S. an estimated 1.4 million adults identify as transgender. A 2018 Williams Institute study determined that 27% of youth in California identify as transgender or gender non-conforming.

"We are always issuing an invitation for people to use their privilege and access to further spread inclusion,"

– Michaela Mendelson,
Founder and Chief Strategy Officer, Trans Can Work

For employers, it is no longer a matter of what to do if they have transgender employees, but a matter of preparing for when they have transgender employees.

Trans Can Work (TCW), a Los Angeles-based nonprofit committed to workplace inclusion, grew out of the California Trans Work Place Project, a restaurant industry-based initiative to expand employment opportunities for members of the transgender community. Accelerator allowed TCW to hire additional staff, connect in a meaningful way to multiple agencies within the workforce system, and further build out its innovative workplace education program.

Currently, TCW is experiencing significant growth. In March of 2019, the organization produced the Los Angeles Transgender Job Fair, hosting 74 employers and 580+ job seekers, nearly 200 of whom completed job interviews that day, including 50 who secured employment. The still-young organization has relationships in place with 400+ employers and is poised to scale its work, moving ever more individuals from diverse communities into the workplace.

In the current environment, in which federal protections for trans individuals are being stripped away, TCW's employer partnerships are more important than ever. As Founder and Chief Strategy Officer Michaela Mendelson declares, "With all the challenges we as a community are facing now, corporate partners have been the wind at our back."

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) has been a key influencer for Trans Can Work in the corporate sector. According to TCW Executive Director Allison VanKuiken, "This is probably one of the most impactful relationships we will ever have."

One of the country's largest civil rights organization working to achieve lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer equality, HRC conducts an annual survey with its Corporate Equality Index (CEI), a national benchmarking tool on corporate policies and practices pertinent to LGBTQ employees. For multiple reasons—including employee retention, socially responsibly screening by prospective investors, public relations, and shareholder concerns—businesses of all sizes desire the highest possible score. Since launching the index in 2002, HRC has built the CEI into a nationally recognized report that exerts a powerful influence across the country.

Through its partnership with Trans Can Work, HRC leverages the power of the CEI to engage corporations desirous of improving their score in TCW's job fairs and inclusive workplace trainings. HRC's influence has thus opened up a path for TCW to dramatically expand its geographic scope and deepen its impact.

Why is HRC such an effective influencer on behalf of TCW? Complete alignment in organizational strategy between the two is a big factor. With the CEI, Human Rights Campaign exerts pressure on corporations to create inclusive workplaces. Trans Can Work is able to show them how to successfully respond to that pressure. "We are always issuing an invitation for people to use their privilege and access to further spread inclusion," as Michaela Mendelson says.

KEY TAKEAWAYS: The Influencer Role

- o Influence comes in multiple forms: structural, personal, professional.

- o All effective influencers share certain key characteristics: authority, authenticity, dedication.

- o The influencer role is essential for projects as they seek to integrate their innovation into existing systems, as they convert their big idea into a new business as usual.

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Secrets of Success: A Three Part Series
#2: Technical Assistance

Introduction

Technical assistance can best be described as a collaborative and coordinated approach to facilitating change, building the capacity of both organizations and individuals, developing improved ways of doing things, and ultimately, achieving agreed-upon outcomes.

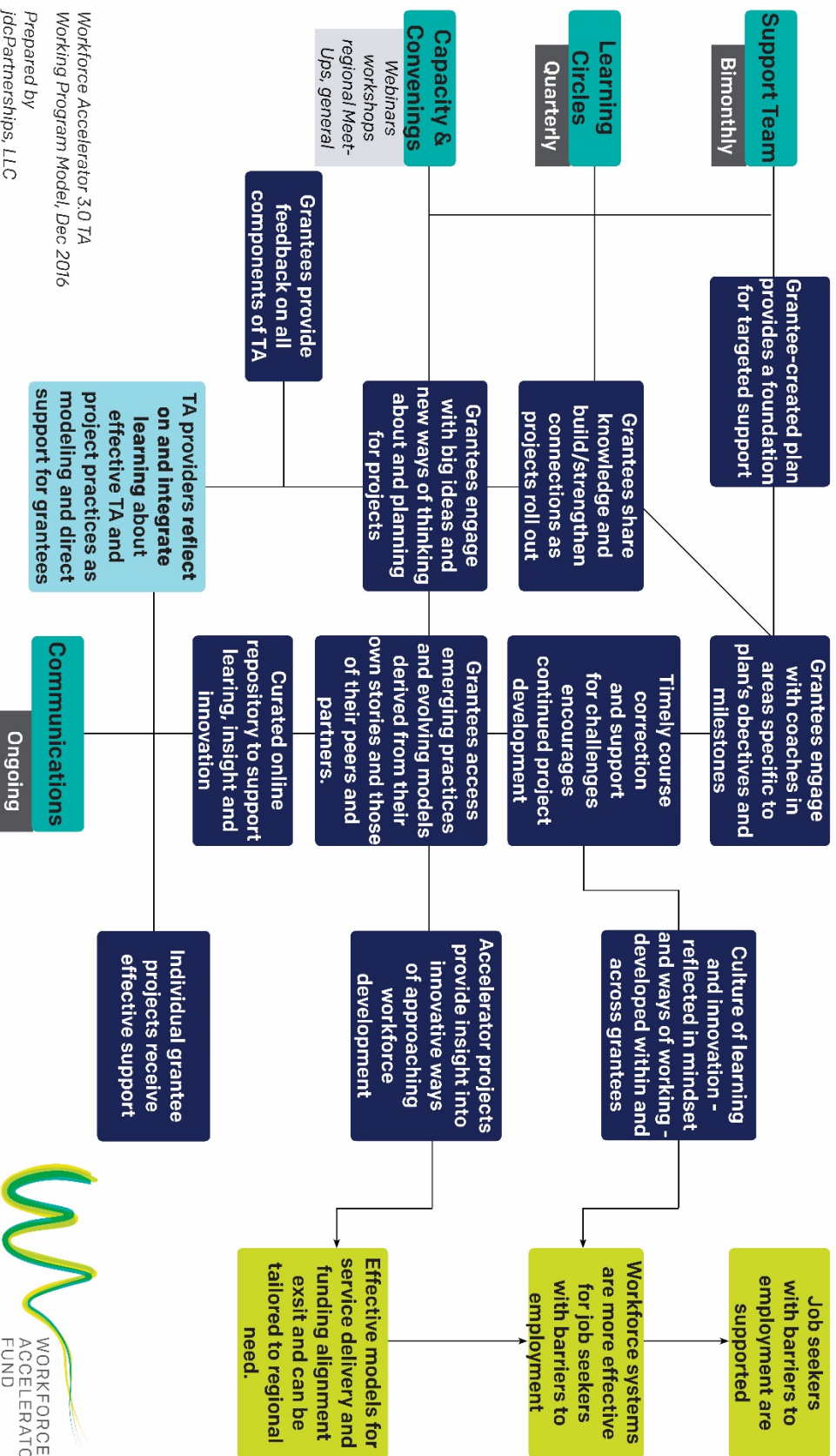   **- Guiding Principles for Effective Technical Assistance**

Early in its life, the Workforce Accelerator Fund program (Accelerator) began to offer technical assistance (TA) to both enhance the effectiveness of projects and create a culture of learning and innovation within a grantee community of practice. In 2016, Luminare Group (FKA jdcPartnerships) began working with the Accelerator TA team to develop a logic model that both lays out the strategy and intended impacts of the TA program and establishes a framework for its evaluation. While the mix of TA resources is periodically adjusted in response to changes in the operating environment, the overarching strategy remains constant. It also bears noting that the logic model will soon make small shifts in the systems change quadrant to ensure alignment with the CWDB's High Road Training Partnership framework.

This brief will review the five categories of TA offerings—Communications, Coaching, Virtual Learning, In-Person Learning, and MeetUps—and go on to describe the most intensive TA offering, coaching, in more detail. It will conclude with brief case studies covering the coaching experiences of two Accelerator projects.

What Do We Do?

What Happens for Grantees?

What Difference Does this Make?

Support Team | Bimonthly

Learning Circles | Quarterly

Capacity & Convenings
Webinars
regional workshops
Meet-Ups, general

Communications | Ongoing

Grantee-created plan provides a foundation for targeted support

Grantees provide feedback on all components of TA

TA providers reflect on and integrate learning about effective TA and project practices as modeling and direct support for grantees

Grantees engage with big ideas and new ways of thinking about and planning for projects

Grantees share knowledge and build/strengthen connections as projects roll out

Grantees engage with coaches in areas specific to plan's objectives and milestones

Curated online repository to support learning, insight and innovation

Grantees access emerging practices and evolving models derived from their own stories and those of their peers and partners.

Timely course correction and support for challenges encourages continued project development

Individual grantee projects receive effective support

Accelerator projects provide insight into innovative ways of approaching workforce development

Culture of learning and innovation - reflected in mindset and ways of working - developed within and across grantees

Effective models for service delivery and funding alignment exsit and can be tailored to regional need.

Workforce systems are more effective for job seekers with barriers to employment

Job seekers with barriers to employment are supported

WORKFORCE ACCELERATOR FUND

Workforce Accelerator 3.0 TA Working Program Model, Dec 2016

Prepared by jdcPartnerships, LLC

Components of the Accelerator Technical Assistance Program

Communications

California Workforce Development Board (CWDB) communications staff and TA partners create content to distribute across four channels:

- o A **monthly e-newsletter** shares regular updates on Accelerator events and resources, sustainability updates with links to funding opportunities, information on workforce development events throughout the state, and reports on grantee accomplishments.
- o The **Accelerator Grantee Portal** is an online repository of Accelerator materials, including: slide decks from in-person and webinar learning events, publications such as promising practice briefs and replication toolkits, and press coverage of Accelerator projects.
- o **Periodic publications**, such as promising practice briefs.
- o **Workforce Accelerator Fund LinkedIn** is the online community through which Accelerator grantees, partners, and stakeholders share information and ideas. Group membership currently numbers 166.

Coaching

Under the direction of Pathway Consultants and Bay Area Community Resources, the Accelerator coaching team comprises 18 skilled workforce professionals who collectively possess deep expertise across a wide range of content areas, including human-centered design, evaluation, curriculum development, youth development, career and technical education, program design, Registered Apprenticeships, fund development, and more.

Virtual learning

Online group learning experiences are available through **learning circles** and **webinars.** Presenters come from the ranks of TA coaches, Accelerator project teams, and outside experts. Learning circle topics have included Apprenticeship, Future of Work, Career Pathways, Evaluation, and Capacity Building. Live toolkit webinars, in which Accelerator projects share insights and tools, have included Aero-Flex Pre-Apprenticeship, Government Engaging Youth, Road Map to College, Career

Hub, Mentorship, Inclusive Workplace Training, Holistic Workforce Training, Early Educator Apprenticeships, Re-Entry Employment, Non-Traditional Apprenticeships, Beyond Partnering. Webinars presented by TA coaches and external experts have covered Recruitment of Hard-to-Employ Populations and multiple aspects of the Workforce System and the Homeless Crisis.

In-person learning

Accelerator creates face-to-face opportunities, both formal and informal, for members of project teams to make connections and share lessons learned. These include:

- o Annual **Community of Practice convenings** that offer a mix of formal technical assistance workshop-format learning, interactive facilitated conversations, and focused networking opportunities.
- o Face-to-face interactive **workshops** covering technical areas of use to Accelerator projects is a new option. An early session covered customer-centered design; a workshop still in the planning stages will address trauma-informed programs.

MeetUps

The TA team organizes informal events at locations throughout the state twice a year. At these MeetUps, Accelerator members are able to deepen their connections with other practitioners in their region and learn about local projects in a casual after-work setting.

Accelerator Coaching Process

Coaches and consultants are often brought in to help fix a problem or intervene in some way when a project goes off track. Accelerator, however, offers coaching as a proactive tool to speed up progress in meeting objectives. The assumption is not that something has or will go wrong, but rather that all practitioners can benefit from the support and outside perspective that coaching offers.

Each Accelerator grantee is paired with a primary coach for the entirety of their project period. By establishing a relationship in the formative stage of a project, grantees and coaches can more easily identify challenges as they arise and together strategize solutions. The coach helps to develop a coaching plan and arranges monthly check-in calls.

As is evident in the two case studies below, grantees engage with coaching in different ways. Roles that Accelerator coaches play include:

- o **Thought partner.** Project leaders often find it useful to talk through project issues with their coach. This can be particularly useful when the grantee is wrestling with a question into which their fellow team members do not have insight, usually because their experience or expertise lies elsewhere.
- o **Technical expert**. Accelerator TA coaches have technical skills—meeting facilitation, project development, process management, and others—that they put to use in moving a project forward. Different members of the TA coaching team also possess content knowledge of fields such as youth development, criminal justice reform, and higher education. Coach matches are made based on the relevance of that knowledge to projects; a coach can thus offer useful insights or connect projects to colleagues on the team for specialized consultations.
- o **Outside observer**. As an outsider not engaged in the actual implementation of a project, a coach offers a fresh and often more open perspective. This can be particularly useful for plotting course corrections and reflecting on lessons learned.
- o **Workforce Accelerator Fund expert**. Coaches also understand the purpose and processes of the Accelerator program; they can provide invaluable insight and navigation assistance as projects respond to unanticipated developments. They also know when to direct the projects to the assistance of the CWDB staff and administrative assistance of the Employment Development Department staff.

Outside of the monthly check-in call and responsive light-touch consultation that is common to all Accelerator projects, coaching modalities vary in response to the needs of projects. Some projects choose to receive high-touch coaching through their monthly check-ins, so that they receive **ongoing support** to keep moving forward. Others choose more **intensive short-term support**, in the form of technical assistance for meeting facilitation, planning, evaluation, or other specific needs. And some projects choose to tap a variety of coaches with different areas of expertise for a **series of short specialized consultations**.

In summary, the TA coaching program is continually adapting so that it can be flexible, efficient, and responsive to the needs of current grantees. Projects are always encouraged to engage with coaching in whatever way will produce the best results for them.

Insights from the TA evaluation

In August 2019, the Accelerator TA team's evaluation partner, Luminare Group, delivered a report on its evaluation of the TA program's work with the Workforce Accelerator Fund's grantees over the 3.0 through 6.0 cycles. The focus of its inquiry was three-fold:

- o **Coaching**. What knowledge/skills did grantees gain and how did it translate into impact; reflection on coaching process and practices; coaches' own reflections on what works and what grantees need.
- o **Convenings**. Extent to which convening objectives were met; effectiveness of design and facilitation; reflection on what comes next.
- o **Technical Assistance overall**: benefits experienced to date; effectiveness of different TA activities; current challenges that might be addressed through TA.

Data sources for the evaluation included convening feedback forums, annual grantee surveys, coaching provider reflection forms, and targeted coaching feedback. Luminare distilled its results into three key learnings.

Key learnings

#1: Coaching and convenings complement and support responsive and relevant TA. While the details vary across grantees, a consistent theme of coaching's direct relationship to efficient and effective implementation surfaced in the inquiry.

#2: Coaching remains relevant and responsive as ongoing projects mature and new projects join WAF. *Finding*: Coaching's role and focus shift as grantee needs and focus shift as the projects and overall direction of WAF have evolved, but the resources and structures to support grantees remain a value add for many projects. *Data detail:* Per the grantee surveys, the two top contributions of coaching across all four cohorts were "helped build confidence in/validate our approach" and "helped us break from 'business as usual' thinking and approaches/expanded our understanding of what was possible."

#3: TA's support for building a culture of learning and innovation can continue to grow with grantee projects. *Finding*: The TA program/logic model developed in 2016 has remained relevant in bringing in relevant content to encourage new ways of thinking and in providing ongoing support for the reflection, relationships, and confidence that undergird a culture of learning and innovation. Overall, the TA is recognized by grantees as important to their progress toward WAF's goals.

CASE STUDY 1

Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO)
Accelerator project(s): *Employment and Skills Training for Formerly Incarcerated Oakland-Area Individuals*
Accelerator project team member: *Lonnie Tuck, CEO Alameda County Director*
TA coach: *James Walker, Diogenes Community Services*

Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) is a national organization that works to reduce recidivism and increase employment among people reentering the community from incarceration. CEO provides immediate paid employment, skills training, wraparound vocational support services, and year-long retention and career advancement support for participants who secure permanent employment. Each location operates transitional work crews that provide supplemental indoor/outdoor maintenance and neighborhood beautification services to customers.

As Alameda County Director for the Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO), Lonnie Tuck is responsible for overseeing the organization's Oakland office, the second-biggest of the organization's 26 locations, second in size only to the national headquarters in New York City. Open for less than a decade, CEO Oakland has steadily grown and today is staffed by a team of 25; in fiscal year 2019 it enrolled a total of 669 participants.

CEO's statewide leaders applied in the WAF 6.0 cycle to replicate in Oakland an employment and skills training model that had been successfully implemented in other areas of California with Accelerator funding. The project entailed a new partnership with City of Oakland Public Works to create a pathway to permanent employment for formerly incarcerated individuals working on CEO Oakland's transitional work crew.

Mr. Tuck's coach, James Walker, chose to hold initial coaching meetings on site so that he could develop a sense of organizational dynamics. He is particularly appreciative of the discipline Walker brought to coaching meetings. "James was

always prepared; even when we didn't have something specific lined up, he had a set of question to ask and a list of options to consider," he states.

After a short time, the coach suggested an approach that surprised Mr. Tuck, who expected a focus on project activities and outcomes. Walker, however, had heard from Tuck of some growing pains, including more complex requirements for the additional funding the expanding program was securing. He had also observed some aspects of the corporate culture, developed in earlier years that could not be scaled for a larger operation. Walker therefore suggested a flexible and responsive arrangement under which he would tap his experience as an executive coach to help Tuck streamline processes and adopt new practices that would shift the organizational culture. He also leveraged his technical expertise to advise CEO Oakland staff on their grants management system and provided hands-on assistance to the Reporting Specialist in completing the Accelerator reports.

> **"James was great for me. He coached me in the organizational skills I need to manage the larger team."**
>
> **– Lonnie Tuck,**
> **Alameda County Director, Center for Employment Opportunities**

One concrete example of executive coaching involved a key change in personal practice that rippled throughout the office. Mr. Tuck had long maintained an open-door policy, which Mr. Walker observed was not sustainable with a staff as large as CEO Oakland's now is. He strongly recommended a policy of pre-set meetings only and also suggested the use of a calendar app to manage scheduling. In response to concerns about the effect on the connected office culture that such a practice would have, Walker coached Tuck on how to make the new system better for all involved. Every meeting is now focused and intentional; staff members have come to appreciate the efficiency and transparency of the new system. "James was great for me," states Tuck. "He coached me in the organizational skills I need to manage the larger team. He also helped me to see how I could put staff off without offending them."

CASE STUDY
Northern Rural Training and Employment Consortium (NorTEC)
Accelerator project(s): *Court Involved Youth Employment Services, Deferred Entry of Judgement Program, A Second Chance in the Gig Economy*
Accelerator project team member: *Heather Alexander Chavez, Director of Youth Programs, AFWD, Inc. and Prison to Employment Project Coordinator, NorTEC Region*
TA coach*: Ruth Barajas-Cardona, Bay Area Community Resources*

Over the course of four WAF-funded projects, NorTEC expanded its WIOA-funded youth programming to address the needs of justice-involved individuals. It has also developed a remarkably deep partnership with the juvenile justice system and has learned about the mindset, characteristics, and barriers to employment of justice-involved youth. In its WAF 6.0 project, the consortium extended the age range for its youth programming up to 30 in order to align with the Prison to Employment framework and has subsequently succeeded in securing AB1111 funding.

Thanks to the span of time over which NorTEC has engaged with Accelerator coaching, Heather Alexander and her TA coach Ruth Barajas-Cardona have grown into an unusually sophisticated coaching relationship. In the initial series of coaching calls, Ms. Chavez soon realized that Ms. Barajas-Cardona expected that NorTEC would want to tap into her deep experience and expertise in youth development. After the calls, Barajas-Cardona would include with her follow-up summary a list of potentially useful resources. In reviewing the list, Ms. Chavez would find almost nothing that was not already in her toolkit. Barajas-Cardona quickly understood the situation and the two deepened the conversation in their monthly coaching calls.

In so doing, they addressed a need that Ms. Chavez, as a workforce practitioner in a rural region, has long felt. In sparsely populated Butte County, Ms. Chavez is one of only very few practitioners with significant experience in both workforce and youth development. In Barajas-Cardona, she found a thoughtful peer with the same level of experience and expertise. Their coaching sessions thus became an opportunity for Chavez to engage Barajas-Cardona as a thought partner with whom she could test

her emerging thinking about higher-level issues, such as an evaluation agenda and impact outcomes, that will inform the future arc of NorTEC's work.

The one area in which Barajas-Cardona does have more experience is field-wide leadership. She not only encouraged Chavez to sharpen her practice in this area but also provided hands-on assistance as she prepared to deliver a live toolkit webinar on NorTEC's partnership with Probation, providing a sample toolkit and data-sharing template as well as access to IT support.

> **"Ruth reminded us, with reassuring authority, that Accelerator wanted us to try new things and learn from what didn't work out."**
>
> **- Heather Alexander Chavez**
> **Director of Youth Programs, AFWD, Inc. and Prison to Employment Project Coordinator, NorTEC Region**

Another situation in which coaching provided much-appreciated support was when NorTEC realized, early in the project period for their 6.0 grant, that the premise behind their innovation was not proving out. Barajas-Cordona was able to leverage her inside knowledge of the Accelerator program to coach Chavez through NorTEC's course correction. "We are always so aware when we are spending taxpayer money that we should do what we said we would do," Ms. Chavez states. "Ruth reminded us, with reassuring authority, that Accelerator wanted us to try new things and learn from what didn't work out," she continues. In the end, NorTEC was able to pivot in a way that accomplished the goals of the project via a slightly different path than they had originally intended. Barjas-Cardona advised them on how to present this in their conversations with CWDB and EDD staff and in their reporting.

KEY TAKEAWAYS: Technical Assistance

- o Accelerator's TA program is flexible and multi-faceted; grantees get the most out of it are those who sample widely among the offerings.
- o Coaching is not just for fixing problems—it is a powerful proactive tool for accelerating change.
- o Participation in the Accelerator community of practice can be invaluable for grantees: they can both sharpen their workforce practice and develop field leadership skills in the process of sharing out their own successes.

CALIFORNIA
Workforce Development Board

Secrets of Success: A Three Part Series
#3: Networks

Introduction

Networks—loosely defined here to include partnerships, collaboratives, coalitions, and alliances—are an essential part of strategy for most workforce agencies and nonprofit providers.

Accelerator's program design intentionally encourages grantees to enhance existing networks they are already a part of, join others, and create new networks. Participation in networks offers project team members a host of benefits: they gain exposure to best practices from a variety of players, deepen their own practice as innovators, find support to scale their projects beyond the start-up phase, and expand their sphere of influence.

The impact of any single agency or organization will almost always be increased through a network. Indeed, some influential thinkers believe that **network thinking** is an ideal framework for both collective action and organizational effectiveness.

This brief will review the most common lines along which Accelerator projects engage with networks, provide a brief summary of network thinking, and share the stories of four different Accelerator projects, each of which has successfully leveraged networks to significantly extend their reach and/or deepen their impact.

What do networks look like?

For many workforce practitioners, the most familiar network is **geographic**: all of the workforce agencies and related community-based providers in a city, county, or region collaborate on or coordinate services to job seekers. Networks of **peer institutions—**made up of organizations or agencies of the same type, such as community colleges or workforce development boards—are another type; they generally operate at the regional, state, or even national level. Networks are also formed around **population served:** in this type**,** a full constellation of providers, policy makers, and others come together around the needs of a specific population, such as reentry, foster youth, or veterans.

What is network thinking?

A growing number of futurists and social change leaders believe that the set of practices that supports effective networks, which they call "**network thinking**," is the key to innovation and systems change in the 21st century. The five key elements of this mindset, according to Curtis Ogden of the Interaction Institute for Social Change are:

1. **Adaptability instead of control**. Networks survive and thrive because they are decentralized and self-organized, not because of any single actor or leader.
2. **Emergence instead of predictability**. With a system as complex as a network, it is impossible to know in advance exactly what will emerge. Leaning into the predictable means short-changing what's possible.
3. **Resilience and redundancy instead of rock stardom**. If any one node of the network goes away, the network adjusts and continues to work.
4. **Contributions before credentials**. New and better thinking is what counts, not the résumé of the person who proposes an idea.
5. **Diversity and divergence**. New thinking comes from the meeting of different fields, experience, and perspectives.

Elements of this thinking appear in all four of the case studies below about Accelerator projects' experiences of networks.

CASE STUDY

Norco College
Accelerator project: *Replicating a Successful Early Educator Apprenticeship across Six Community Colleges*
Network type: *Regional and peer institution*
Project team member: *Charles Henkels, Apprenticeship Director*

Norco's Accelerator 7.0 project, which has only recently gotten fully underway, will replicate an Early Educator Apprenticeship across six community colleges. The project leverages the nearly two-year-old LAUNCH Network, a growing apprenticeship-dedicated partnership of community colleges, K-12 districts, two Workforce Development Boards, and industry partners in the Inland Empire. Within LAUNCH is a core network of community colleges.

As part of a regional planning group convened through the California Community Colleges Strong Workforce program, Norco's Apprenticeship Director Charles Henkels and others entered into a conversation about a potential advanced manufacturing apprenticeship. The group landed on a vision for an apprenticeship program model that could be "plug and play," so that colleges and employers could launch new apprenticeships with as little friction as possible and achieve sustainability in as short a time as possible. The group, with Henkels as the coordinator, received Strong Workforce funding in February 2018 to create an apprenticeship infrastructure for the Inland Empire and the network was formally launched.

Creating an infrastructure to accelerate efficient replication yet allow for variation is a not insignificant challenge. Henkels recalls that they soon realized the key question was, "Are we building a subway system or are we building a freeway?" To his way of thinking, the state has been funding cars for a freeway system. Its Division of Apprenticeship Standards has requirements for minimum hours of apprentices On the Job Training and for hours of college coursework, but otherwise allows a generous amount of latitude in program design. For LAUNCH to achieve its goals, the

partners needed to build an infrastructure that would operate as a subway system and create individual apprenticeship programs that would be like subway cars. Just as individual cars within a subway system can have different paint jobs and interior furnishings but must fit inside the rails of underground tunnels, so too would LAUNCH apprenticeship models have to accommodate the varying requirements of different occupations while conforming to a global design framework.

Thus far, LAUNCH has spent a great deal of time wrestling with the technical issues involved in building a subway system. Their work has culminated in what Henkels describes as "a highly detailed technical MOU that is much more technical than most people expected it to be." With this tool—which all partners have signed on to—they have laid out a programmatic structure that every college in the network will build their apprenticeship programs within. The MOU eliminates many of the start-up headaches that stymied colleges

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in the past, by providing guidance for how to handle technical details such as FTE apportionment funding, tuition, and tracking work-based-learning. And now at all participating colleges a dean or faculty member who wishes to launch an apprenticeship program will have an effective pre-authorization to do so via this common framework, bypassing many of the internal hurdles that were in place previously.

LAUNCH was founded on the assumption that the network could achieve far more than any one member could do on their own. This belief in collective impact was tested as the partners worked through the arduous and often tedious process of collaborative planning. Their patience has been rewarded. With the MOU completed, the next steps for the network are to run a regional campaign to educate businesses and educational institutions throughout the region on what has been accomplished. As Charles Henkels states, "Now that we've built the subway system, we are ready to build subway cars."

CASE STUDY

Workforce Investment Board of Tulare County
Accelerator project(s*): Readiness for Employment through Sustainable Education & Training (RESET) and Readiness for Employment through Sustainable Education & Training 2 Youth (RESET²)*
Network type: *Population-based*
Project team member(s): *Mary Rodarte, Workforce Service Program Manager; Desiree Landeros, Workforce Program Coordinator, Youth Program*

Tulare County's RESET program, a partnership between the Workforce Investment Board (WIB) of Tulare County and Tulare County Probation Department, Adult Services Division, was created to address gaps within the workforce system's services for the county's adult re-entry population. RESET aligned funding streams and built a strong joint case management team, providing earn and learn training opportunities to participants. RESET² scaled the program to serve justice-involved youth. Both programs have achieved excellent results, with a particularly impressive recidivism rate of only 11% compared to a countywide rate of 37.5%.

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>
> ## –Desiree Landeros,
> **Workforce Program Coordinator, Youth Program**

RESET began in 2014 as a partnership between the WIB and Probation.

An important aspect of RESET's success has been the degree to which the WIB and Probation share ownership of the program. At the outset, Probation built a grant-funded web portal that is linked to the WIB system. A designated Probation officer directly enrolls participants into Wagner Peyser services. The Probation Officer then works with the WIB's America's Job Center of California™ service provider to facilitate warm handoffs. Reflecting on the initial stages of that first Accelerator project, Mary Rodarte, Workforce Service Program Manager, states "One of the biggest challenges was getting all of the Probation Officers to see the value of the job-readiness training and the other WIOA and Accelerator-funded services and get

accustomed to referring their probationers to RESET." Over time, staff throughout the probation came to not only see the effectiveness of the RESET program but also to consider it their own. When the Accelerator grant period ended, the Chief Probation Officer took over funding program staff positions, including a job developer and case manager.

In 2018, the WIB set out to expand RESET to justice-involved youth with Accelerator 6.0 funding. Core program components--including joint multi-disciplinary case management, On the Job Training, and continued re-enrollment of participants who terminate employment—were adapted to meet the needs of youth. Other services, such as High School Diploma/GED instruction, were added. Other recent growth includes the WIB's extension into the county correctional system through a partnership with the Tulare County Sheriff's Office and the California Department of Corrections to serve persons on parole.

The Tulare WIB's network strategy is grounded in deep partnership with justice system agencies. Equally important, however, is strategic engagement of service providers in a multi-disciplinary case management team, through which participants can access non-WIOA services. Compelling proof points for the strategy's effectiveness include RESET's impressive recidivism rate and the pattern of partner agencies operationalizing the cost of the program in their own budgets. With their strategy, the WIB has created effective programs that are sustained through braided funding. According to Desiree Landeros, Workforce Program Coordinator, Youth Program, "Right now, we just keep growing, and we think it's because we have a model program."

CASE STUDY

Friends Outside in Los Angeles County
Accelerator project(s): *Improving Employment Outcomes for Sex Offenders*
Network type: *Population-based*
Project team members: *Mary Weaver, Executive Director; Luis Barrera Castanon, Lead Consultant*

Over the course of her 32 years at Friends Outside in Los Angeles County (FOLA)—a nonprofit organization that assists the friends of people who are incarcerated as well as prisoners and former prisoners with the immediate and longer-term effects of incarceration—Mary Weaver was disturbed by a persistent gap she saw in services for a particular subset of the reentry population. Registrants on sex offender registries often struggle to obtain employment due in part to structural barriers but also due to a lack of knowledge among workforce providers about how best to serve them. FOLA's 7.0 Accelerator project is seeking to address this gap. A multi-disciplinary team of workforce providers and other practitioners, content experts, and registrants are collaboratively engaged in research into the issue and will create tools to promote best practices for the improvement of employment outcomes for registrants.

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Given the complexity of the task, Weaver knew that a network strategy would be central to the project design and at the same time that it would create some challenges. "I knew that we could not get anything done without having a group of people involved." she said, "But the huge stigma that registrants live with affects almost everything we are trying to do. For example, a registrant referred to FOLA might be willing to trust us because of our long track record of working with the reentry population. It is another thing for that person to extend that trust to the partnership, which include correctional officers."

FOLA tapped their existing relationships with people and organizations already involved in justice reform to create a network for the registrant research and pilot project. "We didn't have to do much to norm the conversation at the beginning," observes Luis Barrera Castanon, Lead Consultant. "We could all start on the same page as we began to learn as a group."

To achieve the group learning and cross-fertilization of ideas they knew were needed for success, the project team paid careful attention to group dynamics. Early in the project period they switched from a monthly video call to a quarterly face-to-face meeting, to facilitate better connections among members. The ongoing integration of new members into the group has required more management than was anticipated; Castanon suggests that in future he might spend more time in design and preparation previous to launch so that the entire network was in place from the start, rather than building out over time. Weaver and Castanon have also had to consider the motivation of network members as they calibrate the weight of work assigned for completion between meetings; they have concluded that if they had been able to offer a small amount of funding to all network partners they could now be a bit more demanding.

Meanwhile, the network is moving steadily ahead, continuing to gather and analyze intelligence. The results of their learning will be shared with the workforce system through a 2020 summit meeting and will be taken to scale with a final white paper and a best practices-informed toolkit for delivering employment services to sex offenders.

CASE STUDY

Institute for Local Government
Accelerator project(s): *Pipeline to Public Service:[2] Regional Network and Partnership for Disconnected Youth*
Type: *Geographic*
Project team members: *Randi Kay Stephens, Project Leader; Bina Lefkovitz, Consultant*

Building on the success of two previous Accelerator projects, Institute for Local Government (ILG) set out with its 6.0 Accelerator project to develop a Public-Sector Workforce Cluster. Innovative Pathways to Public Service (IPPS) is the vibrant network that came out of the project, a cross-sector collaborative of more than a dozen organizations that are working to align efforts and create intentional effective pathways for youth to enter public service. In August 2019, IPPS hosted the sold-out Public Sector Workforce Summit and published a public sector workforce needs assessment for the Sacramento region that was prepared by the Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research.

Project Leader Randi Kay Stephens and Consultant Bina Lefkovitz have facilitated the development of IPPS with several key partners. "We don't really talk about networks in our work; we talk about collaboration and collective action," states Ms. Lefkovitz. Both she and Ms. Stephens, however, are clear that their work is network building. "What we are, in essence, is a collective of people who are saying 'I want to be part of the solution and I know I may be part of the problem. Let's figure out together how we can navigate forward together.'" Both women point out that a lot of their work is relationship building. As Lefkovitz describes it, "We first build the relationship to identify what assets the partner brings to the table and what their self-interests are."

IPPS hold monthly face-to-face meetings at ILG, at which attendance is almost always 40-plus individuals. Stephens points out that well-structured meetings are essential to preserving a sense of momentum for the network. This is especially true for a collaborative that is as inclusive as IPPS: many of its meetings are welcoming

first-time attendees. In its early days, the network retained a facilitator who helped to design agendas, skillfully ran meetings, and suggested practices to facilitate productive collaboration. At every IPPS meeting, for instance, their milestone chart is prominently displayed, showing all completed activities year-to-date and projected milestones as an orientation tool for newcomers and a reminder for established members as well. The ultimate catalyst to the success of IPPS, Stephens believes, is that "We all believe in GSD--Getting Stuff Done." Network meetings foster this with one portion of every monthly session devoted to small-group working sessions. States Stephens, "What I see now is that people show up at meetings for our group's long-term purpose, but they are also having side conversations about other things on their agenda. That's the network in action, and it's great to see change agents making progress on IPPS shared goals as well as other activities important to their organizations."

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Initial funding from the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office supported Los Rio Community College as the backbone agency holding administrative responsibility for the project; ILG stepped into the role when the Chancellor's Office grant ended and Accelerator funding began. There is now a leadership team in place, consisting of the most engaged members of the network. Even though ILG remains the backbone agency, partners on the leadership team help out as time and skills permit and there is a real sense of shared ownership. "If both Randi Kay and I withdrew at this point," muses Lefkovitz, "I am hopeful that IPPS would continue, and one member of the leadership group would step more into the role of convener." Both Stephens and Lefkovitz

believe, however, that the role of backbone agency, or administrative home, is essential. They also acknowledge that funding is a key challenge for sustaining the backbone role in networks.

KEY TAKEAWAYS: Networks

o Good design and skillful facilitation of network meetings—especially in the early, messy start-up stage—are essential. Retaining an external facilitator is often a wise investment.

o Every network needs a convener—the one person who will pull together meetings and attend to attendant details. Most networks also need a backbone agency to act as administrative home.

o One of the most important ingredients in every successful network project is patience. In most cases, the benefits of collective work more than outweigh the costs, but in every case it will take more time and effort to do things collaboratively than it would to go it alone.

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