

Enterprise Community Partners

Transcript of Webinar

2021 ConnectHomeUSA

Preparing Jobseekers for a Digital Economy

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*Transcript by
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Caila Prendergast: -- Dina to get us started.

Dina Lehmann-Kim: Thank you so much. Caila, can you hear me okay?

Caila Prendergast: Yep, you sound great.

Dina Lehmann-Kim: Great. Okay, thank you. Thank you so much, everyone, for being on today. We are in for a real, real treat. Today's speaker is a real expert. Amanda Bergson-Shilcock is a senior fellow at National Skills Coalition, where she oversees the organization's work on adult education and workforce policies to expand opportunities for U.S. farm and immigrant adults.

Throughout her career Amanda has worked with state and federal policymakers and skilled advocates to develop policy solutions that address the challenges facing adult education leaders and job seekers, including immigrant workers. Her areas of expertise include adult education, workforce policy, immigration, and digital literacy. So as I said, we are really in for a treat today. Couldn't be more timely. So that I will pass it over to Amanda for her to begin her presentation. Thank you, Amanda.

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock: Great, thanks so much, Dina. It's a real delight to be here with everybody today. I just have my camera on briefly to say hello to you all at the beginning. We'll be walking through the slides and I'll turn my camera off at that point and then we'll go into the conversation part with Dina.

I do want to emphasize I'm going to be sharing quite a bit of information here, but you have the slides that were sent to you in advance. You'll get them sent to you again after the webinar. So you'll have all of this information and all of these links to go back to. So no need to sort of scramble and feel like you're quickly taking notes or anything like that. So let's get going here.

Caila Prendergast: Because before we get into it, it looks like there's something on your screen, to the right that's blocking some of the background, because we just see -- there we go. Perfect.

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock: Okay, excellent. I think that may just have been the seminar instruction box. So you know me, you've just heard introduction. I'm going to tell you just a little tiny bit about National Skills Coalition.

We are a nonprofit organization. We were founded 20 years ago. We are funded by private philanthropy. We are a big-tent bipartisan coalition. We really focus on making sure that people have access to good jobs, and those are often jobs that require skills training and is more than a high school diploma, but not necessarily a four-year degree.

And my guess is that many of you across the country are working with public housing residents and others who may be at that high school diploma level, maybe they have not yet gotten their diploma or equivalent and are hoping to move in to be good middle skill-level jobs, to be able to better support their family.

So I'm not going to go into detail today about specific program models or curricula around how we train people with digital skills. That's not the focus of my organization, which is more of a policy organization. But they know that's a question that a lot of you had, because a lot of you submitted comments in advance. And it was something that -- I'm seeing as a chat message about some person not hearing anything. I'll assume I'm just fine until I hear otherwise from our our webinar lead here. And it may just be a glitch of that person.

One of the reasons I wanted to include resources slides at the end of today's webinar, was so that folks who had those more specific questions would have some really helpful resources to draw on, organizations that are working on exactly these questions. So we know that people need all three legs of the digital inclusion stool. And we knew this before the pandemic, but we really know it now. People need to have broadband Internet access, ideally not just from a wi-fi hot spot, but real broadband Internet access at home.

They need digital devices so that they're not trying to share one smartphone with five family members, trying to use a fifth generation computer that can't access certain government websites because the browser is out of date, that sort of thing. And then they need those skills, the ability to use that device and that technology effectively.

My guess is that many of the residents in communities that you all serve are juggling all three of these issues, right? Perhaps they are taking advantage of one of the low cost broadband Internet programs that some of the telecom companies offers. Perhaps you're in a state or locality that's done some additional work on that from the CARES Act, maybe your program has helped people access digital devices or maybe they're using their kids' Chromebooks that they got for school.

And maybe you're also working with residents and others who are really still working on building their individual skills. We're going to talk primarily about the third leg of the stool in today's presentation. The pandemic really brought home a new reality to folks, and that is everyone needing digital skills. You need them to do your telehealth appointment. You need them to help your kids get logged into virtual school or to do homework online. You need them to be able to have your diabetes managed, or your HIV or Hep-C, or whatever chronic health conditions you may have.

You need them to do this stuff. What had previously been a medical office receptionist whose job it was to check people in. Now, maybe you're standing outside in a parking lot holding an iPad six feet away from an elder who's trying to check in for their telehealth appointment. So we see maybe where a retail worker before they stopped working, and now you have to be somebody who's doing curbside pickup and navigating the mobile apps and being able to engage with customers through the mobile apps.

We know that at every level of the workforce, including the both entry-level jobs that many of the folks you're serving may be employed in or may have been laid off or furloughed from, digital skills are important. We see that businesses have really fast forwarded ten years of expected technological change in about ten months. It is an incredibly fast change.

We see here a retail worker. This worker happens to be at Walmart, but we see this at a lot of retail companies now. There's a mobile app for its inventory control and returning products. There's a mobile app for a price check. There's a mobile app for your HR and logging your hours, entering your sick time, and workers have to be comfortable now doing all those things. Even restaurant workers are being trained with virtual reality goggles.

This is an example from Honeygrow, but it's also happening at Kentucky Fried Chicken. And they've created a virtual escape room where Colonel Sanders won't let you out of the virtual escape room until you can show that you know how to do the chicken frying safely. We see, as mentioned earlier, the health workers are registering folks with tablet computers. Grocery store workers, completing online training on everything from how to handle SNAP benefits to how to prevent infectious disease transmission, which is not a thing that we used to think grocery workers needed to know in the pre-pandemic times.

Construction workers. I talked to somebody the other day. He said my guys are on work sites all across a big state and they need to be able to use a mobile app. Some of them don't speak English as their first language, and they have to be able to use that app to take a picture on the job site and send it to the general contractor and let them know that the blueprint schematic might need to be changed.

Manufacturing workers using augmented reality. You might be sitting here thinking, you know, I'm not 100 percent sure what augmented reality is. If you've ever played Pokemon Go or used a Snapchat filter, you do know what augmented reality is. It's when you aim your cell phone camera at something and you just see the real-life image through the camera, but then you also see a little animation or some sort of cartoon display over it.

So if you're assembling an aircraft, you might be wearing a helmet that shows you the picture of the actual aircraft piece you're looking at, but overlaid on top of that would be a little drawing of a schematic or a chart showing you where that piece needs to be attached to another piece. But we know also that workers have really crucial digital skill gaps.

I'm going to share a little bit of data with you. My hope is that coming out of today's conversation, you're going to feel empowered to both use this data, use these charts and graphs if they're ever useful to you, to educate your colleagues and your partners about what kinds of skills challenges that your residents in your communities are facing. To connect, effectively, your partnerships with adult education providers, folks who teach GED high school equivalency classes, those folks who teach English as a second language classes, workforce development providers, careers and one stops.

Your state may have its own name for what those are called. Maybe give you an opportunity to capitalize on some federal funding that can be used to help people build digital skills and to learn a little bit about some program options. So let's look at some data first. About a third of workers - and this is data that was taken before the pandemic. This was currently employed workers aged 16 to 64.

That's a third of workers have few or no digital skills. And most of these folks have a high school education or less. So the left-hand side of the screen, you see folks with no digital skills. On the right-hand side, limited digital skills. In both cases, you can see almost everybody has either a high school credential or a below high school level of education. We see this. This is not a problem that's going to get solved when some workers retire from the workforce.

First of all, that's kind of unfair to a lot of older workers who are actually pretty good with technology. And second of all, that overlooks the fact that there is actually a fair number of younger workers who struggle with technology. And you can see, again, no digital skills on the left-hand side of this chart, limited digital skills on the right-hand. And you can see that quite a chunk of the people with no digital skills are below the age of 35. Those are those bright green bars showing who's below the age of 35.

We see that digital skill gaps affect people of all backgrounds, so regardless of the major ethnicity of the people in the communities that you serve, they are likely to be facing digital skills challenges. And yet we know that lots of workers who have digital skills gaps are working in jobs that require them to use computers.

So how are they doing this? They are putting a lot of time and energy into covering for and compensating for their skill gaps. They take work home to do it at night so that they can get a child or a spouse to help them. They ask a coworker or even a supervisor for help. And that is a productivity challenge. So we know that a lot of folks who probably resemble the residents and the community members that you serve in your programs are muddling through.

But it's hard on them to be muddling through and it would be better for them and for the businesses that employ them if they had access to better training that could help them build those skills. And we see that even one in five workers with no digital skills are supervising other workers and one-third of workers with limited skills are supervising other workers. So I call this the sort of productivity bottleneck.

If your boss isn't comfortable with technology, that might slow down the whole department or your whole shift. And that can be a real challenge for workers, even if their own skills are actually okay. So there's a whole bunch of partners that can be valuable allies to you in addressing these issues. My guess is that many of you listening to me today are already partnering with a number of these organizations and entities.

I just want to call them out here in case you may not already be connected with them in your community. Local workforce boards. There's one in every community. It may cover several counties, it may cover one county, depending on how big the area that you're in looks like. Community colleges, particularly the noncredit side of community colleges, visit the adult education and workforce training. Nonprofit adult education providers, community-based nonprofit organizations.

Public libraries can be amazing partners on these issues. The American Library Association and the Public Library Association are really doing a lot of work in this area. Digital inclusion advocates. I'll talk about that a little bit later.

And then labor-management training funds. So this is nonprofit organizations that exist because a labor union has a contract with an employer that has a small percentage of every worker's money is going to go into a training fund. It could be a building or a janitorial worker or a health care worker, and maybe two cents out of every wage for every hour you worked is going to go into a training fund. And that training fund might want to partner with an organization or an entity like yours.

There's a series of federal policies that can actually support digital inclusion activities, starting with the CARES Act and other COVID relief legislation; the SNAP Employment and Training Program, which is the employment and training arm of the food stamps program; the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the WIOA; Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; and then some discretionary grants, including the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

Only libraries can apply for these grants, but libraries can partner with organizations like yours in the state to be able to provide services to, for example, your housing residents. There are some key elements to what we are learning about helping people build digital skills. A lot of them are pretty straightforward, kind of common sense, contextualized and integrated learning.

People learn better when the learning is connected to something they want to do anyway, is something they do in their real lives. Rapid prototyping, kind of a formal version of trial and error. We build a model of something. We experiment with how it works for any program. We say, okay this part works, this part didn't work so well. How do we improve it for the next go-round? And then partnerships between educational institutions, employers and other community members.

I did zoom through a whole bunch of information here. And I want to be able to make sure we have plenty of time for a robust conversation. So I'm going to go ahead and turn my camera back on now and take a look at the chat information. It looks like we're doing fine on the chat. I'm going to close that out. And I'm going to go ahead and turn my camera on so that Dina and I can start having our conversation. Dina, I think you might be muted.

Dina Lehmann-Kim: There we go, sorry. Hi, everyone. Hi, Amanda. Thank you so much. Can you see me okay?

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock: Yep.

Dina Lehmann-Kim: This is a first. Let me just say, this is a first in ConnectHomeUSA webinar history, just for us to use video. So thank you so much again for the great presentation. I'm going to flip my screen. I'm not going to share it, but I want to flip it to questions. We got a lot of great questions from our registrants.

And I want to obviously leave room in time for them to ask you questions. But I put the ones that stuck out to me in a few buckets. The first one is around crossing the digital divide and preparing residents for seeking jobs in this digital world. Are you seeing new job seeking techniques now in this era of COVID? And with jobs changing, or are you seeing new job seeking techniques?

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock: Yeah, that's a great question. And the short answer is National Skills Coalition, of course, is not helping individuals, jobseekers ourselves, but our members are. And the short answer is it's more that people need to feel comfortable with a range of different online activities when they're engaging in job seeking. In other words, they need to feel comfortable going to different kinds of websites to upload a resume.

They need to feel comfortable applying on their phone for a job. They need to feel comfortable if they talk to a hiring manager in person, and that hiring manager says, well, I'm interested in hiring you, but my corporate office makes me have everybody go through the online portal. People need to be comfortable doing that. And that's easy to say, but it's hard to do when a person is, has low income, might be worried about caregiving for children or elderly or disabled family members.

So one of the most important things that I think the ConnectHome Partners can be thinking about is what is a Rolodex of resources that I can have on hand? Not that I have to solve all of the questions that my residents may have, but who can I refer them to that can help? And a really interesting new emerging model is called digital navigators.

These are basically paraprofessionals and some of the ConnectHome residents may be a digital navigator or may have one on staff, who are kind of like informal tech support, helping people not just hook up a machine or see if you've got a broadband connection, but really become confident navigators and using the technology.

I'm actually going to scroll briefly forward into the resources slides here so that folks can take a look. I put a link to the National Digital Inclusion Alliance, which my guess is a lot of folks on today's webinar are already familiar with, but if you're not, they are a great resource, and they have 500 local affiliates across the country and some really useful handbooks and other resources online on their website.

Dina Lehmann-Kim: Thank you, that was great. Another bucket is, and I know you prefaced your remarks by saying you don't really talk about fields of employment necessarily. So I guess I want to ask it in a different way. How can staff that are working with residents to prepare them for jobs and employment, monitor the landscape in their community to see where jobs are growing in your area? That's part one. I'll let you answer that and then I'll ask my follow up.

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock: Sure. There's two really important sources of intelligence about jobs. The first is your partners in the workforce system. It is their job to be talking to employers all the time and finding out from employers what skills are in most demand, what kinds of job openings are in high demand.

So rather than give yourself the homework assignment of trying to do all that detective work with employers in your community, it's a great idea to reach out to your local workforce board and your local career center to check in with them. But the other source of expertise on this is your residents themselves. If they are working, if they're currently employed, they may be able to

share intelligence with you about what -- I work in a warehouse right now, everybody needs to use a mobile app.

This is the kind of thing that if somebody wants a warehouse job, they should be prepared to use this. So your residents themselves may have data for you about the jobs they're working in right now or the jobs your friends or family members are working in.

And it's really important to think about residents themselves as sources of expertise. We often think about the meetings that people have, which can be pretty significant, but also thinking about them as a source of expertise about what employers are looking for locally and what skills people really need to have. It's incredibly valuable on-the-ground intelligence.

Dina Lehmann-Kim: That's a really good point. I mean, I don't know, I don't want to speak for everyone else, but I think we think about residents every day in the work that we do. But maybe we don't think to ask them directly about what they themselves are seeing. I think that's really a really great point. My other follow-up question is you listed really good partners, but I'm wondering if you can elaborate a little bit more in terms of relationships with community colleges or linkages between community colleges and employers.

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock: Yeah, that's a great point. So the first thing, and I'll mention this because folks are not always aware of this. Every community college has kind of two components to it. They have the credit-bearing side where you register for classes and you might get a two year degree or a certificate or you might transfer to a four-year university and then have the noncredit side of the house, which could include adult education classes, sometimes high school equivalency, English language training, workforce training.

And so when you're connecting with your local community college, it can often be more powerful to connect with the dean of workforce development or the vice president in charge of adult education, because that's a more effective on-ramp for your residents in the communities that you serve. That's often the door of the community college that they're more likely to be walking in and to be served under. And that dean is the person who's talking to local employers all the time.

Who's hearing, okay, this manufacturing shop is wanting CNC operators that's trained. This large hospital is looking for phlebotomists right now, or we had to move this training online because of the pandemic, but actually, we're still doing welding training in person because we can do socially distanced training in our big welding class.

And so talking to that contact person at your local community college can really save you a lot of time because then you don't have to go chasing around, trying to talk to a bunch of different employers in your community.

You can find out what their community college folks already know. And I'll also just say, it can be a really good win/win in that your community college may be really looking for enrollment right now. Their tuition is down, their enrollment is down. They are hurting. And if they can

figure out a way to make a win/win for some of your residents to get enrolled in classes, that can be really powerful.

And you might be thinking, well, gosh, Amanda, that sounds really nice, but who can afford to pay for that? And I do want to flag for you there's a really great federal policy called ability to benefit. And it is a way for people to get access to Pell Grants, even if they have not yet gotten their high school diploma or equivalent. They have to prove that they have so-called the ability to benefit from post-secondary education.

And if that's something that you're interested in, it's good news because the U.S. Department of Education has done some webinars and some recent really useful resources on the topic. And World Education, which I've linked to actually on this slide here, has also done some webinars and resources on that. So if you're sitting here thinking, well, I'd love to connect my residents to community college, but I can't imagine having to pay for it, that might be one way to think about.

Dina Lehmann-Kim: That is fantastic. I had never heard of this ability to benefit, so thanks very much for sharing that great resource and all of the great information about community colleges. I just actually read an article last night in The New York Times about how nonexclusive, let's call them, universities are suffering tremendously because now a lot of the elite colleges have waived their standardized tests we both have taken, so a lot of people who wouldn't have normally applied, are giving it a shot.

So you have applications up at Ivy Leagues and really down at these other institutions. So as you said, they are certainly hurting. So it could be a great entre for our PHAs to reengage or engage with community colleges in their communities. So I know we're at the half hour mark. I'm thinking we're going to continue.

Maybe I'll just throw out one more question. And this one is a little bit more specific. And I think you can answer it. I'm sure you can. The question is training. And the person is interested in training and retraining opportunities for residents with limited job skills, particularly those that have worked in customer service, hospitality, and those types of careers.

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock: Here, I want to go back to a set of partners I mentioned before called Labor Management Partners, this idea that it's a collaboration between a labor union and a set of employers. You might be in a state where you don't have any labor management partnerships or you're in a state that doesn't have a really strong labor union presence. That's fine.

I just want to cite them as examples here of what interesting work is being done for folks in those industries. So for example, out in Los Angeles, the Hospitality Training Academy, which is one of these labor management partnerships, has been training former banquet servers from hotels, sort of big banquet jobs, into private bartending jobs, so that they can do either virtual cocktail events where people get a package of things mailed to their house and then the bartender is on Zoom showing them how to assemble a drink.

And that may sound a little crazy, but this is how creative folks are reading and thinking about how do we train people, knowing that hotel conference services are not going to come back

online until probably at least 2022. We're not going to be having huge 700-person conferences the way we were pre-pandemic for quite a while yet.

Another example comes from the labor management partnership called Building Skills Partnerships. They work with janitors and building services cleaners. They've done a new online infectious disease training. They have done also some green janitor work, training janitors to do environmentally friendly cleaning.

A third example comes from a nonprofit called Futuro Health, which is funded by Kaiser Permanente, the big health insurance provider. And Kaiser funded Futuro to train folks in what are called their paraprofessional health roles. And when the pandemic happened, Futuro created a new training very quickly called Advanced Telehealth Coordinator. And they're trying to train people who have some background in health care before.

Maybe they were a certified nurse's aide, maybe they are a phlebotomist, or a lab tech, or some other. And they're training them as telehealth coordinators to be able to serve folks online. There's a lot of this sort of cutting edge, trying to figure out what are the skills people have that are useful in a new role, and how do we help them build a bridge from their old role to their new role?

Nobody's figured this out magically. There's no magic bullet answer. All of the examples I'm sharing with you are happening in communities where maybe they're training 30 people, maybe they're training 200 people. It's not like they're training 2,000 or 3,000 people at once.

But I think what's valuable about these examples is it gives you something concrete and specific that you can kind of sink your teeth into and say, okay, I can imagine what that would look like. Who in my community could I talk to about what a training for my residents might look like, or who's already doing this training? And how may I connect our residents to that?

Dina Lehmann-Kim: Thank you so much, Amanda. So Caila, I don't want to hog the conversation, so let's open it up to our participants to see what they might like to ask Amanda.

Caila Prendergast: Okay. Great, thanks. I'm not seeing a ton of questions come in, Dina, so if you did have others, flag those just in case. But in the meantime, we'll start. So you've been talking a lot about how to help people get jobs. Are there any resources or guidance on how to help people keep jobs?

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock: Yeah, I mean, I think that's a great question. One thing we hear over and over again is, again, jobs are changing faster than they used to. One example, which I talked about in a number of settings, but bears repeating, is maybe your job was medical billing and coding, and now there's artificial intelligence software that is looking at the first pass of all those invoices.

You have to be the human with the critical thinking skills to be able to double-check the computer and say, oh, wait, they coded this mammogram for a nine-month-old baby; there's no way we're sending a baby for a mammogram. And so when we think about training people to

keep a job, we think about giving them the adaptability, not so much that there's a magic piece of software they need to know or even one magic skill they need to know.

We want them to have the confidence that they know where to go looking for the answer when don't know. Because that's going to happen to anybody in any job all the time. And so what you really want to be doing is kind of preparing people with the critical thinking skills and the adaptability to say, okay, I might be working in Dunkin Donuts right now and I might be handling certain things. And now I've moved up in Dunkin Donuts. I'm no longer the cashier. I'm managing people.

Where can I go to get some support for myself as a young manager? So again, not your job as ConnectHome partners to have all those answers. Definitely a good thing for you to have a strong mental Rolodex of people you can refer to and connect to to help your residents build those skills, get those connections, and be able to hold on to their jobs even as those jobs keep changing.

Caila Prendergast: Awesome, thank you. So this next question, I have a few residents who are looking for work at home jobs with legitimate companies. Is there any guidance on how these residents can avoid being scammed?

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock: Yeah. I think the short answer is there are people other than me who spend a lot more time on that question. I think you're right to be cautious. There are an enormous number of scams and quasi-scams, sort of multilevel marketing things out there. One question I would ask is, what does work at home mean to them? Are they interested in a customer service job where they might be taking calls to a call center? Are they interested in a job that is flexible hours?

You know, understanding a little better about what they are thinking of when they hear the words work at home can help you, then, talk to your workforce partners and say, hey, what are the legitimate options out here? What's the landscape of legitimate folks or what are the real cautions that I should be warning folks to watch out for? If a company is requiring you to pay them to train you, it's probably not legitimate. And yet a lot of people get caught in that trap.

Caila Prendergast: Okay. Great, thanks. So the next question is about interviewing and if there are resources that we could provide our residents to help them prepare for interviews that they might have either virtually or in person.

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock: Yeah, and I would say there's a wealth of career resources, both on the [federalcareeronestop.org](https://www.careeronestop.org) website. And some of the organizations that I listed here on the additional resources slide. So I encourage you to check out World Education's online resources for adult educators, the [careeronestop.org](https://www.careeronestop.org) resources from the federal government, the Department of Labor.

I also put some resources here from the National Coalition for Literacy and Open Door Collective who are, again, working with folks who really look a lot like public housing residents. Adults who maybe have been in and out of the labor market, who may have worked more entry-

level jobs or minimum wage jobs and who are trying to navigate this new landscape. So I would turn to some of these trusted organizations for that kind of more detailed assistance.

Caila Prendergast: Okay. Great. So next question, you mentioned libraries and community colleges, as great resources for partners. Are there any others that you, that stand out to you as great local partners in this effort?

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock: Yeah, well, let me talk a little bit more about why I mentioned libraries. Think of libraries as a physical place you can go to that will have a computer and Internet and probably a librarian who can help you. And that's all really important and that is absolutely true. But libraries are also electronic resources and often increasingly online class resources as potential collaborators.

In Philadelphia there's a really innovative example of a partnership between a group of immigrant organizations, other community-based nonprofits, and workforce providers to really serve a very underserved neighborhood in southwest Philadelphia. Primarily, African-American and African immigrant neighborhoods, where both have been disconnected from work with limited economic opportunity, even before the pandemic.

So thinking about libraries not just as a place to refer your residents to, but as a thought partner and a collaborator who could maybe have a library or a library administrator brainstorm with you about what are they working on? And is there overlap with the work you're trying to do for your residents or the needs that your residents are bringing to you. Libraries often run learning circles. Learning circles are kind of peer learning experiences that are different from a formally taught class.

And they can be really powerful in helping people take charge of their own learning and take charge of their own futures and really tap into the expertise that they have, as opposed to kind of waiting for an expert to come in and tell them what to do. There is a whole universe of digital inclusion advocates. I've touched already on the National Digital Inclusion Alliance and I know many folks on this webinar are familiar with NDAA.

And there's a whole universe of folks working on post-secondary credentials. Not just two years of the four-year degrees, but shorter term job training credentials. You have ServSafe credential for food safety, for example. And so I've also included a couple of resources on this slide around competency-based education and hiring. This is a very new emerging area of the job market.

But the general idea is particularly foster care youth who aged out of the system, or people who are returning from incarceration, or people who might face other kinds of barriers, they might not walk in the door to an employer with a traditional educational credential. I have this degree from this university and this is what I can do. But they may have other ways to demonstrate the competencies that they have.

And so I've included these competency-based resources on the slide here, because I think it's a really interesting way. Opportunity@Work calls these folks STARs, Skilled Through Alternative Routes. People who have built skills because they've been working, because they've been raising

kids, because they have been doing volunteer work in their community. And it doesn't necessarily look like a formal academic credential.

So how can they translate that into employment? And I think that's a really interesting set of partners for public housing advocates to think about, is like you want to have a conversation with a nonprofit like Opportunity@Work or with an initiative like Skillful to see where there might be overlap between the kinds of competency-based pieces that might be of interest to the residents and the work that they're seeking.

Caila Prendergast: Okay. Great. Next question, and I'm not sure she'll have the answer to this, but I'm going to throw it out there anyway, because maybe Dina will, too. "Do you know if libraries have funding for lending laptops or iPads and hot spots?"

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock: That's a great question. The short answer is it's extremely dependent on the community. It varies enormously. I think there's something like 17,000 public libraries in the United States, so huge variation there. I will say that libraries can be a really good partner if you want to apply for funding to be able to have loaner laptops or that sort of thing.

And I did a blog post early in the pandemic, which I'll make sure to send along to Dina and other students to share out afterwards with information on how different federal policies like TANF and SNAP can be used to purchase loaner laptops or to help folks get access to low-cost broadband.

As an advocate, I would be remiss if I didn't say this is a really important area for you to speak up and let your governor, your mayor, your city council people, your congresspeople know this is critically important for them to invest in, and your residents need it and help connect the dots for them.

You know, I have had people tell me stories about folks going to parking lots in the middle of the night trying to get Wi-Fi and how that's a safety issue for some people because they may not have a safe way to do that at midnight or 11:00 at night. So really connecting the dots to help your policymakers understand why these are so important for your residents, to help you win more resources to be able to provide those longer computers and that low-cost broadband to your residents.

Caila Prendergast: Great, that's the last question that I had in my queue, Dina. Did you have any that came in to you or anything else that you wanted to ask?

Dina Lehmann-Kim: The only thing I can -- we sort of touched on it, but maybe we can spend a little bit more time on this, is a question about helping residents, and the questions a little bit general, though. It's a subsidy that's helping residents affected by the pandemic, just before COVID.

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock: Dina, you're breaking up. So maybe we can try to get you some help behind the scenes on that point. While we're waiting for that, I'm just going to mention some other resources that folks may be interested in.

Dina, your sound is breaking up, so maybe I'll just let Caila behind the scenes, maybe do that via chat and get the question that you wanted to have me answer. And in the meantime, I'll just briefly describe a couple of the publications on the slide here. If you are looking for ways to talk about how race and racial equity intersects with digital literacy skills, we have a really easy to follow six-page fact sheet.

And that is linked at the path link on the slide here. I'll warmly encourage you to steal these charts and graphs, use them yourself if they're helpful to you. And to follow up on the specific recommendations we make there. If you're looking for something that you could ask your state or your governor's office or friends in state government or colleagues in the mayor's office or local government to do, our 10 state policy recommendations. Seven of them are revenue neutral and things that can be done in the executive branch.

I know a lot of state budgets are in crisis right now. So this is no time to go running around asking for new money necessarily. But this gives some practical things that can be done immediately.

And then if you're a little bit like me and you like to geek out a little bit about what digital skills really look like when you're helping people develop it, you might be interested in a really short blog post we did on what the heck is rapid prototyping and how does it help workers develop digital literacy.

Let me pause there and just see if either we've got Dina's sound back, or if we can get the question that Dina was trying to ask.

Dina Lehmann-Kim: Do you hear me now?

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock: Yes.

Dina Lehmann-Kim: You can. Oh, okay, sorry about that. My question was, which had come in from one of the people registered, is ways to help residents who have been impacted by COVID get employed. I imagine they had a job before COVID, that job went away. How can we help them find employment?

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock: I think there's a couple of things to keep in mind. Impacted by COVID could be a lot of different things. It could mean somebody lost a job; it could mean somebody lost a family member.

So one thing to be aware of is there's a great nonprofit called the Heartland Alliance. And it has done some work on trauma informed workforce. I would guess a lot of your public housing residents right now are dealing with some sort of trauma, either because of the pandemic directly or because of indirect effects, like having lost a job, having lost a kind of work identity, having lost a family member or friend or even, heaven forbid, multiple family members to this pandemic.

So I would encourage folks to check out the Heartland Alliance and their work on trauma, informed workforce development. And when you're thinking about what kind of jobs to help people look for if they've lost a job or if their whole industry has been decimated, I go back to the two things I said earlier.

One, you don't have to reinvent the wheel. You don't have to run around to all these different local employers trying to figure out what they're looking for. You can have a short chat with your local workforce board and your local community college and hear what they're hearing on the ground and use that information to inform your advice to residents.

The second thing is to think about whether you might want to do an informal focus group or a couple of interviews with some of your residents to hear what they're hearing about where jobs are emerging, what folks are looking for, where they're getting hired in this moment in this pandemic.

Again, tapping into resident expertise is both a smart strategy, but it's also a reminder to people that they have expertise at a time when I think a lot of folks are feeling like they're struggling or they're overwhelmed, they're always being reminded of all the things they don't have. Being able to remind them about what they do have, like knowledge about the world is a really powerful thing.

And we say in the education world that having a sense of self-efficacy is enormously important. Self-efficacy is just a fancy way of saying, do you have confidence that you yourself can get control over things, can do things, make things happen? And when the world is kind of battering you because you've lost work, you've lost income, your kids are struggling, people might be having mental health crises, it's really easy to lose that sense of self efficacy.

The one thing to think about is what are the things you can do to build up opportunities and to authentically exercise and authentically build their own sense of self control and expertise about their community that they live in, about work opportunities, about physical skills, whatever that might look like.

Dina Lehmann-Kim: That's wonderful. Thank you so much, Amanda. Caila, do you have more questions? Have more questions come in?

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock: I will go ahead and put my contact information up on screen here, just because I know folks will also be getting these slides later. But I will warmly invite anybody who has follow-up questions or who wants to brag about something cool that you're doing. I'm always excited to hear about interesting things that are happening at the local level.

So please do not be shy, especially to reach out to me any time and tell me about the great work that you're doing or what you're struggling with. And I'll see if I can provide connections or help lift up the good work that you're trying doing.

Caila Prendergast: Thank you so much, Amanda and Dina, thank you both. Just before we log off, and in the spirit of bragging and lifting up accomplishments, I wanted to flag about someone

in that chat said that there is the Bibliotheque, which is a library partnership in San Antonio, lends out hot spots and tablets. And they are a ConnectHome community. So if you want more information on that, just reach out to us. And they're actually going to be featured as the spotlight in our upcoming newsletter. So that's great. Go ahead, Dina.

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock: And I have to give San Antonio credit, because if I remember correctly, they allocated \$27 million in CARES Act funding just for different aspects of digital inclusion. So San Antonio, out there showing the rest of us how it gets done. Thank you, San Antonio.

Dina Lehmann-Kim: Yeah. Yeah, definitely. San Antonio is definitely one of the leaders in the space and also Brownsville, right? That's who, in this case, I think who we're talking about with the Bibliotheque. But San Antonio also has a Bibliotheque. So thank you so much, Amanda, for this fantastic webinar and the wealth of information you have shared with us.

I learned a lot and as I was advertising this across our regional calls, I was telling everyone how excited I was about it. So thank you so much. And thank you for being so generous with your e-mail and be willing to answer other questions that folks may have after this webinar is over.

With that, I want to also thank all of the participants. Thanks for joining us today. I know everyone is exceedingly busy. And Caila, as always, thanks for your wonderful support and organization of this webinar. So with that, thank you, everyone, for joining today. And we will be in touch soon. Take care, everyone. Thank you. Bye-bye.

Caila Prendergast: Thank you.

(END)