

# America's Promise Grants

PARTNERSHIPS — PATHWAYS — PROSPERITY

## TIPS TO ENHANCE PARTICIPANT RETENTION

### Purpose

*This toolkit is intended to inform America's Promise Grantees about strategies to increase participant retention and improve completion rates that lead to employment in their field of study.*

*The resources provided were initially developed for other discretionary grant programs or by non-federal entities that describe participant retention strategies.*

### Strategies

Participant retention strategies should be planned for at the start of a program and should continue throughout the term of the project. This requires close coordination among the grant lead, the training provider, the public workforce entity (if that is not the grant holder) and community-based organizations assisting with recruitment and delivering supportive services. The resources in this toolkit may be relevant during the project's planning stage as well as during program implementation. Participant retention is crucial to ensuring completion, employment, and supporting the fulfillment of participants earning family-sustaining wages.

### Resources

#### ■ Resources for Use in the Program Planning Phase

**1. DOL TAACCT Teleconference Summary on Student Retention**  
([www.workforcegps.org](http://www.workforcegps.org))

A quick summary from a Peer-to-Peer teleconference focused on overcoming challenges and promising practices in student and program participant retention.

[Student Retention Teleconference Summary](#)

**2. Strengthening Working Families Initiative (SWFI) Tip Sheet on Retaining and Engaging Participants** ([www.workforcegps.org](http://www.workforcegps.org))

This is an applicable resource from SWFI that highlights strategies that grantees can use to help maximize the engagement and retention of participants. The tips focus on three areas:

- Building relationships with participants,
- Structuring programs to meet participants' needs, and
- Using behavioral interventions to keep participants engaged

[Retention and Engagement Tip Sheet](#)

#### ■ Resources for Use after Program Implementation

**1. Strengthening Working Families Initiative (SWFI) Topic 7: Participant Engagement and Retention** ([www.workforcegps.org](http://www.workforcegps.org))

This broad resource includes a checklist containing four practical questions to consider when addressing issues of student or participant engagement and retention.

1. Is there a time during the intake, orientation, training, or placement process when your biggest participant drop-off occurs?

2. Do you follow up with participants who drop out of your program to determine why they stopped participating, or what barriers stood in the way of completion? What methods of communication are being used to follow-up with students, i.e., phone, email, text?
3. How have you used that information to try to limit participant drop-off?
4. How can you build deeper relationships between staff and participants?

[SWFI Participant Engagement and Retention](#)

**2. 7 Roadblocks to Boosting Student Success** ([www.unit4.com](http://www.unit4.com))

This is a short, but compelling list of barriers to consider ensuring a successful student or participant experience. Click on this link to obtain a copy:

[7 Roadblocks to Boosting Student Success](#)

**3. 10 Strategies to Increase Student Retention**

This resource highlights steps program implementers should consider as they implement their grant programs. Grantees that take the time to execute a well-thought-out plan for student retention can improve completion rates and help prepare students for successful and satisfying careers.

[10 Ways to Increase Student Retention](#)

**4. Promising Practices for Engaging and Retaining SWFI Participants**

This one-page resource was developed for the Strengthening Working Families Initiative (SWFI), and the content has practical application for America's Promise.

[Promising Practices for Engaging and Retaining SWFI Participants](#)

■ **AACC 21<sup>st</sup> Century Center**

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Center includes resources and a toolkit for colleges interested in advancing their own student success agendas.

- Creating articulation agreements
- Focusing on college readiness prior to enrollment
- Prior Learning Assessments
- Reverse transfer agreements
- Create Pathways
- Student Success Centers

[www.aacc21stcenturycenter.org](http://www.aacc21stcenturycenter.org)

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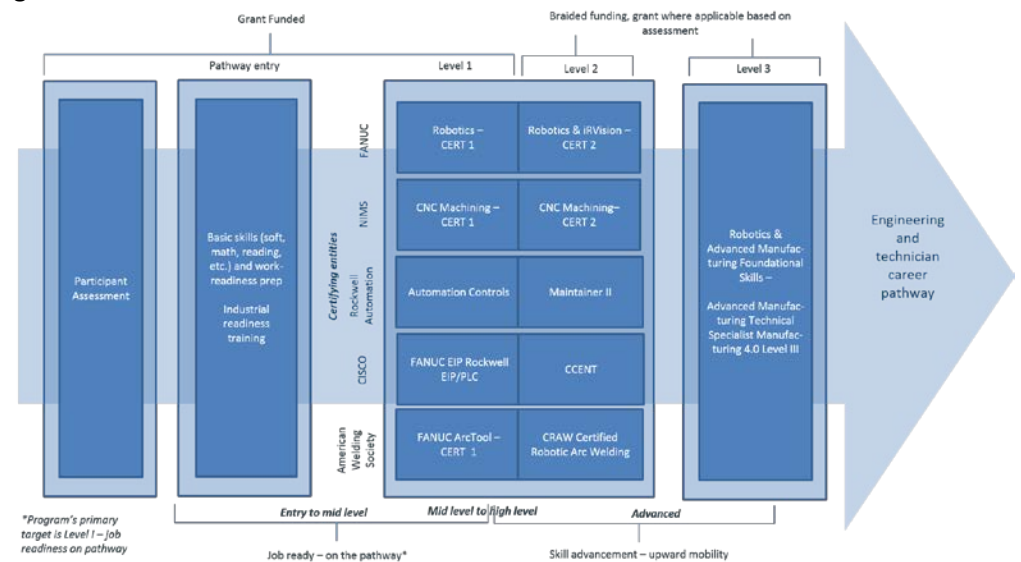
*"This grant represents an investment in students like me to help facilitate our successful transition into the working world. Without opportunities such as The Pathways to the American Dream grant, many students in dire financial situations would not have been able to finish the nursing program."*

~ Patrick Kurdila, Student, NRMWIB Pathways to the American Dream project

## Grantee Models for Participant Retention

### Southeast Michigan Community Alliance (SEMCA)

This America’s Promise grantee has implemented a holistic approach to assessing program participants for their Advanced Manufacturing and Automation Program. Drawing upon their previous experience gained through other federally funded programs, they consider and address common barriers that lead participants to exit programs before completion. Most of the barriers are external factors such as transportation, child care, and needs for other types of supportive services. SEMCA also understands the importance of closely tracking progress and having early interventions to quickly identify and address individuals who are falling behind. Key to this strategy is close coordination between the grant administrator, the public workforce system, the training providers, and employer partners. Together they consider all factors that contribute to the recruitment, retention and completion of program participants. This approach to serving the “whole” participant is yielding great results and has the grant on track to meet or exceed all of their program goals.



### New River/Mount Rogers Workforce Investment Area Consortium Board (NRMRWIACB)

New River / Mount Rogers Workforce Investment Board Consortium has great success with participant retention by thoroughly vetting participants prior to enrollment in the program and also strategically tracking participants along their journey to monitor for signs of challenge or potential barriers. They have created a “traffic light” tracking system where their Navigators keep updates on various categories for each program participant. These are reviewed weekly to address any potential “yellow” or “red flags”. Navigators keep in constant communication and check-in on participants monthly. This process can be as simple as sending a text message asking, “how things are going?” or “are you having any issues with the program”. This informal method allows for quick responses and a more personal relationship. This relationship has also helped them as they look to verify employment after the program.