



# Talent Development Technical Assistance Pilot Case Study



# Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b>	2
<b>Introduction</b>	3
<b>Case Study Approach</b>	3
<b>Leading Organizations</b>	4
DC Workforce Investment Council	4
District Bridges	4
Markle Foundation	4
<b>Contextualizing Washington, DC's Workforce Ecosystem</b>	5
<b>Pilot Program Tools and Strategies</b>	6
Purpose & Deliverables	6
Outreach Strategies	8
Business Survey Strategy	10
Skills-Based Hiring Business Cohort Strategy	10
Content Delivery Strategy	12
<b>TDTA Program Analysis</b>	12
Outreach Impact & Analysis	12
Business Survey Analysis	13
Cohort Participant Feedback	13
<b>Challenges/Successes</b>	18
<b>Key Recommendations</b>	18
<b>Connecting the Ecosystem Dots</b>	19
<b>Conclusion</b>	20

# Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically reshaped the workforce ecosystem in Washington, DC, and across the country. As the DC business community has pursued recovery, the persistent worker shortage has continued to impact businesses in every sector. Chronic understaffing and high employee turnover have continued to stymie business recovery. In response to this unprecedented need, the DC Workforce Investment Council (WIC) released the Talent Development Technical Assistance (TDTA) RFP in the fall of 2022. The purpose of the grant was to support Washington, DC employers in adopting inclusive hiring and talent development practices in their businesses to help meet the unprecedented employment demand.

District Bridges was selected as the implementation partner for the TDTA pilot program, to support the WIC in developing a suite of business-facing tools and resources for District businesses and support them in connecting to the broader workforce ecosystem in the city.

## **Through the grant period, key highlights of the TDTA pilot included the following:**

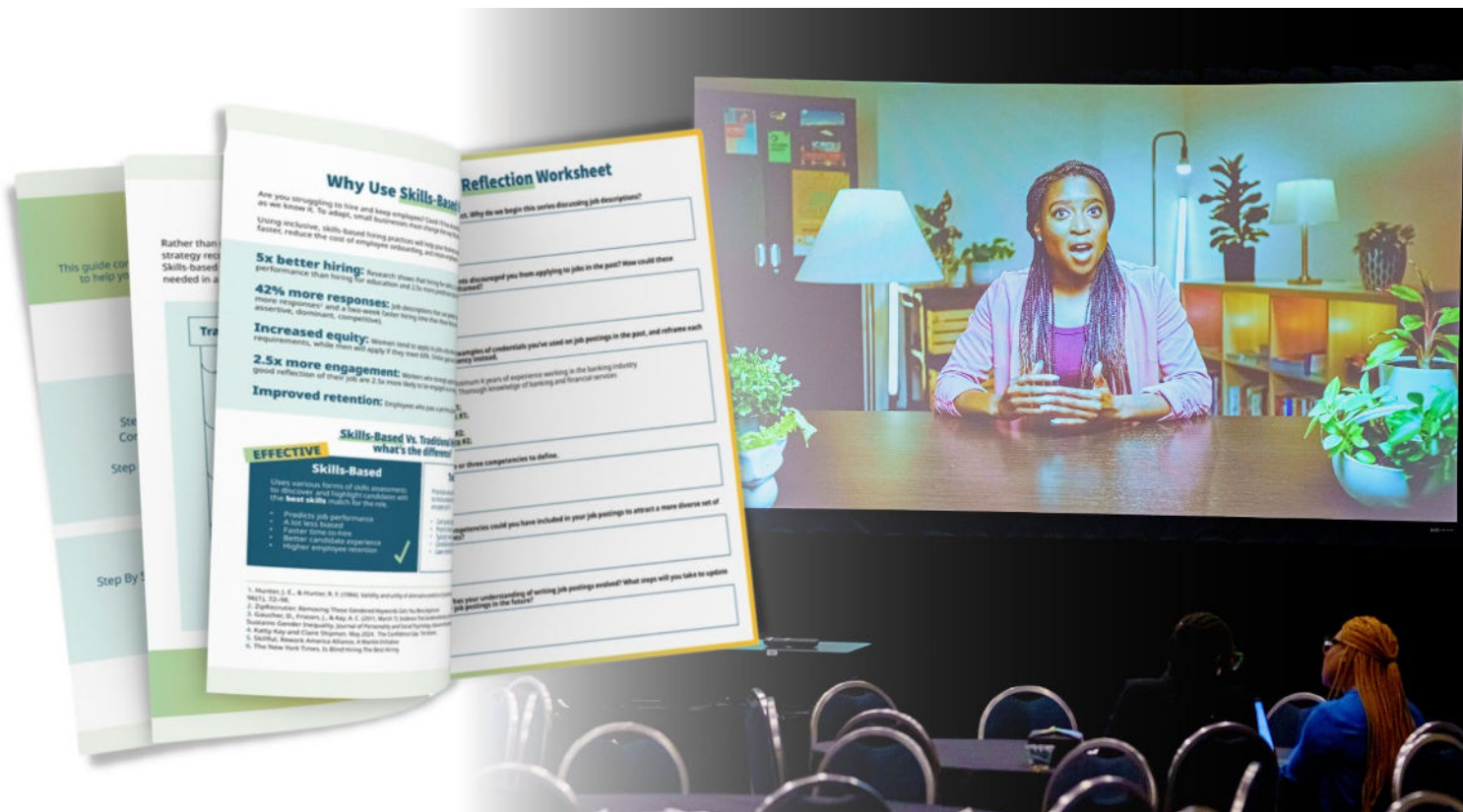
- Disseminated the TDTA business survey and recruited cohort members by leveraging the relationships and reach of 17 Main Street outreach partners to 3,167 businesses;
- Implemented District Bridges' custom-built Salesforce instance with all outreach partners to standardize data collection and reporting, and build the foundation for the Access Point partner platform, strengthening the small business support ecosystem;
- Developed 5 Skills-Based Hiring courses and associated workbook within the "Skills-Based Hiring Module" on Access Point, also be available on the WIC's website;
- Established a cohort of 60 businesses that participated in reviewing, testing, and providing feedback about the program, the training, and the accompanying resources.
- Launched an API integration between AccessPointDC.com and DC's open source data enabling the Access Point platform to directly pull business data into the platform to create robust business profiles which will enable partners to have a greater understanding of the businesses accessing content in the future.
- Tested the Access Point cohort capability to enable participants and administrators to interact with each other, ask questions, and engage within the platform;
- Finalized the beta testing for the partner platform which will enable the WIC to track granular data on the course's reach and engagement beyond the grant period;
- Held a Business Summit to formally launch the developed courses and create a networking opportunity for businesses and workforce partners; and
- Developed a train-the-trainer video training, slide deck, and training guide to support workforce development partners and the WIC team in supporting businesses in utilizing the tools and adopting skills-based hiring practices in the future.

Through the course of the pilot period, businesses expressed their interest and desire to adopt skills-based hiring practices but were also ready for the next step of how they connect to the workforce development partners in the DC ecosystem to get their open positions filled. While going into this pilot, it was understood what would be developed was only one piece of the larger ecosystem, the pilot served to validate the desire and need of the business community for more connection to the workforce ecosystem.

# Introduction

In the fall of 2022, the DC Workforce Investment Council released an RFP for the Talent Development Technical Assistance pilot grant. The purpose of the grant was to develop a suite of business-facing tools and resources for District businesses to educate and support them in adopting skills-based hiring practices. The hope was that once businesses were educated and implementing skills-based hiring for their businesses they would be ready and able to connect to the existing workforce development partners in the city who are actively supporting DC residents in finding employment.

Recognizing the grant period was only nine months long, it was important that the tools and resources developed be foundational to enable the WIC to build upon the pilot using the resources to strengthen the workforce ecosystem. The core elements of the pilot program included the development of five skills-based hiring video courses and accompanying materials, testing the content utilizing a cohort of DC business owners, a business summit publicly launching the content, and the development of training materials for workforce development partners to leverage the tools in the future.



Pictured above, the Skills-Based Hiring Workbook and a training video developed for the pilot program.

## Case Study Approach

We used an exploratory approach to this case study. While there is a significant body of research that shows that skills-based hiring benefits businesses, the goal of this pilot program was to begin educating businesses about skills-based hiring and understand barriers to adoption and gaps within the current workforce ecosystem that make the connection between businesses looking to hire using the skills-based approach and the workforce development partners looking to place individuals looking for jobs here in the District.



Pictured above, the logos of the leading organizations of the Talent Development Technical Assistance Pilot: DC Workforce investment Council, District Bridges, and Markle Foundation.

## Leading Organizations

### DC Workforce Investment Council

The DC Workforce Investment Council (WIC) is a private-sector-led board responsible for advising the Mayor, Council, and District government on the development, implementation, and continuous improvement of an integrated and effective workforce investment system. Members of the WIC include representatives from the private sector, local business representatives, government officials, organized labor, youth community groups, and organizations with workforce investment experience.

The mission of the WIC is to lead with a sense of urgency to help create a fully integrated, comprehensive workforce development system that meets jobseeker and business needs; while ensuring accountability, high performance, coordination, transparency, and effective leadership at all levels.

The WIC Business Engagement Team is working to coordinate business services across the workforce system through sector partnerships, occupational skills development grants, LMI analysis and career pathway maps, SkillsDC resources, and training and skills development.

### District Bridges

District Bridges is a community ecosystem development nonprofit, with a vision to thrive together in equitable, resilient, connected communities here in DC and beyond. The organization manages six of DC's 28 Main Street programs. Through these programs, we provide community-based economic development to over 1,500 small businesses across Washington, DC. In addition to its six Main Street programs, which are hyper-local economic development programs, District Bridges serves businesses across the city through its custom-built online technical assistance platform, AccessPointDC.com.

Access Point DC was developed to build more accessibility and equity into the provision of business technical assistance in DC. The platform addresses the need for self-paced learning, limited time for in-person workshops, comprehension difficulties caused by language barriers, accessibility challenges due to disabilities, and the suspension of in-person technical assistance during the COVID-19 crisis. Access Point features content on a wide array of topics that are relevant to the growth and development of small businesses here in the District. The platform is free and available to anyone in the District from any data-enabled device.

### Markle Foundation

One of the invaluable partnerships that the WIC established in advance of this pilot program was with the Markle Foundation and their Rework America Alliance. The Markle Foundation has developed a broad suite of tools and resources to support businesses and organizations nationwide in adopting inclusive hiring practices. These resources were generously shared with the WIC and District Bridges teams and were the foundation of the resources developed for the DC ecosystem through this pilot program.

# Contextualizing Washington, DC's Workforce Ecosystem

In 2019 and 2020 the DC WIC conducted an environmental scan to collect and synthesize information on how workforce partners and employer partners were engaging, designing, and delivering business services to identify and ultimately address employer needs. One of the critical needs identified was a persistent worker shortage that was a direct result of the cascading impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The WIC has developed resources supporting job seekers and workforce development organizations and the next step of development within the workforce ecosystem was to better engage the business community to connect job seekers to jobs here in the District.

Another key finding from the environmental scan was that 40.5% of District residents do not have a bachelor's degree, but over 68% of job listings list a bachelor's degree or higher as a required credential. The TDTA grant aimed to educate businesses across the District about skills-based hiring in the hope that this knowledge would enable businesses owners to look at competency over credentials, ultimately opening more job opportunities up to residents without higher education degrees.

The TDTA grant was a timely initiative as it is a critical piece to developing a more integrated ecosystem. In 2022, the Mayor's Office of Planning and Economic Development released its 2022-2027 Economic Strategy, called the DC Comeback Plan. The strategy outlines six primary goals that the city would work to achieve by 2028. Two of the goals directly relate to the work that the TDTA grant sought to accomplish. **Those goals include:**

- Creating **35,000 new jobs** in high-growth target sectors, and
- **Increase economic prosperity** in DC by lifting the median household income of Black residents by \$25,000.

For the city to achieve the ambitious goals of adding 35,000 new jobs to the market and increasing economic prosperity by lifting the median household income of Black residents by \$25,000, businesses in the District will need to create new jobs, launch new businesses, and increase the annual wage or hourly rate of employees. However, this growth cannot happen in a vacuum. The Office of the Deputy Mayor of Education's latest analysis adds a measure of pathway strength to support employers in accessing new pools of skilled talent and focusing on upskilling workers.

**This pathway strength analysis categorizes jobs based on job progression:**

- **Origin Jobs:** Low-wage jobs with high unemployment among workers without a Bachelor's degree
- **Gateway Jobs:** Good jobs proven to be accessible and best positioned for workers to build skills and advance economically
- **Target Jobs:** Middle- to higher-wage occupations that are resilient to automation and accessible based on job experience

The TDTA pilot initiative sought to engage businesses with "Gateway Jobs". By educating businesses with "Gateway Jobs" about the value and impact of skills-based hiring, the DC WIC anticipated an increase in the number of hires made using competencies rather than relying on credentials.

In addition to the strategic posture towards skills-based hiring the city has taken, DC WIC has also sought partnerships with leading experts in the field of inclusive, skills-based hiring and workforce development ecosystems. The Markle Foundation and their Rework America Alliance served as an invaluable partner in the development of the TDTA pilot initiative.

The Rework America Alliance supports the end-to-end process of connecting workers to good jobs and is a nationwide collaboration of employers, non-profits, educators, government entities, and public and private organizations dedicated to helping unemployed and low-wage workers emerge from this crisis stronger. DC WIC was given access to a full library of tools and resources which served as the foundation for the development of the DC-focused trainings and toolkits.

Washington, DC, like every other city in the nation, is still adapting to meet the new challenges and demands of an evolving workforce, since the COVID-19 pandemic. While there is significant work yet to be done, DC is on the cutting edge of developing the stakeholders within the ecosystem and pioneering new tools to achieve the ambitious goals it has set out to achieve. The TDTA pilot initiative is one important piece of the greater work and vision the DC WIC and the city at large is seeking to bring to fruition.

## Pilot Program Tools and Strategies

### Purpose & Deliverables

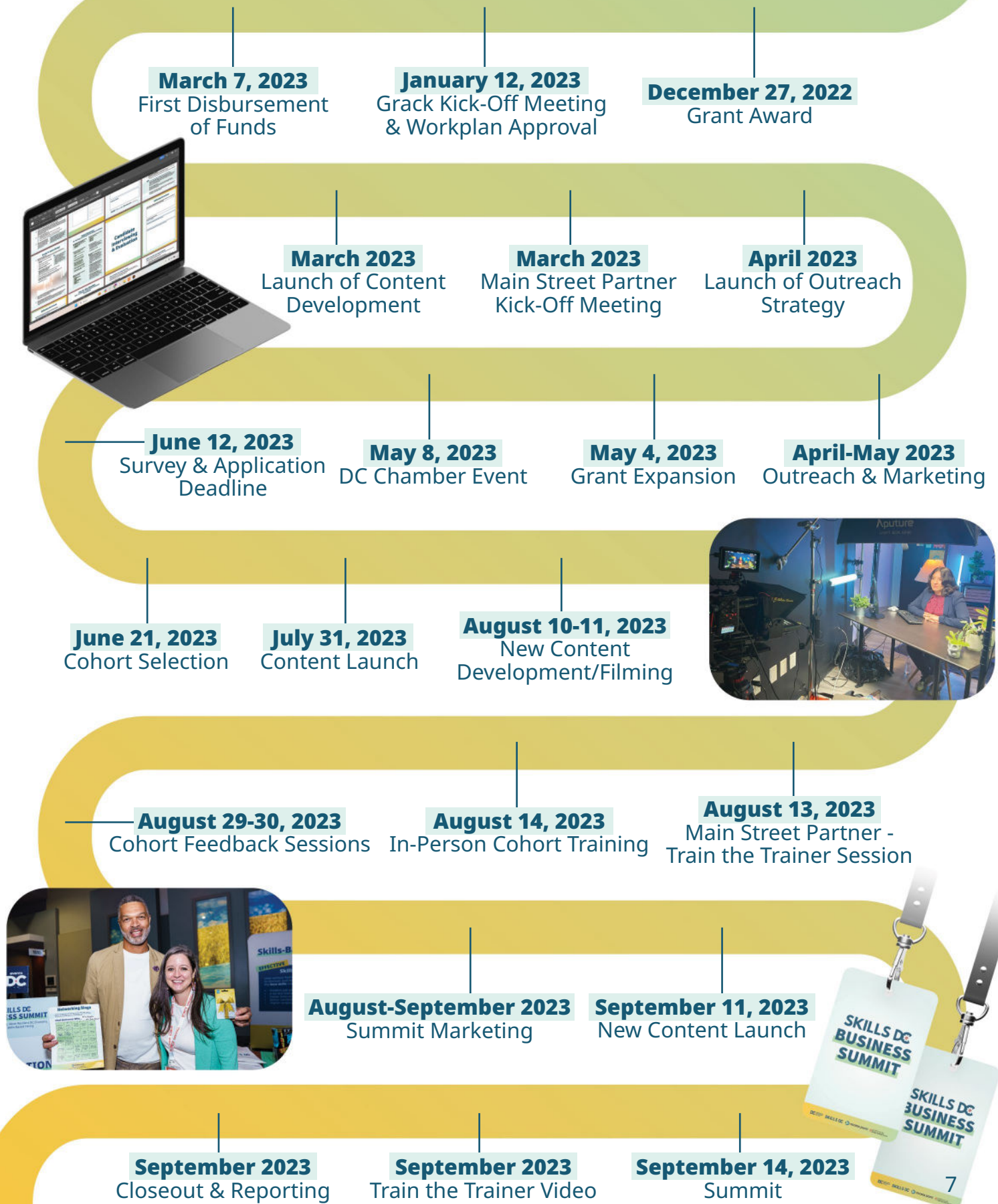
The purpose and scope of the grant were ambitious given the timeline. **The core deliverables of the original grant agreement were the following:**

- Landscape analyses and recommendations on best practices and models for implementation in the District.
- Development and professional production of program-related marketing and informational materials and content, including but not limited to one-pagers, presentations, and digital flyers.
- Development and professional production of business-facing toolkits, including an organizing framework for content, process checklists, linked or developed resources, assessments, and inclusive- hiring and talent development evaluation tools.
- Development of a business outreach target contact list and tracking information and outcomes for those referred to hiring resources
- Convening event with 150 employers in September 2023.
- Successful recruitment of at least 30 businesses to participate in a cohort to engage in technical assistance related to implementing inclusive hiring and talent development practices: management and implementation with the cohort, including technical assistance training plans for participating businesses.
- Training for businesses on inclusive and skills-based hiring, retention, and advancement practices, as needed and confirmed by the DC WIC.
- Provide at least 3-5 best practice and capacity-building trainings to workforce system partners.

In May, District Bridges was informed that additional funds were available to expand the pilot program. **With the additional funds the grant deliverables expanded to include:**

- Increasing the number of businesses participating in the cohort from 30 to 60;
- Developing 3 additional courses within the skills-based hiring training module for a total of 5 courses; and
- Launching the API integration with the cohort model on Access Point to enable better data tracking for WIC and the future launch of the partner platform;

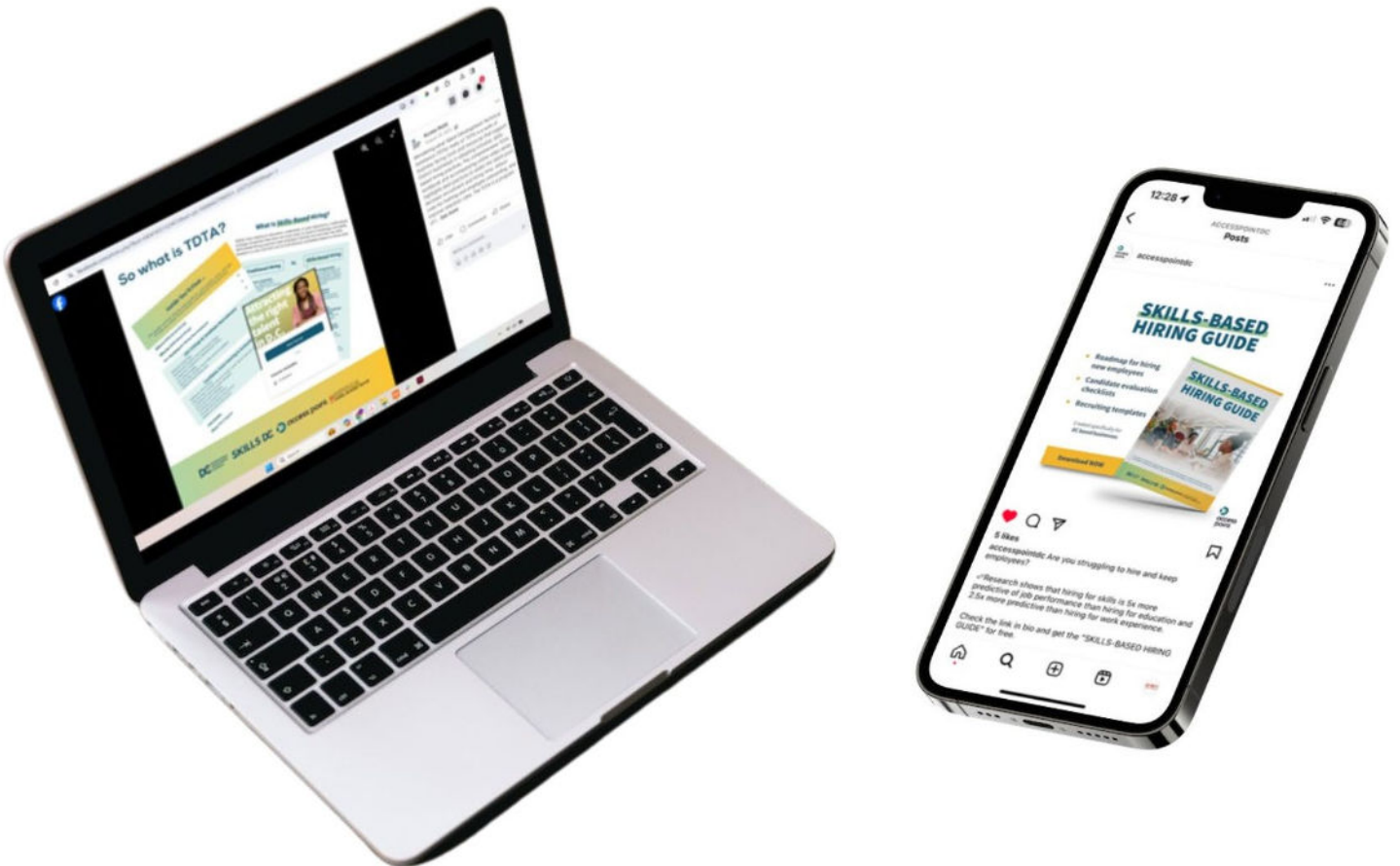
# Talent Development Technical Assistance Pilot Grant Timeline



## Outreach Strategies

The outreach strategy for this program, leveraged the established and trusted relationships Main Street programs have with businesses within their corridors. Leveraging the reach and on-the-ground connection each Main Street director has, **outreach was done directly to 3,167 businesses in all eight wards** of the city. The Main Street partners encouraged businesses to take the survey and apply for the cohort, they also engaged with businesses to understand the challenges they were facing in regards to hiring. The outreach was conducted through direct in-person interactions, flyering, direct mail campaigns, digital media including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn, as well as through digital mailing lists maintained by each Main Street organization.

The number of businesses directly touched by outreach by our Main Street partners was validated by the total number of brick-and-mortar businesses within each partner's respective boundary. However, the digital reach of the seventeen partners is much broader. In total, our outreach partners have a collective digital reach of over **70,648 followers on Facebook and Instagram** and **20,013 individuals between their online mailing lists**. While the social media followers and mailing lists are not exclusively made up of business owners, these outlets enable our outreach partners to reach businesses that may be fully remote or outside of the Main Street boundaries. Additionally, the collective reach of the outreach partners elevated the message of skills-based hiring throughout the entire ecosystem. Increasing the awareness of both businesses and the general public about the workforce ecosystem will serve to strengthen the system over time and enable better connections between partners to be established.



For many businesses, skills-based hiring is a new concept so our outreach strategy focused on helping businesses understand how the skills-based hiring framework could help them solve problems they were facing in attracting and retaining qualified employees. While the existing relationships with the Main Street organizations helped in connecting with businesses we also needed them to commit to participating in the program. To encourage participation we added financial incentives for businesses to complete the survey and participate in the cohort. For the survey respondents, we allocated \$500 as a small business grant for one respondent who would be chosen at random. The respondent who was selected was J&J Mex Taqueria from the Upper Georgia Avenue Main Street program. This business owner was not selected to participate in the cohort, however, upon the public release of the content this business owner created an Access Point profile and explored the trainings.



Under the original scope of the grant, we planned to provide businesses with a small stipend of \$1,000 to compensate for their time. When the grant was expanded, we discussed the potential of offering a wage stipend to businesses who hired during the grant period, however, given the short timeframe between when the businesses would be able to access the training content and make subsequent hires, wage stipends seemed unmanageable and hard to accurately report on. Instead, we opted to increase the stipend amount each cohort business was awarded to \$4,000 to support businesses in making financial investments in adopting the skills-based hiring framework.

For outreach and marketing for the SkillsDC Business Summit, we again leveraged the networks of our Main Street partners but also incorporated traditional marketing strategies to broaden the reach of the event. This strategy included paid advertising with Washington City

Paper, Washington Business Journal, City Cast Podcast, Facebook and Instagram Ads, and the DC Chamber of Commerce newsletter. In addition to this paid advertising, the WIC team sent the event to DC agencies including: (add from Lillian). Following the completion of the TDTA pilot initiative, an email blast was sent out to the registered attendees of the SkillsDC Business Summit, cohort businesses, and survey respondents encouraging them to explore the Skills-Based Hiring Courses on Access Point and to reach out to the WIC for additional support if they are interested in connecting with more resources here in DC.

## Business Survey Strategy

In developing the Business Survey, the goal was to better understand the challenges businesses were facing in hiring and retaining qualified employees. We collected basic business information including name, contact information, location, and sector. We also developed a series of questions aimed at understanding each business's current staffing level, their hiring needs, any challenges they were facing in attracting employees, and their familiarity with the available resources in DC. The initial goal for responses was 100 businesses. We exceeded that target with 308 unique responses. While we did have responses from all eight wards of the city, the total responses per each ward mirrored the overarching business distribution and the number of outreach partners represented in each ward. Additionally, while there were some issues with the self-reporting of the business sector, there was a good distribution of businesses from various sectors.



## Skills-Based Hiring Business Cohort Strategy

The business survey and cohort applications were open concurrently. We made it a requirement of the cohort application to also complete the business survey because of this requirement we decided to close the survey and application at the same time. There were a few businesses that submitted cohort applications but had not completed the survey. We attempted to cure those applications before the deadline but a few applications were deemed ineligible after the deadline due to the lack of response from the businesses. Of the 308 responses to the business survey, there were 265 corresponding cohort applications.

To select the cohort, we developed selection criteria to ensure the businesses participating would be the best positioned to provide meaningful feedback and actively implement the strategies they would learn. **The selection criteria included the following:**

- Businesses need to be actively hiring, prioritizing businesses with more open positions.
- Businesses offering opportunities for economic mobility. While businesses were not penalized for entry-level positions we sought to include businesses with various levels of roles and the opportunity for growth within the business.
- Distribution of sector and ward.



Ultimately, based on the applications received we selected 60 businesses and split these businesses into three cohorts of 20. The three cohorts were Retail & Hospitality, Health & Wellness, and DC Business. We tried to cluster the businesses into cohorts with other businesses similar to them. The goal of creating industry-based cohorts was to give businesses an opportunity to interact with similar businesses that might be facing similar industry-specific challenges. The DC Business cohort became a catch-all for those businesses that did not fit into the other two cohorts. However, we subsequently learned that the businesses enjoyed the opportunity to engage with the entire cohort rather than in industry-specific groups. They cited that that cross-pollination of ideas was valuable to them and outside of the cohort, they often would not have the opportunity to engage with such a wide variety of business sectors.

Once the cohort was selected the businesses were informed of their acceptance to the program and provided instructions on the next steps. They were required to commit to a virtual kick-off session, complete the two courses on Access Point, attend the 1-day in-person training, and attend the virtual feedback session. At the virtual kick-off session, we walked participants through logging onto Access Point and navigating the platform, how to engage through the cohort, and the opportunity to meet one another. Following the kick-off meetings the participants were instructed to take the self-guided trainings on Access Point. We were able to verify through the platform that all the participants had completed the trainings and followed up with those that had not. All the participants completed the online training and all but two attended the in-person training session.



## **Content Delivery Strategy**

Since 2018, District Bridges has been developing Access Point to be a one-stop resource for online technical assistance. The impetus for developing this platform came out of a direct need expressed by the businesses our Main Street programs were serving, namely the need for self-paced, accessible learning on various topics. Over the years, we have continued to improve and add features to Access Point to make it not only an invaluable resource to businesses but also to partners in the business support ecosystem. We proposed using Access Point as the delivery platform for the skills-based hiring training course for several reasons. First, the platform is already being used by businesses as a tool to access technical assistance digitally. Second, the platform enables us to track user data in a way that embedded links on a website will not allow. Third, we were able to develop and beta-test some new features including the API integration, the cohort feature, and the partner platform. These features will enable the WIC to track user data beyond the grant period and collect more complete user profiles to understand more about the businesses interested in this material.

All of the content and materials, including source files, developed through this pilot have also been provided directly to the WIC. The video content and workbook is already live on WIC's website. Leveraging these materials the WIC will be able to share, update, and repackage these materials in whatever way is most useful for the future.

## **TDTA Program Analysis**

### **Outreach Impact & Analysis**

In the post-cohort survey, we asked participants whether they were familiar with the DC Workforce Investment Council before this program. 83.3% of respondents indicated that they were not previously familiar with the DC WIC. While Washington, DC is a city rich with many valuable agencies and organizations ready to support businesses, one persistent challenge businesses face is the lack of knowledge about all the available resources at their disposal and how to access the appropriate resources for their specific business. Many businesses are on various mailing lists for agency alerts and newsletters, however, with so much support available and a multitude of stakeholders all vying for the attention of businesses it can be hard to move businesses from basic knowledge into action. This reality is particularly challenging for small businesses that have limited capacity. A high-touch relational approach is key to cutting through the noise to help businesses take advantage of the tools and resources that can help them most.

While the TDTA pilot was an excellent introduction to the WIC for businesses how they stay connected is yet to be determined. Part of the power of leveraging the relational approach that Main Street programs use is that the Main Street model ensures continuity and consistency of outreach and engagement with small businesses. Consistency is key when it comes to building a following and moving businesses to action. Currently, the WIC has few outreach mechanisms to share about opportunities that would benefit businesses. Now that businesses have learned about the WIC it will be important for WIC to scale up outreach and engagement efforts to keep the attention of businesses. Additionally, businesses need more help connecting with the workforce development ecosystem. Many of the businesses that participated in the cohort noted that either they didn't know about many of the agencies and workforce development resources available to them here in the District or that despite being aware of the resources did not know how to effectively access them and make them work for their businesses.

This pilot served as a springboard for the WIC to get on the radar of DC businesses and position the agency to be known as a resource and connector for business owners looking for tools to learn how to make skills-based hires here in DC. These businesses are now primed to connect with the workforce partners that can help them access the job seekers looking for positions.

# Business Survey Analysis

The business survey was one of the initial outreach tools that outreach partners used to connect with businesses. The survey used Qualtrix as the survey software and included 19 questions for businesses to answer. The survey could be completed in under 15 minutes and all businesses that completed the survey had a chance to win a \$500 small business grant. In total, there were 308 responses to the survey.

## Ward Distribution

The survey reached businesses in all eight wards. The distribution of the business data reflects both the overarching business distribution across the city as well as the distribution of the outreach partners in the eight wards.



## Industry Distribution

The survey asked businesses to self identify the industry or sector of their business. Within Qualtrix, we gave respondents the option to select multiple industries/secotrs. Ultimately, the question design was flawed and resulted in inaccurate results. **In Qualtrix, the question was stated as follows:**

### Business Industry or Sector (Select all that Apply)

- Business industry
- Entertainment
- Financial Institution
- Government Agency
- Grocery
- Health & Wellness
- Hotel
- Information Technology
- Nonprofit, Personal Services
- Professional Services
- Real Estate
- Religious Institution
- Residential
- Restaurant & Bar
- Retail
- School
- Healthcare
- Construction
- Infrastructure
- Security & Law
- Other

While the intention of enabling respondents to pick multiple categories was to collect a more complete understanding of their business, we did not provide definitions of what was included in each industry and thus it was left to the business owners to interpret what category best fit their business. Future surveys should limit the number of industry categories and provide definitions for each category to support businesses in accurately categorizing their business.

The District Bridges team reanalyzed the data and recategorized businesses that were inaccurately categorized. Upon this recategorization, 42% (116) of respondents were in the restaurant/hospitality industry. The next highest industry was retail with 22% (62) business respondents. This data demonstrates the realities of the current workforce challenges these two industries are facing.

## Current Hiring

The survey also asked respondents if they were currently hiring. Of the respondents, 69.1% of the businesses were actively hiring. This response was in line with the background data collected at the city level. However, a subsequent question about whether their open positions required a bachelor's degree or other credential found that only 31.8% of open positions had such a requirement. This percentage is lower than the city-level data showed. This result could be due to the prevalence of respondents from the retail and hospitality sectors, however, it is still notable as these sectors represent one of the high-growth sectors where the city expects to see new job growth.

Survey respondents also reported on the difficulty they faced over the last year in hiring for their open positions. 55% of the respondents said that hiring had been somewhat difficult. 30.5% noted that hiring had been extremely difficult. And 14.5% reported they had little difficulty in hiring. Without cross-referencing the data by sector this data matches the national data available on hiring trends. However, further analysis of this data would give more insight into the industry-specific challenges. For some sectors, the changing desires of employees in a post-pandemic world do not match the structure of their business. There will likely be some readjustments both in the employment market as well as in specific industries as they continue to adapt to meet the new market demands.

## Seeking Support

Two of the final survey questions focused on the support that businesses were seeking from the WIC. We asked, "Are you interested in receiving technical assistance related to implementing inclusive hiring and talent development practices?" 88.8% of respondents stated that they were interested in receiving technical assistance.

The next question asked, "Are you interested in receiving more information about participating in a cohort of businesses who will receive support in implementing inclusive and skills-based best practices, including access to resources the District has to offer?" A total of 91% of respondents indicated that they were interested in receiving more information about this type of support.

These two questions, overwhelmingly show the desire and need of the business community here in DC.



## Cohort Participant Feedback

The cohort members provided direct feedback about the content and resources developed through the TDTA grant through two virtual sessions, written responses, and a post-cohort survey. The overarching feedback from the cohort was incredibly positive. The videos and full transcripts of the feedback sessions are linked below in the report resources. However, we have included within this report some responses that capture the overarching feedback received.



### Two key takeaways from the feedback sessions were:

- Participants overall agreed that they met their goal; most stated their goal was understanding skills-based hiring in the DC market; networking with other businesses and learning about additional resources the City has to offer.
- Participants agreed that the Access Point training videos were extremely useful and were very clear in explaining what skills-based hiring is and why it is important. The majority of the participants weren't too familiar with this topic before the TDTA pilot program.

## Most Useful Components

**Here are some responses regarding their goals and the most useful component of the TDTA pilot program:**

"I would say the most useful to me was learning more about what the city has to offer through this program because there were so many things that I was unaware of."

"My goal was to learn more about skills-based hiring and how it can help me get staff. The most useful was getting Google certified, making connections, and the presentations were engaging and useful."

"I thoroughly enjoyed the video sessions, the training that we had to do prior to the on-site. I thought the speaker was really great. She was really engaging and she was able to give the information in comprehensive and digestible ways. I had a lot of aha moments and it built upon information that I already knew."

## Hiring Challenges

We also asked businesses what some of the biggest challenges they were facing were. Participants stated finding the right people for their jobs, retention, and salary expectations were significant challenges.

### **These are some of the things participants expressed as challenges and how the TDTA program helped them address those challenges:**

“Finding people who have great work ethic. Finding people who want to work hard.”

“One of my biggest challenges is finding consistent dependable employees.”

“One of the challenges that we tend to face is compensation expectations and very unrealistic expectations.”

“The greatest challenge that I have is the level of commitment; the work ethic.”

“Greatest challenge for our restaurant is simply getting people to apply. We used to receive a dozen applications a week...now we're lucky if it's a dozen in six months.”



The cohort also shared what additional resources would be helpful for them in overcoming hiring challenges. **The cohort members shared the following:**

“A resource that would be helpful is really training the people who are applying for our positions of this new skill-based, behavioral-based format and change what we're doing with interviewing because even when we're looking at their resumes, their resumes are very generic, very basic, especially individuals who have DC government agencies helping them with building their resume. I think that their resumes could definitely be a lot stronger which will allow us to kind of filter through you know candidates that we think would be a very good fit for us. So right now there's kind of this mitch-match with what we're given and what we're trying to perform or conduct in the interviews.”

“The challenge is hiring the right person. It was very helpful to consider hiring staff based on their skills vs experience. Not everyone needs to have food service experience to work in it. We all have to start somewhere!”

“Biggest challenge is paying people what they need / what they deserve but keeping the business profitable and healthy. Grants that could go towards bonuses or pay increases for employees could be a good way to support the local small businesses.”

“Our biggest challenge is finding candidates with good customer service skills. A lot of things are teachable but finding people to treat people the right way is a challenge.”

## Barriers to Implementation

**The primary barriers mentioned by participants included funding and finding the right people.**

- Currently our only barrier is finding qualified applicants
- The barrier I have is the talent pool and their expected pay rate.
- Finding the money to support extra staff is a challenge.
- Funding for hiring.
- Barriers- finding the right person for the job
- I want to pay people higher rates to ensure commitment and to contribute to a better livelihood for my community.
- Would like some talent pool support, maybe the city supports trial grants to bring staff in, and then we pick up the pay once they are a good fit instead of wasting so much money
- The barriers I currently face that would cause me to not implement my TDTA training is funding. As a small business, we have to compete with large corporate companies for employees and benefits.
- Time is the biggest barrier to implementing the knowledge gained from this training but it's all good information to have as we look forward to bringing on more staff.

## Results

One of the primary goals of the TDTA pilot was for businesses by the end to have successfully made new hires with the knowledge they gained through the cohort. In the feedback session, **18 participants responded that they had successfully hired staff since they joined the cohort for a total of 23 hired positions.** Two participants mentioned having interviews the week after the feedback session (end of August). While 14 participants reported having not been hired yet, they did indicate that they had made changes to their hiring practices to include the knowledge they gained through the cohort and were confident that they could implement what they had learned as they continued in their hiring process.



## Challenges/Successes

Pilot initiatives always present significant challenges and opportunities and the TDTA Pilot was no different. The goals of the pilot were ambitious and the grant period was short with only nine months to complete the deliverables. Additionally, the grant was expanded mid-way through the grant period which presented new opportunities but even less time to achieve those expanded goals. However, despite the shortness of time, the commitment and engagement of the WIC and District Bridges Teams and the Markle resources made these ambitious deliverables come to fruition.

After the grant was awarded, there was some staff turnover at the WIC creating some limitations on the WIC team's capacity which resulted in the delay of decisions or last-minute changes. Fortunately, District Bridges is well accustomed to pilots and understands how fluid and nimble you must be to make deliverables happen in a changing environment. Despite the limitations on the WIC Team's internal staffing, our teams met at least once a week to ensure deliverables were moving forward and we could make adjustments as needed.

The in-person training was a highlight for almost all of the business owners and the TDTA pilot team as well. The opportunity to network with one another was great. Businesses reported that the opportunity to hear directly from staff from the WIC and DOES was incredibly valuable and they were interested in more opportunities for such engagement.

One disappointment during the grant period was the attendance of the Business Summit. Given the interest expressed by businesses about the subject and the engagement of the cohort, we anticipated 200+ businesses to be in attendance. While registration was showing promising numbers the night before the event, only 78 individuals attended the event. The low attendance was likely due to multiple factors. The event was held in mid-September which is the end of the city's fiscal year. This meant that many of the government partners we were hoping would attend and promote the event were too busy and unable to participate. Additionally, we marketed the event as a "Skills-based Hiring Training" Event. For the businesses that had participated in the cohort, this marketing may have disincentivized them from attending as they may have misunderstood that we were sharing new content, not the content they had already received. For future events, it will be important to lean into the networking aspect of the event. That was what the businesses stated was the most valuable part of the in-person engagement. Businesses have indicated a desire for more in-person engagement but having the workforce system partners there to engage with businesses will be important in capturing businesses' attention.

Ultimately, the training resources developed for businesses through this pilot were excellent and will have a lasting impact. Additionally, the testing of the cohort feature of Access Point allowed us to fix some flaws before that rolled out later this fall. We are excited to be able to expand the partner platform to include cohort capabilities. The WIC's willingness to serve as our first government partner on the partner platform is incredibly exciting as we strive to create more connection and strength to the workforce development ecosystem.

## Key Recommendations

This pilot was an exciting and ambitious project that has resulted in the development of some critically important tools to support DC businesses in adopting skills-based hiring practices. As more and more businesses and industries adopt these practices, DC WIC has the opportunity to bring together the workforce system partners to strengthen the ecosystem and play an important role in enabling the city to meet its strategic goals. From the lessons learned through this pilot, we offer the following recommendations for the DC WIC to best utilize the tools and resources developed through this initiative.

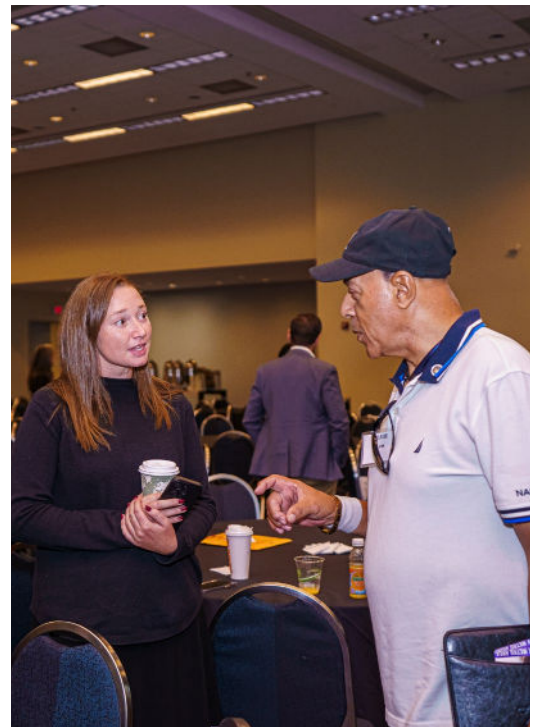
## Connecting the Ecosystem Dots

Throughout the TDTA grant period, the outreach and marketing efforts focused on promoting “inclusive and skills-based hiring”. While there was certainly interest in learning about inclusive skills-based hiring practices and the benefits these practices have for businesses, many businesses wanted more direct connections to the workforce development partners that have potential candidates readily available. Additionally, the Main Street organizations in the city serve as one of the most direct connections to business owners. Leveraging these relationships can increase the WIC’s capacity to engage with businesses without requiring the time and effort direct outreach and relationship development require.

Main Street organizations all have regular business newsletters that are sent out to businesses. In the future, if there are opportunities to share information with these organizations about workforce partners’ events, resources, or services, Main Streets can serve as an invaluable outreach partner.

## Industry-Specific Resources & Events

We learned from the feedback sessions that some of the challenges that businesses were facing around hiring are Industry-specific. Developing support for specific industries like industry-specific hiring events or matching to industry-specific workforce development partners would meet a need many businesses expressed. Marketing such events and opportunities to specific industries will also help with securing interest and ultimately attendance.



## In-Person Networking & Hiring Events

The overwhelming feedback from cohort members was that they are seeking more opportunities for in-person networking events as well as hiring events. In a post-pandemic world, business owners are hungry for reconnecting to other businesses. The connection and support that businesses feel with one another was palpable at the in-person training. Creating opportunities to foster deeper connections between businesses as well as workforce system partners will serve to make more connections between job seekers and employers.

## **WIC Marketing**

One of the critical ways to connect with business owners, particularly small business owners, is by sharing the same message through a variety of mediums. Currently, the WIC does not have a social media presence or active business newsletter. The businesses who expressed interest in the TDTA pilot are seeking opportunities to further engage with the resources and partners WIC has access to. Developing a marketing strategy for the WIC will be important to keeping these connections warm and further engaging businesses in the future. Consistency is key so starting small with what can be easily maintained by the existing WIC team will be important, as the WIC adds capacity those outreach efforts can be scaled accordingly. We also recommend leveraging existing partnerships within the WIC's network to connect and engage their respective networks.

## **Continued Partnership Opportunities**

District Bridges considered it an honor to partner with the WIC on this exciting pilot. We are excited to continue that partnership in the years to come. In particular, we are excited to continue working with the WIC in leveraging the content and materials developed through the TDTA pilot on Access Point and through the partner platform. We are also willing and excited to explore ways to support the WIC in connecting with Main Street organizations here in the District to leverage the resources available to DC businesses as they adopt skill-based hiring practices.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Talent Development Technical Assistance Pilot was a success. Much was learned through the course of this pilot program. But perhaps most notable is the desire of businesses here in the District to adopt skills-based, inclusive hiring practices. We believe that fundamentally, the business community is bought into the values that underpin the skills-based hiring approach and see the value that this approach can have both for their businesses and the greater workforce system in DC. This pilot was only one piece of a larger puzzle, but with the tools and resources developed the DC WIC will be able to continue its work of investing in the DC workforce system and helping our city achieve its ambitious economic goals.

For more information about this program please contact  
District Bridges  
[info@districtbridges.org](mailto:info@districtbridges.org)

3400 11th St. NW Suite 200 Washington, DC. 20010  
Publish Date: September, 2023