RETAIN Webinar

Reflecting, Refining, and Refreshing RETAIN

Facilitators: Jennifer Sheehy, Chris McLaren, PhD, Meredith DeDona, Jackson Costa, David Wittenburg, PhD, and GeMar Neloms

Monday, December 16, 2019 at 2:30 P.M. – 3:30 P.M ET

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>> MODERATOR: Good afternoon and welcome to today's event entitled reflecting, refining, and refreshing RETAIN. My name is Devon LaPoint and I will be handling the technical moderation for this event. If you have any technical issues during today's webinar feel free to reach out to the team by using the raise hand icon or posting questions in the chat box. We will work with you to troubleshoot any issues. At this time, we ask all participants to please mute your phones. During our presentation we will pause for questions and comments. At that time please feel free to unmute yourself to participate in the discussion. But before doing so those of you who are dialed in by phone, please be sure that the volume on your computer speakers is turned all the way down so that we can avoid any unpleasant feedback. We also ask that you do not put the call on hold as that may interrupt the meeting. Next slide, please.

And in addition to unmuting yourself and verbally asking questions, you may also use the questions box in your control panel to submit questions in chat with presenters at any point during today's event. Next slide, please. Now I would like to turn it over to GeMar to officially begin the presentation.

>> GEMAR NELOMS: Great. Thank you all. If you can move the slide one more. Thank you I appreciate that. My name is GeMar Neloms. I am the director for RETAIN Programmatic Technical Assistance and today's presenters are Jennifer Sheehy, Chris McLaren, Meredith DeDona, Jackson Costa, and David Wittenburg, and myself and we are a collaborative effort for today's joint webinar, and we are glad that you could join us. I'm going to turn it over to Jennifer Sheehy to kick us off.

>> JENNIFER SHEEHY: Thank you. And welcome everyone. Some of you are with us on the very dreary cold and wet Washington preholiday day. And others are in hopefully nicer places. We are really excited to be with you today and have this discussion about kind of some of the things that we have

seen, some of the great examples and best practices that we have seen you all incorporate, some thoughts from all of our different groups and they are all here with us today. Hopefully you will find this helpful. We will each find this helpful in our own ways. And we can circulate by e-mail afterwards and with our own state teams and our FPOs [federal project officer] some of what you found interesting.

So, with that I'm going to turn it to Chris.

>> CHRIS MCLAREN: Thanks, Jennifer. The next slide. So, in this section we are going to provide an overview and an update of some key activities related to the phase 1 extension and the focus for the remainder of phase 1. Next slide. All right. So, the DOL [Department of Labor] with the support of the Social Security Administration extended the phase 1 period of performance to enable you to have more time to develop your pilot programs and continue to enroll more participants. You have all made great progress so far but there is more to do. Ultimately, we want you to have time to develop a more mature stay at work, return to work pilot programs so you can identify best practices and be better prepared for phase 2. Next slide. So, I'm sure that some of you if not all of you can relate to this cartoon that shows a much rockier reality compared to the smooth plans you develop. It doesn't just apply to all of you in the states implementing these programs. It applies to the federal partners as well. You are all taking big steps to change the way health care and employment services are provided to injured workers. There have been a number of unforeseen challenges so far and we know there will be more. This is an iterative process and we want you to use this time to reflect on your progress, refine your approaches, and start the new year and new decade with the clear focus. It is important to remember that the point of all this work is ultimately to help people's lives by giving them a support they need to stay at or return to work after an injury or illness. Next slide. We thought it would be useful to reflect on the goals for the remainder of phase 1. The first one being to figure out what works in improving program enrollment numbers and rates. We encourage you to continue to review progress and refine your approach whether in the methods of communication and outreach to expanding to geographic areas that you may have access to with your current partners. A second broad goal and focus is to review and refine your program design so that it is best able to improve employment outcomes. Find the services and designs that work best in helping people get back to work. And we believe that you have the greatest chance for success if you actively

self-monitor your program progress and you CQI about improve processes. Continue to actively review these interim outcomes and refine your approach.

Next slide. Thanks. There are certain RETAIN grant requirements. However, you have the flexibility to develop projects that respond to your state's specific characteristics whether it is the characteristics of workers and employers, labor market conditions, the health care and insurance landscape, workforce system, and others, as long as your programs are within the scope of the grant requirements. For instance, the Funding Opportunity Announcement, or FOA, notes requirements for the target population of eligible participants. But there are a number of flexibilities to allow you to target workers that make the most sense for your program. There are seven required stay at work, return to work strategies but the FOA notes the specific of design and administration is at your discretion. We encourage innovative approaches that are rooted in best practices. There are required partners. However, you do have the flexibility in figuring out the best way to structure your program. We understand that developing partnerships was a significant accomplishment the required MOUs and data sharing agreements. We are not suggesting you change your partnerships, but we do encourage you to continually review those partnerships including the roles and responsibilities to determine the best way to operate. Additionally, data collection is required but the amount of data collected for each participant may vary depending on the services provided.

We know there are lots of data elements that you're required to track to improve program design and for the evaluation but not every participant is going to receive all of the services that you offer and that is okay. The bottom line here is that there have always been flexibilities in place, but we want to reiterate they are there. And it is important to review your program and make a change if something is not working. That said if you are thinking about making a program change let your FPO, TA liaison, and your evaluation liaison know about that change. In particular your FPO can provide information on grant requirements and consult with appropriate parties to make sure you get the program and evaluation TA you need to help -- to help you make an informed decision. Next, I would like to turn it over to our colleague at SSA Jackson Costa.

>> JACKSON COSTA: I just want to reiterate that both the program and the evaluation sites both share the same goals. Both of us are here to provide technical assistance. As we go through the remainder of phase 1, we will continue to provide

technical assistance on the six evaluation goals which David Wittenburg will talk to you a little bit about in a few slides. We want to continue learning about your enrollees and processes. For example, who are you seeing enroll in your project, do you know anything about the workers who are choosing not to enroll and what strategies are working best for you. We would love to learn more about this as you continue to experiment in phase 1. Another one of our goals is to fine-tune and automate as much as possible. We are going to be here to continue to help support you in completing and fine-tuning your processes and we want you to automate whenever you can. For example, the way you enroll workers into the project, for states randomizing at the individual level, how you notify the workers of their treatment group. We want your data collection to become consistent and seamless and we will continue to review the data you submit and help you to continue to collect high quality data accurately. And lastly, we are aiming to develop programs that can lead to stronger future policies. We want to build evidence. Next slide, please. All this is just to say we are on your team. Remember that all four entities, ODEP, SSA, AIR, and Mathematica are here to help you succeed. Our mission is to help you develop programs to help you improve the employment outcomes of injured workers. Consequently, none of us will be on the grant selection panel that ultimately reviews your Phase II grant applications. And as you continue to go through phase 1 one question worth clarifying is what's the difference between the requirements and guidance. Requirements can actually only come from your ODEP FPOs. They are the only ones to set or change the program requirements. Any official changes would be communicated to all the grantees through DOL. Guidance on the other hand, can come from ODEP staff at ODEP outside of the FPOs. They can come from AIR or Mathematica will be related to program implementation. However, the guidance we do give you are all coming from subject matter experts who have tons of experience and knowledge. But it is up to you to reflect on the guidance and decide what to do.

And so, what are our roles in providing these requirements and guidances? Well, the ODEP FPOs are the only ones who provide program official guidance and requirements. AIR the Programmatic Technical Assistance provider is also here to provide guidance with the program design and SSA and Mathematica are here to provide technical assistance and guidance with your program evaluation. With that being said, to talk to you a little more in detail about this, I'm going to hand over to first answer a set of frequently asked questions, I am going to hand it over to Meredith right now.

>> MEREDITH DEDONA: Thank you. I see you asked what an FPO is. It is a federal project officer. So, Kirk is yours. So, we have a number of best -- what's the word I'm looking for? They are like fan favorites of our extension of frequently asked questions. This is now our second extension in phase 1. Can we expect any future extensions? And the answer is no. There will not be any further extensions to phase 1. Which we tie in to our next question, what about phase 2? Will the start date be delayed again? The answer is absolutely not. The phase 2 start date will not be delayed, cannot be delayed. And the reason for that is that the initial funding must be awarded by the end of the current federal fiscal year which is September 30 of 2020.

So, it doesn't -- it doesn't really benefit anyone for us to extend phase 1 any further since phase 2 must start by that time.

Next slide, please. So, you have received the requirements or the project directors in the states did and you may be wondering how detailed do we need to be with the revised budget narrative. Monthly spending projections are difficult to formulate during a pilot stage. And to that we say we expect that the expenditures will not simply be evenly distributed across the remaining months or quarters, adding up to the total now requested. We often see that in initial applications, and it is understandable because during a pilot it is hard to project when you will be changing things as you learn what works best for you. So instead we expect that there will be some variation which we also expect will align to the different strategies and level of effort indicated in the revised work plan that you will be submitting. So we are looking for that variation as an indication that you are planning as carefully as you can. Next slide, please.

Is there a required format for the work plan and timeline? No. We do not have a required format for the work plan. The only requirement is that it must include a timeline and milestones as we will be using that to help us track your progress as you move forward.

Finally, we have other modifications in the works. Do we need to finalize those before we prepare this modification request to extend phase 1 and request additional funding? And the answer is no. The modifications can be combined and processed as a single modification request and we hope that will make it easier for you to process, you know, whatever you have that is currently pending.

And we will get you set up for success in the balance of phase 1. So, with that we will look at the next slide, please.

We have time for a few questions right now. And then we'll turn it over to David Wittenburg from Mathematica. Do we have any burning questions right at this point? And I will also mention that we will have some time for Q and A at the very end as well if you would like to consider any of the other questions that you might want to ask us a little bit longer. I am not seeing any questions in the chat box at this point. So, I think I'll just turn it over to Mathematica and our wonderful partners David Wittenburg. Next slide.

>> DAVID WITTENBURG: Thank you very much Meredith. Hi everyone. I'm David Wittenburg from Mathematica and I'm going to talk about evaluation technical assistance updates and I'm going to reiterate some of the things that were said above particularly about the guidance versus requirements that Jackson had mentioned. But the key point that I want to take away and reason why I am pausing on this slide is that a lot of times we see the word evaluation, we stop reading and we think assessment. But we’re really here for technical assistance and really is a guide to help you improve to get ready for phase 2. So next slide. So, when we develop the technical assistance design at the outset of project, we identified six evaluation goals for technical assistance and these goals are unchanged and they are all available and described in some detail in the state evaluation technical assistance plans. They include six general features. First the rigorous evaluation design. Second the likelihood of sufficient recruitment. Third the ability to detect meaningful impacts and fourth, data availability and quality and ability to cooperate with and support the evaluation and the ability to learn about the program. And the reason to reiterate those, even though the timeline has shifted, the overarching goals haven't shifted, and I think that's important in making sure that the technical assistance is consistent and meets your needs to get ready for phase 2. And the second bullet here on the slide is something that Jackson had really underscored in his presentation which is the TA that we provide is guidance. It is not requirements; as Jackson noted the DOL federal project officer is the one that -- has requirements. Everything coming up from us is guidance and taking a step back that makes sense because some of the things that states will do with their interventions may interact with the programmatic TA. So, states have to fully account for a number of features related to not only the evaluation, but also programmatic TA. So where are we know that we have extended the timeline? Well, states can report updates on progress at any point to Mathematica. So, we have done or are in the process of

conducting site visits with all the states and we will continue to talk with you in the coming months throughout phase 1. Next slide.

So, what does this mean? What specifically happens with the extension? So, in phase 1 for the remainder of the technical assistance process we'll continue to have our as scheduled monthly telephone meetings. But if you need additional supports or something very specific that you want to talk about, you can reach out to us at any time for supports and I think the thing that we really want to emphasize as you are implementing your programs in phase 1 is to experiment with the process because it is really about the processes to inform readiness for phase 2. And I know GeMar is going to give an example and I'm also going to give an example of ways that we can provide TA here in a second along one of the goals outlined on the previous screen. Phase 2 administrative period will be available as requested based on supports for state needs. For those in phase 2 for the post administrative period we will continue to provide ongoing supports and at that point in time the programs will be fully scaled and implemented, and we will be providing data collection and other types of evaluation activities for SSA. So next slide. So, what's an example of evaluation technical assistance? And we thought data transfers was a good example because here is an example of a place where we would want your state to experiment with the process. And a starting point would be that your state sends the data outlined in the data usage agreement. And what we want you to do is not -- don't let perfect be the enemy of the good. We want you to start transmitting the data and taking an attempt at what you think might work and if it doesn't work at the first go around that's okay. That's what phase 1 is for. It is to experiment with the process. It is really what we are looking for in these initial data runs is are the -- are there any missing data? Incomplete information? Any problems with the transfers? If there are, we will provide technical assistance and our goal is really to help you all with the subsequent data transfers that shows the readiness for phase 2 at the end of phase 1. So really the punch line that I want you to take from the slide is experiment because even if you have a problematic data transfer the first time around that's not something that is necessarily a problem. We expect that in a piloting stage. It is really getting to the point where you can show at the end oh, yeah, our state can transmit these data as we move towards the end of phase 1 towards phase 2. So, with that example, I am going to turn it over to GeMar to talk about Programmatic Technical Assistance.

>> GEMAR NELOMS: Great. Thanks, Dave. And if we can go ahead and go to the next slide. So AIR's role as the programmatic TA provider is to help you build your capacity for readiness and the actual implementation of your RETAIN model and we work in partnership with Concepts who is our communications experts and you will see a couple of examples of how many of you have tapped in to AIR or SME network and the work that Concepts does. As individual states we recognize that the technical assistance may look different, depending on the state and that's why we identify the TA needs through -- through a number of different ways but also specifically through you as states. For example, in your monthly meetings sometimes informal or formal check ins, specific requests that you may make to your specific state liaisons, and also in site visits that we have. We also recognize that the states don't always know what's needed. So, part of our job is to also anticipate your needs and we do that with the help of ODEP and the subject matter experts that we retain. We take a look at trends and processes and evidence-based practices and we also look at states as a collective. So, we do look across all of the states as well and make sure that we have identified anything that may be thematic, either ahead of time or as it manifests itself through your implementation or readiness work. And then we develop and implement TA that addresses those themes and as you will see on this slide and as mentioned earlier and you have heard this now three times, technical assistance is a guidance. It is not mandated that you follow the technical assistance. You do know that the guidance comes from a content, a very rich content and expert driven lens. And but at the end of the day we recognize that it is your state's decision on what you feel may be best to serve your purposes and intent. As we move to the next slide, you will see that it is highlighted on this slide some of the programmatic TA approaches that we use. Our approaches are varied because the states are different. You bring different strengths to the table. And so, in the interest of time I won't read everything that's on this slide, but I wanted to start with the first two columns that you see here. The broad level technical assistance that we provide includes things like our webinars, bimonthly newsletters, our podcasts, and the RETAIN online community. And a good example of how you go from column 1 to column 2 sometimes is a few of you have had some one-on-one consults directly as a result of some of the podcasts that we have had or the webinars where we have let you know that our SMEs are available to walk you through or think through some of the areas that you find important and relevant for your project. If you look at the second column, that's where you see our

communities of practice, what we refer to as CoPs and part of that is to encourage peer to peer sharing and also to give you a safe space where you can ask questions and get some expert guidance in real-time but also hear what other sites are either both successful in doing or also experiencing challenges in. We also use our CoPs to identify some potential TA needs and resources to serve all of you as states. And if we go to the third column, so if we could do two clicks to highlight the third column, and that column you see a list of some of the resources and tools that we have produced over the last year. I'll actually give an example about the OPIG, which stands for our Operational Planning and Implementation Guide. I will give an example about that in a moment. But some other examples are the communication roadmap which was developed by Concepts and it provides very specific steps and strategies that states can take for outlining a strategic communications plan for your project. We recently developed a continuous quality improvement guide and that's because CQI is part of everyone's RETAIN model. It was becoming a theme that people are inquiring about on the front end. And so while some of you already have an existing CQI approach that you wanted to use, other states wanted to know what some of the options might be that they could look at to determine what would be a best fit for how your state team and partners are implementing RETAIN. If we go to the next slide, just wanted to give an example of how TA can look for the same thing but be very different depending on what the need is for you as a state. So using operational planning and implementation guide which has 14 categories all of the states that take us up on it, we walk through and facilitated a review and want -- a couple of examples, that review helps support and align to your action planning, particularly in one case to be sure that the revision of the work plan and the timeline also reflected much more explicitly the various partner roles. But another example for how we have used the OPIG with states is to help home in on areas that could be strengthened and determine some of the best ways to do so. So, for example, in another team's case there was the idea of the metrics and potential approaches for measuring participant engagement and results which prior to the review had been much more informal versus what that state has ultimately chosen to do from a more formal lens. If we go to the next slide in the last slide for the programmatic TA portion, other examples that you can see the TA is varied but it is all about supporting you and building your capacity for implementation and successful sustainment of your retained program. So, one of -- we know that all of you all have had some challenges related to enrollment very early on when you first started. One state we worked with to facilitate an understanding about refusal conversion. And we were able to provide both guidance facilitation and resources and produce a universal resource for everyone as a result.

And then also you see in that second bullet to highlight with the lead of Concepts Communications expertise they have helped develop tailored marketing and communication material and also led the development of the recently disseminated stakeholder script. We had subject matter experts weigh in across the board and be customized by states. These are a few of examples of different types of TA and approaches that we do on the programmatic end and as each presenter before me has mentioned and referenced, we are here to assist you and help you be successful and if we don't know the answer to something, we try to find the answer. We go across our network, internal and external networks to find it. So, I'm going to pause there and as Meredith said we are opening it up to questions for any of the presenters and about any of the areas that you have heard at this point. Can we go to the next slide?

>> MEREDITH: We want to let you know that everyone has been unmuted. So, if you have any questions, at this point, you can just speak them in to the phone rather than putting it in the chat box or you can continue to use the chat box if you would prefer.

We were just so clear in our communications that there are no questions? And if it helps if you put a question in to the -- in to the question box we don't have to identify who the -- who has asked the question.

>> So, there is a question about whether copies of these slides will be provided. And I believe they will. I don't see any reason why they can't be. So, we'll give it another minute or so and if -- if we don't get any other questions, then we'll wrap up early. And ask our federal project officers to follow up with their states.

So, give it another minute or two and then we'll --

>> This is Dr. Christian; can you hear me?

>> Yes.

>> Q: I'm wondering about the flexibility the states have and if they have an idea for something that might make things work better. Who can they talk those ideas over with?

>> A: They should definitely talk to -- they should definitely talk to their FPO about it. And make sure that it is something that would be allowable, if it is -- excuse me, within the scope of the project. And then depending on how that conversation goes, if need be, they can further flesh out with

the FPO or the FPO can reach out or they could reach out directly to AIR and identify a subject matter expert to help them fully develop their idea if need be.

>> Uh-huh.

(Talking at the same time).

>> First off would be the federal project officer and then after that would be their TA liaison.

>> A: Okay. Just to take that idea one tiny notch further if they have a thing that's not working well, as well as they would like it to, with whom should the state talk about sort of brainstorming ideas for how to make it work better?

>> A: Again, that first stop should always be the federal project officer. And if -- if the FPO can't help them resolve the issue, the TA liaison is always -- always available for brainstorming and to help identify subject matter experts that can assist in solving the problem or any issue they may encounter.

>> Thank you.

>> You bet. Any questions from anyone else on the line? Okay. Well, in that case we are thrilled to give everyone 22 minutes back of your day. And we look forward to connecting with all of you again soon. If we don't connect before the holidays, we hope everyone enjoys some time off and is able to relax. And if we do, we look forward to speaking with you soon. All right. Take care everyone. Thank you.

>> Bye-bye.

>> Thanks everyone.

>> Bye.

>> Thank you.

(Call concluded at 3:08 P.M. ET)