

# Employer Investment in HPOG



ADMINISTRATION FOR  
**CHILDREN & FAMILIES**

**HPOG**  
Health Profession Opportunity Grants  
OFFICE OF FAMILY ASSISTANCE

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## Introduction

In 2010, Congress authorized the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) Program to develop demonstration projects that provide Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients and other eligible low-income individuals with the “opportunity to obtain education and training for occupations in the healthcare field that pay well and are expected to either experience labor shortages or be in high demand.”<sup>1</sup>

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) oversees the HPOG Program. Within ACF, the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) administers the HPOG Program. In 2010, ACF awarded 32 5-year HPOG grants to organizations across 23 states. This first round of grants is known as HPOG 1.0. In 2015, ACF made a new set of 32 5-year grant awards to organizations across 21 states, with approximately \$72 million paid out annually. A little more than half of the grantees from this second round of grants (17 of 32) had previously received funding through HPOG 1.0. The rest were new HPOG grantees. This second round of grants is known as HPOG 2.0.

HPOG provides education and training to TANF recipients and other low-income individuals to prepare them for healthcare occupations that pay well and are in demand. The program is responsive to community workforce needs and improves job prospects for adults, matching careers in a growing field with people who are eager to fill them.

Many Americans struggle to find jobs that pay enough for them to support their families and accomplish their dreams. At the same time, many healthcare employers have trouble finding qualified staff with the training and technical expertise required to provide the high quality of care their patients need. One reason for this divide is that many potential employees lack the necessary skills to fill those positions.

The HPOG Program is an effort to close the gap between the skills and abilities that TANF recipients and other low-income individuals currently possess and those that the healthcare employers require in their workforce. HPOG utilizes a career pathway strategy, a series of connected education and training programs coupled with support services that enable individuals to secure industry-relevant certification and obtain employment within an occupational area. They can then advance to higher levels through stackable credentials and a clearly articulated career path. HPOG participants receive the opportunity to obtain higher education, training, and support services needed to secure positions that have the potential for sustainability and advancement, ultimately leading these individuals on a pathway to financial self-sufficiency.

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<sup>1</sup> HPOG was authorized by the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), Public Law 111-148, 124 Stat. 119, March 23, 2010, sect. 5507(a), “Demonstration Projects to Provide Low-Income Individuals with Opportunities for Education, Training, and Career Advancement to Address Health Professions Workforce Needs,” adding sect. 2008(a) to the Social Security Act, 42 U.S.C. 1397g(a), and extended by the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018, Pub. L. 115-123, through fiscal year 2019.

## Overview

One of the intentions of the HPOG Program is to prepare individuals for employment. Therefore, it is imperative that healthcare employers find value in the program. By consistently hiring HPOG Program participants, employers confirm that this model prepares people to work in high-demand occupations. In addition, the employers' level of engagement with the HPOG Program grantees reflects employer satisfaction. This paper will examine what deep employer engagement looks like and which elements of the HPOG Program and actions by grantees provided the incentive for employers to engage with the program and its participants.

Deep employer engagement is defined as taking an active role in several, if not most, phases of the HPOG programs. Deep employer engagement might also include employers changing internal processes, systems, or policies to accommodate HPOG graduates. In several cases, the partnership with the grantee has proven so valuable the employer determined its current way of doing business was not sufficient to enable entry of qualified talent to their organization. By changing their processes, systems, or policies, employers are now able to source and hire from a new, previously overlooked pool of talent they find in the HPOG graduates, thus greatly benefiting their business.

Four HPOG grantees and their employer partners were interviewed for this paper: Cook Inlet Tribal Council, Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County, Volunteers of America Texas, and Montefiore Medical Center. The findings from those interviews indicate that **three key elements** of the HPOG Program and **three key actions** by grantees caused the employer to deeply engage with the local HPOG programs.

### **Key Elements of the HPOG Program**

1. Effectiveness of training program
2. Wraparound support services to applicants and new employees
3. Funding stream provides capacity for initiatives that otherwise would not have been feasible

### **Key Actions by HPOG Grantees**

1. Building trusting relationships with both employers and HPOG participants
2. Communicating openly and being responsive to employers
3. Filling business need and/or mission of employers

### **Structure of the Paper**

This paper will outline the nuts and bolts of several HPOG grantees' employer partnerships and pull out promising practices. It will identify factors that caused employers to deeply engage in the local programs and describe what that engagement looks like. It will examine common lessons learned and highlight components that other workforce programs might choose to replicate when creating training programs that employers will value and can utilize. It will prove that deep employer engagement occurs when HPOG grantees are able to meet employer workforce needs.

## Program Overview of Featured HPOG Grantees

The four HPOG grantees interviewed for this paper are located in diverse geographic regions and have implemented programs that are generally very different from each other. Despite these differences, all the featured grantees are successful in having their HPOG participants hired by healthcare employers. All have employer partners that have become highly engaged with the HPOG grantee and their programs.

### COOK INLET TRIBAL COUNCIL

Alaska's Cook Inlet Tribal Council (CITC) partnered with the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) and its co-managed hospital, the Alaska Native Medical Center (ANMC). CITC developed a strong partnership with ANTHC/ANMC to provide a pathway for people who want to become certified nurse assistants (CNAs). HPOG participants were able to interview for CNA Student positions, enabling those who are waiting to start their CNA program to onboard as staff and observe direct patient care. When participants complete the CNA training they progress into CNA Graduate positions, continuing their observational training. Once they obtain CNA certification, they are offered positions as CNAs providing direct patient care. CITC made modifications to an existing curriculum based on what the employer needed, focusing on career readiness skills. They are now working to develop an apprenticeship program, which may include CNA and other training programs that meet workforce needs.

ANTHC/ANMC also has an initiative called the Talent Bank that brings their target population of Alaska Natives and American Indians into the healthcare system. They work as temporary employees for 90 days, after which they may be offered a permanent entry-level position, including medical clerk, customer service, and administrative support.

### WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL OF SEATTLE-KING COUNTY

The Workforce Development Council (WDC) of Seattle-King County worked with partners to develop new training infrastructure to meet industry-identified workforce needs and improve pathways for low-income job seekers and incumbent workers. Under its first-round HPOG project, the WDC partnered with the Washington Association for Community Health (Association) to create an apprenticeship for medical assistants (MAs). The Association had heard from their community health center members about the acute need for MAs as well as new skills and competencies that would be needed to implement new models of care delivery.

The Association partnered with the WDC and the state apprenticeship agency to examine the feasibility of apprenticeship as a vehicle to address this need. HPOG funds helped support staff time needed to conduct a feasibility analysis, identify competencies and learning objectives, develop a curriculum, and add the new MA curriculum as a state-registered apprenticeship. As a result of the analysis, they developed the curriculum and went through the registration process to add MAs as a state-registered apprenticeship.

While the apprenticeship program is now self-supporting, HPOG funding was critical to early development work, and the WDC continues to partner with the Association to expand employer participation in the apprenticeship program. The WDC has promoted the apprenticeship as both a talent development tool and an entry-level incumbent advancement pathway, and has leveraged HPOG 2.0 and other funding to support adoption of the apprenticeship by employers beyond community health, including a recent pilot with a large local healthcare system encompassing multiple hospitals, a regional trauma center, specialty areas, and primary care clinics.

### VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA TEXAS

Volunteers of America Texas (VOA TX), in Houston, described two different employer partner training programs funded, in-part, by their HPOG program: 1) Lone Star Community College and CHI St. Luke's conducted a 12-week patient care technician (PCT) training program that led to another partnership with 2) Texas Children's Hospital and Life Changing Career Institute on a 12-week Medical Billing/Coding program.

Lone Star partnered with CHI St. Luke's and modified their existing PCT program to better accommodate the hospital's needs. The new program is a hybrid system of learning with 3 days a week in class and 1 day a week online with Blackboard. To supplement the technical training delivered by Lone Star, CHI St. Luke's developed additional curriculum about the hospital's culture, which focused on hospital core values, working with peers, dealing with patients, and stress tolerance. Due to the success of the dual-focus PCT program, VOA TX now offers optional workshops in career readiness and the work culture of CHI St. Luke's for graduates of other Lone Star healthcare programs, such as licensed practical nurses and registered nurses.

VOA TX's partnership with Texas Children's Hospital also enabled them to create an incumbent training program for billers and coders. Texas Children's created a new position called coder in training, so students/employees could work within the new coding system and go to a licensed coder for review and approval. With this method of training, participants get sufficient practice and master the new codes more effectively. This results in a higher pass rate for the licensing exam, and participants are often able to move into a licensed coder position within just a month of getting their license.

### MONTEFIORE MEDICAL CENTER

Montefiore Health System, a healthcare system in the Bronx, and its employer partners have a very different model of engagement. The employer partners are home health agencies with which Montefiore has maintained strong relationships. These relationships allow Montefiore to provide their employer partners with the most viable potential trainees and provide HPOG participants with home health aide training at no cost to them and with guaranteed employment upon successful completion. Through HPOG, Montefiore has added additional services, including recruitment, support services, job retention, and career pathways coaching. While the home health agencies fund their own training programs, they value their partnership with Montefiore for providing critical supplemental services they do not have the capacity to provide.

## Common Key Elements and Actions That Sparked Deep Employer Engagement

As stated above, no matter the differences in the details of the individual grantees' programs, both the grantees and their employer partners identify three key elements of the HPOG Program and three key actions by HPOG grantees that contribute to the success of their local programs and encourage deep employer engagement.

### KEY ELEMENTS OF THE HPOG PROGRAM

- 1. Effectiveness of training program:** While the structure of the training programs differs from grantee to grantee, they all effectively prepare their participants for employment. Newly hired employees understand the culture of their new workplace, they arrive to work on time, and they are ready to work. They have the core skills and knowledge they need to perform their duties. They have positive attitudes and are eager to do their jobs.
- 2. Wraparound support services to applicants and new employees:** The employers especially appreciate the support services HPOG provides. Participants receive not just bus tickets and uniforms, but also coaching and the support of a trusted individual who helps them complete training and then successfully transition to employment. When a person runs into difficulty on the job, a trusted coach who lends support and assistance makes the difference in one's ability to maintain employment.
- 3. Funding stream provides capacity for initiatives that otherwise would not have been feasible:** The HPOG funding enables organizations to build, maintain, and grow elements of local training programs that otherwise would not have been feasible for the grantee, an employer, or even a professional association. The HPOG Program enables organizations to demonstrate that a particular model of training and support can prepare TANF recipients and other low-income individuals for employment.



#### #1 Key Element of the HPOG Program: Effectiveness of Training Program

Employers highlighted the effectiveness of the training program in producing work-ready individuals as a reason for their involvement with HPOG. This effectiveness is achieved through a variety of training models and different levels of employer engagement. Some employers help adjust an existing program and others help design one from the beginning.

The common thread through the varying levels of engagement is that HPOG grantees respond to the needs of the employer and, when necessary, have adjusted their training programs to make them more effective or have created new ones.

Employers engage in the training program in a variety of ways. Three of the most common examples are: (1) involvement in designing the training program, (2) implementing the training program, and (3) doing targeted recruitment of HPOG training program graduates.



### **Employer Involvement in Designing the Training Program**

Employers became involved in designing the training program when one did not currently exist or was not effectively meeting the needs of the employer.

CHI St. Luke's in Houston, Texas was included from the beginning stages of program planning with its HPOG partner, VOA TX, and was continually involved through the hiring and retention of HPOG graduates.

VOA TX learned about the high demand for PCTs and asked CHI St. Luke's what an ideal training program for PCTs would look like. They gathered all the feedback and ideas and built the program from that input. For example, CHI St. Luke's indicated that it was important for them to hire people who were a good fit with their faith-based values and culture, so VOA TX infused cultural training into the curriculum.

Since Texas Children's Hospital's program for billers and coders is for incumbent workers at their facilities, they were involved in all aspects of the design. The hospital created the training program because one did not exist. The training program they designed includes training on Epic electronic medical records software and preparation for certification for billing and coding. In their program design they included time for wraparound support services provided by VOA TX, including supervision and mentoring for the employee/students. They also built their budget to allow for the loss of productivity that occurs when training the new coders and the cost to provide mentors for the trainees.

CITC in Alaska wanted to better understand the workforce needs of their employers, so they hosted a meeting for CEOs, hiring managers, and their training partners. These conversations brought to light the need for enhanced soft skill and communication training for entry-level, frontline staff. The conversations also helped training partners understand the demand for training in electronic medical records. This stakeholder meeting enabled CITC and its partners to design a more effective training program.

Montefiore's home health agency employer partner, People Care, helped shape a prescreening process for home health aides by telling Montefiore what they were looking for in a candidate. They emphasized the importance of compassion, sympathy, and devotion to the job. Montefiore then created a prescreening process designed to highlight and screen candidates for those traits.



### **Employer Involvement in Implementing the Training Program**

Employer involvement in implementing the training program varied, depending on several factors, such as the need for their expertise, their personal investment, and their desire to be more involved. In several cases, as the relationship with the HPOG grantee grew stronger, the employer became involved in the training program, usually participating by attending sessions to talk about work at their organization and to meet the students.

ANTHC/ANMC reported that they are very satisfied with the current training programs supported by CITC. They find the candidates from the HPOG Program present well and are prepared to work. Past hires have been successful on the job. The majority of HPOG graduates hired into the Talent Bank have been so successful that they have received an offer for permanent employment within 30 days of hire. These results demonstrated to ANTHC/ANMC that CITC's pre-employment program, which includes the HPOG Preparing Alaskans for Training in Health (PATH) Academy, is so effective that the employer does not need to get more deeply involved in program implementation.

At Texas Children's Hospital, the billing and coding training program is for existing employees, so the employer is engaged in most aspects. The hospital provides the training modules for Epic, the new medical records system. The billing and coding curriculum is set and administered online by the American Academy of Professional Coders. The training program takes place at the hospital after the employees complete their shifts. VOA TX comes onsite to provide financial counseling and coaching and connect employees to other support services like food banks and childcare services. They also pay for tuition, supplies, books, and licensing for HPOG-qualified employees. The hospital provides training space and supervision, as well as mentors for the coders-in-training.

Montefiore in New York provides additional services such as prescreening and wraparound supports to the already existing training programs run by the home health agencies. One employer partner, People Care, stated that by having Montefiore prescreen candidates, they accept people into their classes who are very motivated and who are good fits for home health aide jobs. Through the prescreening process, the candidates gain a better understanding of what they will be doing on the job. They are able to opt out if they feel that the job is not right for them. Since Montefiore has been implementing the prescreen process, People Care has recognized the importance of this component of the program, and People Care staff now attend the prescreening sessions and partner with Montefiore on the selection team.

In Seattle-King County, HPOG funding supported development of the training approach and allowed the Association to validate the curriculum with employers. This allowed the Association to build new training infrastructure in direct response to a specific healthcare employer need and create a new earn-while-you-learn pathway for low-income job seekers and individuals in entry-level positions to advance.

Employers use the apprenticeship program as both a hiring and retention strategy, increasing the pool of potential new talent and creating a career ladder for incumbents, training those who want to move up within their health organization.



### **Employer Involvement in Targeting Recruitment of HPOG Training Program Graduates**

One of the most important measures of the effectiveness of the training program is how employers target HPOG graduates for hire. All interviewed employers felt the training program was so effective that they adjusted their established recruitment processes to pursue the HPOG training program graduates.

CHI St. Luke's hiring managers are part of the team that selects students for the VOA TX PCT training program. When the training is over, they then send recruiters to the training site to do the job interviews. The recruiters and hiring managers are committed to being involved at both ends of the training program, so they can see which students are motivated and which have become highly trained job candidates. The recruiters who go onsite to interview candidates ask them about location, shift, and department preferences. If they do not have an open position that accommodates the candidate's desires and needs, they then tap into other recruiters in the health system who may have open positions that align with the candidate's preferences.

CITC's major employer partner, ANTHC/ANMC, recruits training program graduates in a couple of ways. They modified their employment screening process to ensure that HPOG participants did not get lost in the masses of applicants. Once a participant submits an application and has a complete portfolio, the HPOG Employment Specialist directly contacts ANTHC/ANMC, emailing the student's portfolio and providing a brief of the participant. ANTHC/ANMC's Human Resources or Hiring Manager then pulls the participant's online application and scouts available employment opportunities that may best fit the applicant's skills, certification(s), and interests.

ANTHC/ANMC also hires graduates into their Talent Bank. Recruiters go to the training class and help teach interview skills, which culminates in formal job interviews at the end of the course. The interviews are not traditional. Recruiters take the time to get to know the HPOG participants, inquiring about what they want to do in both the short- and long term. They often hire graduates into clinical roles, such as medical office assistant.

### **#2 Key Element of HPOG Program: Wraparound Support Services to Applicants and New Employees**



No matter the program structure, support services for HPOG participants rank very high in employers' assessment of HPOG's value. Across the programs interviewed, most HPOG grantees were responsible for providing those support services.

Because support services are so highly valued, many employers provide the time and space onsite for their delivery.

VOA TX does a great deal of retention work with students, even after they are hired. Much of it is done virtually, using communication tools such as WebEx, FaceTime, texting, and Zoom. They also have a job navigator who goes onsite to the employer and checks to make sure the employees are successful. If challenges arise with the new employees, CHI St. Luke's contacts the VOA TX job navigators to help resolve issues and provide counseling to new employees who require it. Barring any immediate need for intervention, the job navigator goes to CHI St. Luke's at least quarterly. CHI St. Luke's recognizes

they are getting highly trained candidates who also receive wraparound supports, which is an invaluable resource for them. This factor leads to deep engagement with VOA TX.

Like VOA TX, Montefiore has many strategies to keep track of participants, including text messaging, which they find to be most convenient for participants. Counselors have a set schedule for checking in with students, including touching base 7 days post-employment, and then again after 30, 60, and 90 days. If there is no interest in additional education or training at 90 days, students are considered to have completed the HPOG program but are always welcome to return if they want to advance in their careers. Montefiore also holds job club events every quarter, which bring graduates back to the agency for further professional development. These events are very well attended and provide an additional way to keep the graduates connected to the organization.

Montefiore assigns a vocational counselor and allocates the Montefiore HPOG social worker to each partner agency site. Students and graduates are welcome to drop in to their office whenever they want. The counselor and social worker also go to class to meet the students at the start of each session. They help with transportation and uniforms and are proactive in addressing challenges. Montefiore runs ethics workshops with its participant trainees, teaching students about appropriate workplace behaviors, communication skills, getting along with coworkers, and how to advocate for themselves. For example, the course teaches students how to raise both workplace and patient care issues with their managers when necessary. Montefiore also partners with a network of community-based organizations to help participants resolve barriers to employment that can cause people to leave their jobs, such as instability with housing, childcare, and transportation. A high school diploma is not needed for a home health aide. However, it is needed to advance along the career ladder. Montefiore works with training partners to help students obtain their high school equivalency and advance to the next level of occupational training.

CITC's support and wraparound services are a key to their participants' success. Both ANTHC/ANMC's recruiters and hiring managers note that participants come not only well trained but also prepared with life skills. CITC provides clothing for participants and transportation for interviews, as well as the opportunity to practice interview skills in a practical setting. CITC also provides cultural competency information to enhance employer awareness of different social norms of Alaska Native and American Indian cultures, such as how they use eye contact and speed of speech. They are currently working to increase their soft skill instruction to participants to increase self-confidence and general life skills.

### **#3 Key Element of the HPOG Program: Funding Stream Provides Capacity for Initiatives That Otherwise Would Not Have Been Feasible**



The HPOG grant provides a critical funding stream to support initiatives that otherwise would not have been able to be implemented due to lack of existing resources or the perceived risk of investing in an unknown project. The HPOG grant has been used to fund demonstration or pilot programs,

provide foundational support for program creation, or provide capacity for initiatives that had no other source of funding.

People Care stated that without Montefiore's HPOG grant they would have had to build their own training modules for communication skills and relationship building. They consider it much more effective for someone from the outside to do that work, as it contributes to building a trusting relationship between the students/employees and the coaches.

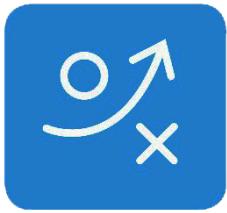
In Washington, the WDC of Seattle-King County saw an opportunity to support development of new training infrastructure that could benefit both employers and low-income job seekers and incumbents in healthcare. The apprenticeship model is powerful because it is inherently employer driven and is generally sustained through employer investment once built. However, there is often a gap in the development stage, as intermediaries like the Association are well positioned to identify and respond to industry workforce needs, but do not typically have funding to support the work associated with assessing feasibility and building curriculum. Likewise, employers typically look for proof of concept or evidence of return before they can justify investment. The WDC was able to leverage HPOG funding to help fill this gap. Once validated, the apprenticeship has been sustained through employer investment and ongoing leadership of the Association.

### KEY ACTIONS BY HPOG GRANTEES THAT HAVE ENCOURAGED PARTICIPATION AND CONTINUED ENGAGEMENT BY EMPLOYERS

Every employer that was interviewed said three actions were critical to their decision to deeply engage with their HPOG partner:

- 1. *Building trusting relationships with both employers and HPOG participants:*** The interviewed HPOG grantees and employers unanimously reported that the personal relationships grantees build with employers are a very important reason employers begin and deepen their engagement with the HPOG programs. Confidence that the HPOG grantee would deliver what they promised was key to building trust. In addition, the relationships the grantees build with their HPOG participants facilitate overcoming barriers and removing obstacles to obtaining employment and continuing work.
- 2. *Communicating openly and being responsive to employers:*** Employers described how grantees are in constant communication with them, eager to make sure the program is running smoothly and is meeting the employers' needs. Grantees are attentive to correcting missteps or changing course to make the program more effective.
- 3. *Filling business need and/or mission of employers:*** Employers explained how the HPOG grantees are able to fill a critical business need and sometimes even help them fulfill their mission. They greatly appreciate that the grantee is sensitive and responsive in meeting those needs.

When the HPOG grantee engages in these key actions, it encourages the employer to trust that the grantee will deliver what they promise and results in them finding great value in the partnership and the HPOG program.



## #1 Key Action by HPOG Grantee: Building Trusting Relationships With Both Employers and HPOG Participants

All HPOG grantees had to find the “hook” to get employers to partner with them and utilize the HPOG program. Some had to restore or repair existing relationships, while others were able to build and grow existing relationships. All worked hard to build trust with their employer partners and maintain that trust over time. At the same time, HPOG grantees were valued by employers for the trusting relationships they had built with their participants. Those relationships were cited as a key reason for the success of the participants. Having someone to turn to when challenged by life circumstances or work-related issues made the critical difference in a person’s ability to stay employed and be successful on the job.

VOA TX built a trusting relationship with the nursing department at CHI St. Luke’s by delivering a high-quality PCT training program. They were then able to leverage the trust they had earned from CHI St. Luke’s to work on other occupations within that department. They have now expanded their programming to include training for licensed vocational nurses and registered nurses. In addition, the success VOA TX had at CHI St. Luke’s greatly impressed one of their training vendors who had a relationship with Texas Children’s Hospital. Because of this, the vendor introduced Texas Children’s to VOA TX, resulting in VOA TX building a new trusting relationship. VOA TX now runs the incumbent billing and coding training program at Texas Children’s.

CITC in Alaska had to restore relationships to build trust. In the past, CITC had made commitments to employers that had gone unfulfilled due to CITC staff turnover and transitions. When the new CITC leader and staff came onboard, they took ownership of the staffing issues and lack of follow-through. By keeping their new commitments, they were able to build trust with their employer partners. To maintain that trust, CITC makes sure they are focusing on the employers’ business needs. They are growing their new relationship with ANTHC/ANMC by explaining and then demonstrating how HPOG and the training programs they support help the health centers meet their needs. They invited the new recruitment manager to speak at one of their healthcare training classes, which proved to be the “hook” to get her involved. She was so impressed with the participants’ enthusiasm and motivation that she committed to working closely with CITC and hiring their graduates into ANTHC/ANMC’s Talent Bank, where they are classified as temporary employees and can transition to regular employees after 90 days.

ANTHC/ANMC also relies on their HPOG grantee partner’s ability to connect with the new employees to support them as they transition to their new jobs. They credit this relationship with the success of graduates. They specifically spoke about the support they saw the CITC staff giving the participants during an interview event. They felt that the CITC presence provided the participants the confidence they needed to be successful during the interview and was a key component of their growing partnership.

When it came to building relationships with employers, Montefiore had several advantages. Not only were their partners the home health agencies with which they contracted, but they also had a history

of working closely together on a previous Department of Labor grant. The employers were familiar with the HPOG model, as it was similar to what they used with the Department of Labor grant, and were excited to continue the partnership. Even with those advantages, Montefiore pointed out the key to success is having the right staff and continually nurturing employer relationships. Montefiore stated that in order to achieve the deepest level of employer engagement it is critical to understand employer partners' needs and respond accordingly.

Trusting relationships that grantees built with their participants while delivering support services were recognized by most employers as a key to the participants' success. In fact, Montefiore's employer partner, People Care, believes the most valuable component Montefiore provides is the rapport they develop with the HPOG participants as they provide support services. It is extremely important to People Care that their students, and then employees, have someone to go to when facing a challenge. They find that their students and new employees are more likely to turn to someone who is not the employer when they are facing a problem. They work with Montefiore because they feel that it is a win-win situation: Montefiore supports the students who need jobs, and People Care gives the students jobs.

### **#2 Key Action by HPOG Grantee: Communicating Openly and Being Responsive to Employers**



Building the initial relationship between the grantee and the employer partner is only the first step to deep employer engagement. Continual and consistent open communication and responsiveness by the HPOG grantee was cited as a key element in solidifying and growing the relationship and programs.

Being reliable, delivering what has been promised, and openly communicating when commitments are not being fulfilled are the main ingredients to a successful, trusting relationship that leads to deep employer engagement.

VOA TX takes pride in their responsiveness to their employer partner and shared the following story: One of their clients was a veteran who suffered from PTSD issues. He was a motivated, enthusiastic candidate, and many employers were interested in interviewing him. However, just before one of his interviews, he disappeared. VOA TX reached out to a veteran's organization to help locate him, which they did. Because the candidate trusted the veteran's organization, he revealed to them that he was experiencing high levels of anxiety at the thought of having a job. The veteran's organization was then able to work with the candidate and VOA TX to get him ready for his interview. VOA TX feared the employer would not want to work with them anymore because the candidate had not gone to his interview. However, because VOA TX was transparent about the barriers their client faced, and because they immediately worked to find this candidate, communicating closely with the employer about the actions they were taking to find him and the anxiety he was feeling, they were able to work

together to resolve this challenge. Today, the gentleman is successfully working, and this experience and the actions that VOA TX took built additional trust between the employer and VOA TX.

At CITC the Employment Specialist speaks to the employers weekly or more often if needed. If something is not going well, CITC addresses it in a timely fashion. Employers need to have the opportunity to talk about challenges as well as successes. Through ongoing, consistent communication with employers, CITC gains insight on what is working in their model and what needs to be adjusted. They also are very honest with employers about the potential hires and their level of interpersonal and soft skills.

ANTHC/ANMC explained that their level of engagement is due to CITC's responsiveness to their needs. They feel the HPOG team does a great job of demonstrating the mutual benefits of the program.

Because of the close, trusting relationship the Montefiore program has with their employer partners, if People Care has issues, their manager feels very comfortable approaching the HPOG team to talk about what is not working. By raising issues as they occur, People Care and Montefiore are able to resolve those issues together, which continues to build the strength of their relationship.



### **#3 Key Action by HPOG Grantee: Filling a Business Need or Mission of Employers**

Besides the general need for a qualified workforce, some healthcare systems are seeking a workforce with demographic characteristics that reflect the community they serve, of which a subset may be HPOG-eligible people. By recognizing that an employer's hiring needs may go beyond finding anyone who can fill the position, HPOG grantees can help source and train people from the employer's target population, thus allowing the employer to address its mission as well as its business needs.

VOA TX has helped two different employers fill very different missions and business needs. CHI St. Luke's, a Catholic, faith-based hospital, was looking for applicants that embraced their values of compassion, empathy, and service. VOA TX created training modules that imparted the values of CHI St. Luke's, presented candidates that believed in those values, and helped the hospital meet its mission as well as fill critical jobs.

Texas Children's Hospital faced a regional shortage of certified billers and coders. To fill their need, they had to bring people in from out of town to do the job. However, the hospital was determined to support its own incumbent workforce in career development and wanted to upskill their billers and coders to get certified. By partnering with VOA TX, they are now able to co-invest in the upskilling of their employees. Texas Children's Hospital is deeply committed to its partnership with VOA TX and hopes to continue working with them on other workforce challenges.

In Alaska, ANTHC/ANMC has an objective to hire 80 percent Alaska Natives and American Indians. Once the ANTHC/ANMC's recruitment manager got involved with CITC's training program, she quickly recognized that the CITC HPOG program was a great referral source for Alaskan Native and American

Indian talent and that, by partnering with CITC, they could meet their overall strategic plan and mission. ANTHC/ANMC's recruitment manager stated that the more traditional way of sourcing resulted in inconsistent candidate quality, while hiring through CITC has been more reliable. The HPOG candidates are more professional, and hiring managers report they are more prepared. The managers are doubly pleased to receive quality candidates from their target population of Alaska Natives and American Indians via CITC.

## The Ultimate Indicator of the Value of the HPOG Program: Doing Business Differently

Perhaps the ultimate indicator of how valuable employers find the HPOG model is their willingness to conduct business differently. There are several examples of how an employer partner found great value in the HPOG Program, learned from it, and decided they needed to modify current practices or implement new practices to benefit from the results of the HPOG Program, specifically in the training, recruitment, and retention of a workforce that meets their needs.

ANTHC/ANMC in Alaska has several ideas on how to do business differently, including implementing a new recruitment strategy that incorporates the HPOG program. Instead of having a traditional job fair, they recently held an invitation-only hiring event. They invited all the upcoming HPOG graduates to meet with hiring managers who had a high volume of open positions. This resulted in employment offers being extended to almost the entire class. ANTHC/ANMC found the participants were very prepared for the interviews and were able to clearly articulate how they were prepared for the jobs. ANTHC/ANMC is excited to hold another hiring event and decided to schedule the next event around the HPOG class graduation. ANTHC/ANMC cites a couple of reasons for the success of the event. As stated above, they found it helpful that the HPOG team was there to support the students. Additionally, the ANTHC/ANMC recruitment manager had been to the class to talk to the participants before the event, so there was a feeling of familiarity that decreased the participants' stress. ANTHC/ANMC is also considering implementing quarterly meetings with the HPOG team to learn about upcoming candidates and share their anticipated needs. Working with CITC helped the ANTHC/ANMC recruitment manager understand how to build partnerships with other training organizations and replicate the HPOG model.



In Seattle-King County, the Association reported that employers are doing business differently in a variety of ways due to their initial success with the MA apprenticeship program. Some employers have benefited so much from the MA apprenticeship program that they have begun to incorporate the MA apprenticeship into their operating budget, taking responsibility for the apprentice program fee. Many also provide incentives for staff members to serve as coaches and accept and accommodate loss of productivity while apprentices are in training. Some employers are now sourcing apprentice candidates straight out of high school, as they have found that the apprenticeship program adequately prepares

them for the role of an MA. Many employers are using the MA apprenticeship as a grow-your-own strategy to increase the pool of potential new hires as well as promote advancement opportunities for incumbents, and are evaluating the impact of both on retention.

Montefiore's employer partner, People Care, has been so impressed by the value that the prescreening process has brought that they now hold prescreening recruitment events at the Montefiore HPOG office on a monthly basis. At these events, recruiters meet with potential applicants that the grantee handpicks for their home health aide training program. They state, “[t]o some degree, we consider Montefiore's input as a second interview. The extra steps have improved our screening process and increased our overall completion rate.” People Care sees how effective the Montefiore prescreen process has been in identifying candidates that are a good fit with their company, so they are now asking their other recruitment sources to implement that same prescreen process for their candidates.



In addition to the prescreen process, People Care has also incorporated an “HPOG day” prior to the first day of training, so Montefiore can provide services to the HPOG participants. People Care double-checks that participants have all their paperwork in order and are properly prepared for training. During this check-in, People Care and Montefiore are able to identify students' barriers to employment and can begin to work on assisting the students in overcoming these barriers. They have found that adding this component to their program helps the students orient more effectively to the training and removes barriers that otherwise would have prevented them from successfully starting and completing the class. They maintain that changing the program to incorporate this HPOG day has made their program more effective.

## Conclusion

The HPOG Program enables healthcare employers to consider, hire, and retain TANF recipients and other low-income individuals when presented with qualified candidates who meet their business need and/or mission. Employers become deeply engaged with the grantee organization when the program includes key elements from which they receive great value. These elements include the effectiveness of the training program, the wraparound support services the grantee provides to applicants and new employees, and the funding stream that provides capacity for initiatives that otherwise would not have been feasible. Employers only continue and deepen their engagement with HPOG when the grantee demonstrates exemplary performance in specific key areas critical to delivering and supporting a qualified workforce. These areas include building trusting relationships

with both employers and HPOG participants, communicating openly and being responsive to the employer, and filling a business need and/or the mission of the employer.

When employers recognize the great value they receive in return for their engagement and see the quality level of the HPOG training program graduates, employers often will change their sourcing and recruitment strategies to accommodate and hire additional graduates. These lessons learned from the HPOG Program grantees can be applied by other organizations that serve TANF recipients and low-income individuals when they are seeking deep employer engagement and partnership.