



TRANSCRIPT

Webinar: Capacity Building for Rural Data-Driven Education and Career Partnerships

MARY RAUNER

Okay. So, good morning. My name is Mary Rauner and I want to thank you all, first of all, for joining us today. This webinar and our associated work with teams from across community sectors in rural California is conducted through the Regional Educational Laboratory West or REL West, and it's funded by the Institute for Education Sciences, which is a division of the U.S. Department of Education.

The REL West, or the Regional Educational Laboratory West, is one of 10 regional labs in the REL network that spans the whole country. Our lab, REL West, serves four states: Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah. And our overarching goal is to support the use of high-quality data and research in order to improve academic outcomes for students.

Next slide, please. So, REL West's work is organized into nine partnerships. Our partnership is called the California Rural Partnerships Alliance, or the CRP Alliance, and I'm the lead for that alliance. And in our work, we provide research and technical assistance to cross-sector partnerships that focus on education and career in rural and rural-serving California. And we help them identify, gather, share, and use data to make informed programming and policy decisions. Next slide, please.

So, in today's webinar, we'll take some time to review the research about the ways in which regional partnerships engage in cross-sector data collaboration, we'll identify strategies and processes for collaborating around engaging with data, and we'll highlight some tools that can help facilitate the process.

So with that, I'll turn this over to Mara Lockowandt who will summarize some of the research that guides this work.

MARA LOCKOWANDT

I'm very excited to be on this webinar today with all of you and really excited to share some of the innovative strategies that are coming out of the work happening in our rural California communities around cross-sector data use.

Before we hear from our two presenters today that are really going to share their lessons and strategies that they've been successful at and where they're at in terms of kind of moving

forward with these best practices, I just wanted to ground our session today in a little bit around the research that has kind of been underpinning a lot of the work that we have been doing as part of this project.

So, the first piece of research I just wanted to point to is something's that's really helped inform a lot of our work within our rural communities here in California. From the onset of this project, we have been really interested in not only kind of the nitty-gritty technical ways in which rural and rural-serving consortia are working together to better use data to inform decisionmaking, as Mary was discussing, but also around the skills, capacities, and mindsets of leaders that are really integral to the success of this cross-sector work.

And for those of you who aren't aware, there's some really exciting research around networks for social change, and this article that we have on the screen right now is from an article called "Four Network Principles for Collaboration Success," and it really goes into four rather counter-intuitive principles that have been deemed to be really important in the ways in which cross-sector leaders can really advance significant change in their region. And this work is really rooted in over a decade worth of research with nonprofit leaders. And the four key principles are here on the slide now summarizing this way to...coming out of this work is really to focus on this idea of focusing the cross-sector work on a mission before individual organizations. And this is really looking at the way in which successful cross-sector leaders might in some ways be doing counter-intuitive action in terms of forsaking organizational gains for a greater mission and impact.

And so, what's coming out of this research is that this really kind of has significant implications for cross-sector work. In the short term, organizations have had to shift from focusing on their program expansion or scaling or replication of services to really investing in their peers and really investing in a network that's driving towards a shared mission. So, this is one of the kind of mindsets that this research points to, it being really critical for the cross-sector and kind of collective impact idea that was happening with the nonprofit interviewed for this work.

The other big principle that's discussed in this paper is the idea of manage through trust, not control. And this gets to the idea that sometimes when folks are trying to gather cross-sector people to come together, partners might be showing up at the table for the wrong reasons. They might be there because a funder has asked them to go or they feel compelled due to the dynamics in the region. But, really, this kind of principle is getting at the idea that more successful cross-sector work comes from when partners show up because they have an affinity towards working together and towards this shared mission.

Another principle here is the idea of promoting others and not yourself. And this gets at the idea that individual organizations are all individually critical, but, really, a lot of the work within cross-sector success is around how each organization works together and how they see each other as all integral pieces, and that each of them bring their own strengths and that the health of the overall cross-sector work is dependent on continuing to build and nurture and support and empower your partners that are within this larger effort.

And that kind of gets us into the fourth principle that's outlined in this particular paper, which is around this idea of building constellations, not stars, which I really love the imagery around and have found it to be really, again, very, very true to what we're learning in the work that we've been doing here in California around this idea that it's not all necessarily about your organization and it being spotlighted, but really that your organization is one of many nodes, it's within a larger constellation of efforts that's happening here, and that by leveraging resources, the whole kind of cross-sector work can kind of move and advance beyond what any one individual organization might be able to reach.

The other piece of work that we just wanted to bring into the conversation today—and there are so many relevant pieces of work here, but this one gets more at some of the steps and processes that we have in terms of the research that's underpinned our work here in California and also that we have found to be insightful and helpful as we are learning from our partners in the field. And this comes from a report from the OMG Center for Collaborative Learning, which is part of Equal Measure. And this report came out in 2013 and it was the culmination of a three-year research report funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. And they were really looking at tools and processes around supporting multi-sector strategies around student postsecondary success and completion.

But when we engaged with this research and started to test it out in broader context, we learned that a lot of the tools and processes here are not just about postsecondary completion and not just relevant for postsecondary partners and cross-sector work, but some of those process steps have been really helpful in kind of larger cross-sector work, getting at goals that integrate both K-12, postsecondary, and workforce partners. And so, we've put some of the data sets and activities that are indicated in this report on the slide, and so as you can see, working together is listed here in terms of step number one. These are in a linear order, but there's a lot of weaving back and forth between some of these and we're going to hear a little bit more about how that looks in operation later from our partners.

But the working together idea is really about how your cross-sector partners are coming together to establish data sharing agreements, developing data warehouses or data lakes if that's the direction that your consortia is taking. The development and assignment of roles and responsibilities in this work is really critical. Another step here is really setting the goals and data strategies, and that is really critical in order to narrow the work and ensure you're all kind of working towards shared outcomes, shared intentions, and beginning with that selection of a research question to drive the work. It also refers to the identifying of partnership goals, the milestones and ways in which you might measure progress, the strategies for qualitative data collection—should you be including that in your data work? So, that's kind of the definition of that data step.

The next step there is really around the collecting, aggregating, and analyzing the data. It's bucketed all there under one bullet, but for all of us working in the field knows that there's a lot of activity and a lot of thoughtfulness that's required around that. The idea of determining common definitions of quantitative data variables, that's a really big piece, especially in California where our different dashboards don't all have the same data definitions. The

alignment of your data collection and reporting timelines—so being really clear about that. The extraction of data, the cleaning of data, report development and refinement—a really important kind of data step there.

And then, next, engaging in data inquiry and interpretation. This is a really exciting piece of it. It's like, once we have the data, what are we doing with it? So, this is really in terms of the steps of a cross-sector collaborative around sharing the data report, discussing the data results and factors that might be underlying trends, so starting to kind of look for those patterns. Sharing the findings both internally and also externally with communicating messages and results. So, once you have your shared internal discussions, refinement, it's the external communication there to broader stakeholder groups in your region.

So, these are the steps that are outlined in this report that we find really helpful, not only in thinking about postsecondary success but cross-sector data work in general. So, happy to talk more about that later, but I want to make sure we move on now to hear from some of our partners. So, these two pieces of research has underpinned a lot of our work, have helped in supporting our rural partners think about their own strategies and moving forward, but now we really want to turn it over to them.

So, I'm going to introduce my colleague Alice Rice here, who's going to tee off our presenters. Thank you.

ALICE RICE

Great. Thanks so much, Mara. Hi, everyone. I'm Alice, another REL West staff. I now have the privilege of introducing the first of our two regional partners, Tim Gill, who is the director of Student Support Services at Kelseyville Unified School District. He's going to be talking about securing regional buy-in for cross-sector work. Tim?

TIM GILL

Hi. Good afternoon, everyone. Alice, can everybody hear me? Am I unmuted?

ALICE RICE

Yes, we can hear you.

TIM GILL

Okay, good. So, hi. I'm Tim Gill from Kelseyville Unified School District in Lake County, California. To be honest, I'm reading through where everybody's from and what everybody does that's on this webinar; it's a pretty impressive group. I'll try to do my best to give you a good sense of what's happening in our little neck of the woods.

So, Kelseyville Unified School District is a small rural school district. We have about 1,700 students, kindergarten through 12th grade. Our North Lake Education Partnership is actually three school districts in the northern part of Lake County, along with the Mendocino Community College. So, Mendocino Community College is actually located in the adjacent

county in Mendocino County, and then they have a small satellite campus in our northern part of Lake County. So, it's basically four institutions that have come together to form the North Lake Education Partnership.

Like probably most small rural districts, we are in an area that basically has zero large industry. We're an agriculture-based community and all of our agriculture is really the small family farm kind of agriculture. We don't have big ag corporations that are doing the work here. We have little to no industrial manufacturing. The largest employers in the county are the school districts and the county government and the hospitals.

So, a little bit on our demographics. Here, about 90 percent of our students qualify for free or reduced lunch, and we're about 45 percent Hispanic/Latino, 45 percent White, and then another about 8 percent Native American, and then a few students from other ethnicities. So as such, like my high school in Kelseyville, 500 students, we have about 125 kids in each graduating class. So, those of you who are working in or associated with small school districts know that that limits the number of programs and the scope of the programs that you can offer sometimes.

As far as this type of work that the North Lake Education Partnership is engaged in, I did want to mention before I talk about now, that we've tried this before and we've been unsuccessful twice before. And in looking at lessons learned and securing that regional buy-in for cross-sector data work, we came into this with some lessons learned from previous unsuccessful attempts. And looking at the slides that Mara was presenting, the one bullet point that really resonates with me in the work we've tried to do here before is that we always tried to go right to the organizing what we were going to do before we actually went through any type of visioning process. So, we were incredibly fortunate this time around. We were really motivated by changes in the California accountability system and the emphasis that was being placed on career technical education pathways and dual enrollment coursework for high school students. We were really motivated by that to get some kind of effort going around working with our local community college.

I should also say that we don't have a four-year university within about 120 miles of where we're at, so for us, "institution of higher ed" means our local community college.

We were really fortunate this time that a woman named Judy Canabal became the interim dean, and is now the dean of Mendocino College Lake Campus. And we went to her and said, "Judy, we would like to get this started again. Would you be interested?" And not only was she interested, she jumped in with both feet and really led us down this path of developing the shared agenda, mission, and vision for our consortia.

And then along the way, the folks from REL West, Alice and Mara, came and have really done an incredible job of helping us focus on this important part of securing the regional buy-in. And Mara and Alice and Judy can tell you that the folks from the districts, when we go to our meetings, we want to jump into the nuts and bolts of what we're trying to do. Who's going to teach this class? How many hours does it have to be? I mean, the really getting down to the operational aspects, and they kept dragging us back and dragging us back around this idea that,

hey, if this is going to be successful, you guys are going to have to develop a shared agenda, mission, and vision.

So, Alice, could you go to the next slide?

So, they introduced us to the process enneagram, and I'm sure that most of you are familiar with this, but that thing at the top there, the current identity, this was critically important for us to go through this process of actually being honest with ourselves and with each other about what was the state of our current programs. Because when we really had those conversations and we were able to say, "You know, we really don't have a good handle on how to collect the data that we need to drive this to work," and being honest about that, being honest about the fact that we had career technical education pathways at our high schools but they didn't go anywhere after high school. We didn't have any type of articulated agreements with our local community college.

We had to be honest with ourselves around the idea that we were offering programs based on people that we had, not offering programs on what the workforce data says that we needed to offer. And, again, small school. My high school has less than 30 certificated teachers. That does put some constraints on what you can do. But this idea of really identifying your current identity, where we're at right now. And then you can see some of the other things there. We've really spent a lot of time around the idea of "What do we want to create, what do we want to achieve, what do we want this to look like five years from now?" And we, through this process, came up with a vision that says that really what we wanted was a connected and coordinated community college and high school system in North Lake County, and that in the coordinated 9-14 system, K-12 and community college districts will work together to provide integrated support to students as they move from self-directed discovery and career exploration through their individually tailored pathways to college and/or career success.

And once we went through this whole process with the enneagram, it has really brought things into focus. Down on the bottom down there, relationships. I think Mara and Alice have been involved for about a year, and I've been involved with the person at our community college for about a year and a half, and even in that year and a half we've had some people at the other districts, and even in my own district, key players who have left and new players came in. So, we're constantly having to revisit the relationship part of this work to make sure that the key players from all of the organizations are buying into the process.

And if I'm being honest about it, we're just in the really beginning stages. When you think about, where do we want to be five years from now? We're asking that question now and looking at a five-year process. But I can tell you, just from my own little school district here, we've gone from offering no dual enrollment courses to, I think, this fall we're going to be offering seven dual enrollment courses. In the past, we had zero articulated career technical education pathways with our community college. We're just in the process of...my school board is approving an agreement that establishes at least three, and we're working toward five articulated career pathways with our community college that result in some kind of industry-recognized certification.

And when I talk about how important it is for us to do this work, about 80 percent of the students from my high school go to this particular community college because it's right here and the kids don't have to go away. So, I think, Alice, I'll move on to the next slide. I think I got about two more minutes.

Okay. So, this is just an example of the SMART goal process I'm sure that you're all familiar with. You can see there, if you can read it—create and implement the way to track students from pathway entry into employment. So, we have lots of a variety of grant opportunities through the state for funds for this kind of work, but they all ask for this kind of data. And right now, I mean, we're closer to getting there now than we were a year ago. A year ago, we had no way to track this kind of data. So, once we were able to identify exactly what we wanted as far as data goes, then we've been able to make some strides in collecting that data. And then the last slide.

Yeah. And then this whole idea that...so sometimes you can get started down a path and it looks really great and then for some reason it falls apart. And this idea that the communication strategy that we're using to not only increase the buy-in but make sure that we're not losing track of why we're here. So, every meeting we have, we start with the review of the vision and the mission of our group. And I have to just say that our community college partner, Judy Canabal, has just been awesome in keeping us on track and keeping us focused on the work, and working with REL West on having outside experts that can come in with a fresh set of eyes and apply their expertise to keeping the work focused. I've been in education for almost 30 years—again, this is my third attempt at this kind of work, and this time it's happening, and it's just been outstanding, and I can't wait to see where we go from here.

ALICE RICE

Thanks so much, Tim. So many great lessons. We really appreciate you sharing out. Next we'll be going to our second regional leader, Joy Soares. She is the director of College and Career for the Tulare County Office of Education; she is also the regional convener of Tulare Kings College and Career Collaborative. Joy, can you hear us?

JOY SOARES

I can. Can you hear me?

ALICE RICE

Yes. Wonderful.

JOY SOARES

Okay. Fantastic. Tim, congratulations. So inspired listening to your story about your journey and your honesty, and I just want to echo so many of the things that you've shared. This is very challenging work, it's very messy work, but it is by far the most rewarding work I've ever been a part of. Thank you for the introduction, Alice.

And just for...just a very quick context builder. I came from industry, 15 years with a major food company when I left as a vice president of marketing, and it was because I got involved with career pathways on an advisory board and I wanted to just get involved in education and change the world, right? So, here I am, except I am not a star by any means, I'm definitely one small star in this constellation of the Tulare Kings College and Career Collaborative. And I know a couple of my colleagues are on here. Mike, Ken, good to have you online with us.

And I just want to echo what Mara shared in the beginning about really looking to the research about driving principles for this cross-sector leadership. I really want to encourage anybody that's on the line to take some time and read the article that was shared. This has really been something that we've embraced in Tulare Kings. The Four Driving Principles for Cross-Sector Leaders—it's something that we do believe in, and I'm so glad Mara brought that up because it is sort of embedded in a little bit of this presentation.

So, very quickly, the Tulare Kings College and Career Collaborative, which is convened by the Tulare County Office of Education. We are a cross-sector collaborative, and our partners are 11 school districts, 3 community colleges, 1 CSU, which is about 40 minutes away, and 1 UC, which is about 90 minutes away: UC Merced and CSU Fresno. And then our two workforce investment boards, Tulare County and Kings County, are very involved in this work.

Tim, five years ago my story was very similar to yours, and when I say "my" I mean our story at Tulare Kings College and Career Collaborative. We had some very successful college and career connections made in the county and like in these pockets of excellence, if you will, some career pathways in a particular district, and some work-based learning going on in another, and it was really exciting.

But I think what happened in our region, which is primarily driven by our three major industry sectors—number one being ag, and also health, manufacturing, and education is also a priority sector—we were a recipient of a CCPT, a California Career Pathways Trust grant, a 15 million dollar grant, and it really propelled what we did. And within that grant, we brought these school districts together and we started learning and improving together, and we had to collect some data and it was difficult. Then we also were fortunate enough to say, hey, CCPT 2 came out. One of our districts applied and we all went into that grant, most of us went into that grant, so we braided those funds. And then we were a regional hub of excellence with Jobs for the Future, and we braided that work with the CCPT 2 grant. And it was because of the Jobs for the Future regional hub of excellence support, technical support from Jobs for the Future, that really had us focusing on this cross-sector leadership.

So, I want to go back to something that Tim said, and I would say, if anybody asked me, "Joy, as a leader, what is something that really, really changed the trajectory of your partnerships, your collaborative?" And Tim hit the nail on the head. He mentioned Judy, his champion. Judy was the champion, and Tim, well said, because it's those partnerships and relationships. And what I feel so fortunate about is after five years in this work, I can honestly tell you that we have a champion in every single sector and we have multiple champions in these sectors, and that is really what is driving the work. We have over 650 business partners, and that wasn't

always the case. But people want great things to happen for kids and they know that education needs support, and they also know they can't fill the jobs in their region because the students that are coming to them do not have the skills that are needed. So, these partnerships are moving and growing.

Getting high-quality data and research in a rural area, it's tough, and that's why we were so excited when Mary, WestEd, REL, and Jobs for the Future gave us this opportunity to learn together and to figure out really organically how we could do what we needed to do. And we still have a long way to go and we'll talk a little bit about outcomes later, but it was really something that helped us.

So today, we're just going to touch very briefly on our regional collaborative and developing these endorsed shared metrics. We're going to talk a little bit about how we leverage some resources to maximize our impact and expand our cross-sector partners, and I'm just going to touch briefly at the end on outcomes and next steps. So, when we look at the next part, Alice, that says developing shared metrics and building cross-sector buy-in; I think this was a game changer for us. So, like Tim, like the work in Lake County, we actually brought together over 79 cross-sector partners so we could actually identify our regional priorities. I mentioned that we had all these grants come in, but, you know, grants come and go, and sometimes grants buy equipment and people. And coming from industry, when our superintendent asked me, "Joy, will you take on this directorship and this and that?" I was really reluctant. I was like, "I don't know. I don't want to be part of something that buys people and equipment, but I'll be part of something that... I would love to be part of something that really develops systems and really creates partnerships."

Well, there were so many like-minded people in our region that wanted to come together and do that, the champions that I mentioned, so that's what we did. We moved from a grant-funded consortium to a partnership collaborative. And in this partnership collaborative we needed to give ourselves some structure. So, a huge principle that I try to message as a leader and then the leaders that lead with me messaged it, and that was mission before organization. That driving principle has really helped us create our regional priorities, which very quickly the five of them are: strengthen and scale industry partnerships; define and align effective practices for high-quality pathways; increase postsecondary participation and success; and implement shared operational structures, with the fifth one being endorsed shared outcomes.

So, we knew that we had to all put our regional hats on, we need to come to the table and we set these regional priorities, and within the endorsed shared outcomes, we brought our steering council together. So, in this Tulare Kings College and Career Collaborative, we have this structure that's built on an executive Tulare County Steering Council with a dean and directors network, and then we have work groups. We have work groups around data, we have work groups around high-quality pathways, we have a work group around postsecondary success, and we have a work group around the scale and strengthen industry partnerships.

The endorsed shared outcomes we knew could not be developed by the data work group. It needed to start with senior leadership. So, this TK Steering Council that I've mentioned, we

have the senior leaders from all of our cross-sector partners. So, I'm talking about the community college presidents, I'm talking about the superintendents from the school districts, I'm talking about the executive directors of the WIB—they come together to meet and provide guidance. We also, just this past year, created a governance guidance document. It's a collaborative document so that we can operate with some organization and some framework, but it's loose by design because we need to be very flexible in what we do.

So, we brought the TK Steering Council together after we identified our regional priorities that I just mentioned, and we used the top facilitation process, which I won't go into a lot of detail about. You could do some research, or please feel free to send me an email and we're happy to send you information about it. The picture that you see on the slide is an example of what we brainstormed around when we created the work for the data work group. When we decided to create some endorsed shared metrics for our region, we knew that those senior leaders needed to lead that. We knew that the president of COS and West Hills College...and we knew that they needed to be at the table, our superintendents and our WIB. And so we created our endorsed shared outcomes by really asking—and it was in two work sessions: "What's important to you? What is important to you? What is important for us to know to ensure that our students are truly college, career, and life ready?"

So, we created six metrics, which you'll see on the next slide in just a moment, and these metrics were created using a cumulative voting process, aka, the dot, right? And it was really exciting to see how connected and how like-minded these leaders were. Our metrics were around college credit, completing a career pathway, industry-recognized certification, attempting and completing transfer-level English, attempting and completing transfer-level math, and then our last metric is around the job placement rate and really looking at exactly what Tim referred to and their big overall goal. How are we going to see and know what students are doing, with us, in our K-12 system to postsecondary to the workforce, and how do we get feedback so that we can improve upon our practices and really provide to the workforce what is needed?

So, moving on to the next slide. When we created these endorsed shared metrics, it was so exciting to see that what we created for our metrics tied so well to a funding source in California that has been provided to K-12, and that is the K-12 Strong Workforce. And while the funding goes to K-12, the community colleges are very involved. We got Fresno State and UC Merced involved in our project, and then, of course, Workforce is very involved. Because one of the things, when you create this collaborative space for people, you want them to see where they fit. We want to all understand how we will benefit, all of us, everybody will mutually benefit, and we also don't want to be doing all these things in silos. Okay, we don't want to measure this in a silo, measure that in a silo; we want our work to be braided and very connected.

So, my colleague, Lori Morton and I—she is our career pathways engagement manager and a leader here at College and Career with me—we started really looking at our endorsed shared outcomes here on the right side of this H graph, then we placed what our strategies were for the K-12 Strong Workforce project, and then as you can see on the right hand side are the

metrics that are being used for the K-12 Strong Workforce project, and they very much align. And so, while they were created at different times, I think what it says is, there is a lot of, like Tim said, there's a lot of opportunity right now provided to us to have these conversations and to have this space. Being part of Jobs for the Future and being able to connect and really collaborate and learn from collaborators across the state, that was such a huge game changer for us, something that really made a significant difference in our leadership and in our implementation.

And then, of course, being part of this REL rural data project has really been a gift because we've been provided with tools and coaching and that sort of thing along the way. So, we are embedding our metrics across our regional projects, and that's been really exciting.

I'm going to wrap up this last slide. Am I doing okay on time, Alice?

ALICE RICE

You are.

JOY SOARES

Okay. So the last slide...this is messy work, and I like what...So, let me just very quickly share that TCOE is very involved with improvement science, and there is a theory that when we look at our work, that our work can be possibly wrong and definitely incomplete, and we mean that in a very positive way and it does show, I think, a really important thing in this work, is that there is a growth mindset around improving. And that is that we still want to learn so much more and we need to keep and continue our inquiry driving and to understanding what's happening and collaborate to come up with additional answers and reasons and just continue the work.

So, in thinking about that, what some of our outcomes have been in the past two years has been, we really have created consensus and coherence around what is important in the region with our senior leaders and much of our middle management and in our high schools with partial team members. In other words, I couldn't say that this is a really clear understanding in every one of our high schools, but I do know that there are staff and people embracing and understanding what we're doing here at a regional level. And we've also provided guidance for the collaborative work to be done in the region from highly engaged leaders.

So, this is a collaborative that at one time, two years ago, operated with the middle management, the deans and directors from our organizations leading the work, and now we get guidance from our senior leaders, with the dean and directors still providing leadership with guidance and then implementing it. And then we've increased ownership and commitment from our cross-sector partners. Again, I'm talking about the championship idea, having champions in each sector. And then what's been exciting is, we really work hard to align our regional resources and our systems work so that we're not duplicating as much or working in any kind of silos.

So, our next step is, we're looking to do something very exciting, and I really want to thank Alice, Mara, REL West for this upcoming work this year. We're really excited. We're going to provide data briefs to our partners. So, our first data brief, which will be coming out at the end of this month, will be around understanding what's happening in postsecondary, how our students are doing in various measures with postsecondary. And then in winter, we'll be looking at...and into the college arena, and then we'll be looking at some career metrics with our next data brief. So, we're very excited about that.

And then, just to wrap up, we've been really fortunate to have partnerships and really...I think with data, you need redundancy. This is something I've learned recently and that is that if we can get data from multiple sources and really try to figure out why the data...why, why, why and use data protocols, REL West has been very fantastic and we've landed on a data protocol that we'll be using. I think that because we're working with REL West, we're working with Educational Results Partnership, which is CalPASS Plus and Launch Board, and we're talking with another data provider, and we also are so grateful to have UC Merced Center for Educational Partnership as part of our collaborative because there will be gaps in any data that we collect, I think, and that all of these partners can work together to help us fill in those gaps.

So, it's been a fantastic partnership and I want to thank all of you at REL West and Jobs for the Future for the opportunity. Tulare Kings College and Career Collaborative, we're better together, which is one of our core beliefs, and you're definitely together with us. So, thank you.

ALICE RICE

Thanks so much, Joy, for sharing your unique experiences building capacity for data use in your education and career partnership and setting such a high precedent for cross-sector collaborative work in California. It's really amazing to work with you.

We'd now like to invite attendees of the webinar to join us in the conversation. Please type your questions or indicate if you would like to ask a presenter a question about their presentation or ongoing work in the chat box.

The first question we have is from Jerrien Abel. He would like to learn more about REL West data protocols.

JERRIEN ABEL

Oh, yeah, thank you. We're a broad-based partnership that's also cross-sector, and one of our challenge areas is engaging partners who come from very different perspectives, very different backgrounds, very different experiences and exposures to data, and so we're always looking for ways that we can engage them in data that doesn't scare them, that isn't overwhelming, that really allows for that kind of soft entry into deeper conversations around data. So, I'm just always on the lookout for those kinds of tools.

MARA LOCKOWANDT

Yeah. Great. There are some really interesting kind of protocol templates and examples out there, and we're actually working with Tulare Kings College and Career Collaborative now on kind of starting to look at some of those pieces of research and figure out what is going to make sense for their next steps around data inquiry. But I wanted to know if Joy or Tim, either of you wanted to speak to this in terms of how to kind of build the data literacy skills, what has worked or what hasn't worked for your cross-sector work. How do you engage folks that might be unfamiliar with data or find the data scary, as you say? So, I hope, Joy and Tim, you're still unmuted, if you want to chime in.

JOY SOARES

Sure. This is Joy. Just very quickly. One of the things that REL West helped us do was that we... So, when you think about cross-sector partnerships, you're talking about every sector speaking a different language. K-12 talks differently than postsecondary talks differently than the workforce. We spent a solid year reading articles, talking about what kind of data we were gathering at this time. Where does this data come from? What are these acronyms? What does this mean? And we had various presentations from the partners. This is at the middle management level. It was glorious. I am 100 percent sure that not only did we build our data literacy, we also built our partnerships and our team. And when we started looking at the data that we collect and where it comes from, we started connecting the commonalities, we started connecting the differences. And I think this is what helped us, because as we all know in California, there's not one single data system to use to gather information on behavior of a person in all of the sectors.

So, I think that organically, we were able to create some data literacy, and then I also think that that was sort of our beginning stages. We read a couple articles together, and Mara, maybe we can post them later, we can pull them out. That was a couple of years ago. And then just to continue the data literacy, we have our data work group that meets religiously once a month, and that is a focus to continue to create data literacy, to continue to figure out how we're going to really measure these metrics that have been endorsed by our collaborative and then who will help us do that and where are we in the process.

MARA LOCKOWANDT

Yeah. Great. So, thank you, Joy, so much. And just to build on that further, it's so much about where your different partners are at in terms of that entry point into the conversation, but as Joy is saying, it's not as if there's a one-hour presentation you can do and get everyone kind of feeling comfortable. It's an ongoing process, as Tim mentioned before as well. It can take years, it can take several attempts. I think one thing that we were going to get to just even later in this conversation today is also around the critical importance of trust between partners, and I think that's one reason why data conversations can sometimes seem intimidating, is because folks might feel as though they're airing some things in the open that they might want to keep under the bed.

And so kind of making sure your partners...that you have taken the time to build the trust and the relationships regarding some of those principles we were talking about at the beginning; that is fundamental to getting to a place where folks feel like they can start to talk about data that doesn't seem too scary or unveiling things that they might not want to unveil. If you're all working towards the shared mission, mission over organization, those conversations become a lot easier.

And as Tim was saying in the process enneagram, the cycle in which you might want to have those conversations, those intentions, those principles would ideally be coming before you're actually asking folks to share their actual data. But I hope that helps a little bit get at what you're asking there in your question.

Joy, while folks might be thinking about their questions, we did have someone else chat in a little bit earlier wanting to know a little bit more around the ToPs facilitation. So I wanted to know if you feel comfortable talking a little bit more about that and what that process is like, and then we can share some links out after the webinar.

JOY SOARES

Sure. I think what's really neat about these cross-sector partnerships is that this was really an idea that really came to us through our Workforce Investment Board. And they actually bring in businesses and the entire Tulare County WIB staff is trained in this methodology, because it is about making sure that you do have everyone engaged in this process and it's leadership that really can be gained through this process.

So, just very quickly. The ToPs facilitation method, it actually is about coming to some...it's surfacing what people are thinking, it's coming to consensus about what people are thinking around a very important guiding question, and then it's about creating action plans after those consensus-building decisions are made. And I think that what this helped us do is that we were able to...Actually, by the way, real quickly, ToPs, it stands for Technology of Participation, so it's really about facilitators designing and leading meetings so that you can really focus on the outcome, if you will. I don't know if that makes sense, but it's really for focused conversations and then consensus building and then action plan. I guess those would be the three pieces. But we can definitely share a link and you can definitely just...okay, I just Googled something. You can definitely Google it yourself, about the ToPs facilitation.

The wall of wonder is fantastic, and you can see the corner of the wall in the picture on the that one particular slide, but you get to see everything in front of you and it really is a fantastic way to facilitate.

MARA LOCKOWANDT

Yeah. Thank you.

PARTICIPANT

Hi. We just wanted to learn a little more about how really the rural setting influences collaborative strategies and practices as opposed to how it might be in other settings.

MARA LOCKOWANDT

Yeah. Such a good question. Tim, I think we've talked a lot about this before. If you want to have a first go at answering this, the way in which that rural setting, working in rural communities really influences this work. Some of the frameworks and strategies we're talking about here don't necessarily apply just to rural settings, they can be applied in other contexts, but there are certain perhaps principles, certain strategies that are really relevant when we're talking about the rural cross-sector work.

TIM GILL

And I think I understand the question, and I guess I would answer it with an example. When I hear folks from a large suburban or urban consortium talk about, say, work-based learning opportunities for students, and they talk about the 200 students from their school district that are going on work-based learning or finding work-based learning opportunities at, I don't know, Lockheed Martin or Boeing or some big giant industrial-based company; when the kind of work-based learning opportunities that I have here in Kelseyville is, I can send two students over to a company called Stokes Ladders, which makes ladders for picking pears—it's not even in the same universe of scope.

So, I think that what we try to do is, I mean, we certainly appreciate and envy a lot of those kinds of projects that are possible in a more suburban or urban area, but you have to be realistic about what you can accomplish. And I think that one thing I've learned over the last year and a half in working with REL and with our community college, is really how to have those discussions to narrow down the focus to something that can actually be quantified, that you can actually come up with a SMART goal around that one thing that you've narrowed it down to, and that it's okay for your organization to have much more modest SMART goals than say in a larger setting. So, not that we're settling for less, it's just sometimes in order to make progress you have to know what's possible. And, again, I think it goes back to that being honest about where you're at right now. And so, I guess that's how I would respond to that.

MARA LOCKOWANDT

Yeah. Great. Joy, did you want to add anything to that?

JOY SOARES

Yeah, just quickly. So, I understand what Tim is saying and agree—work-based learning does get tough. And just that example; we try to get really creative, like, our school districts are partnering with the vendors. The people that they pay to do work at their school, those people are committing to job shadows and internships. And while it may not be in the same industry that these students are doing, you can still focus on this skill. But I would like to speak to the

fact that I feel it's been a real positive for us from a rural standpoint in that I feel like we're able to be very maverick and move. We have that opportunity that we're small enough...we do have a couple of districts that are in areas with no mayor, no city government, and very similar to what Tim is talking about, and they have to get very creative, and at the same time they can really move quickly because the sense of urgency is heard very quickly. So, I mean, there's a lot of positives, without going into much detail, about being in a rural community as well.

MARA LOCKOWANDT

Yeah. I think the point both of you are making, kind of a realistic assessment of where folks are at and what's going to be possible, and also using the opportunities to really lean into some creativity and innovative ideas, some of which Joy is talking about there, I think is really important. Other things that we've heard about or read about in the research, depending on your technological infrastructure to really create opportunities for virtual learning experiences, sticking with Tim's, like, work-based learning example there. And we've also seen examples of folks kind of doing actual kind of mock work experiences or role plays where employers come to the school and actually do kind of rotation stations where students are engaged in kind of a project-based learning, but they don't have to go to the company, the company comes to them to create that in order to overcome barriers related to transportation and access there.

So, there's a lot of opportunities that might start to be created once you get folks thinking about what are those innovative strategies that you might be able to do. But that was a great question. Great. Like I said, I'm going to just share one more learning that we've had from our engagement with rural communities in California and our work in general in terms of the building data capacity. If anyone else has a question, please do type it in. We want to make sure that we've got time to support folks and answer questions and hear from the two experts that we have on the line today.

So, while we're waiting for any other questions to come through, I just want to share one more kind of hopefully helpful framework. Something that we like to say a lot is that all frameworks are flawed, but some can be useful. And one thing that we've been really learning about through our work is this idea of system leader characteristics. So, a lot of our time on this call today is talking about not only those kind of nuts and bolts processes that are very technical, that are required to build a community's ability to collect and share and analyze data related to the databases and the agreements that are in place, but, really, how important it is to have cross-sector leaders that have particular skills and capacities and mindsets that can really accelerate the work in a region, really find those champions and empower them.

And so, this particular slide that you're looking at now has a graphic that is getting at the system leader characteristics. And this is coming out of a James Irvine Foundation grant that took place in 2015 with Jobs for the Future. And these characteristics were really identified through interviews with system leaders across the state who were doing this cross-sector work that we're talking about as well as a deep literature review in terms of other evidence-based practices of the characteristics that leaders have in order to drive system change.

And as you can see here, there are certain dispositions, there are certain skills, and there are certain ways of working. And a lot of the principles that we talked about at the beginning are echoed or interwoven into a lot of these characteristics, too. So, I know some of the text is really small, but we have the link and we can share it afterwards as well. But there's nine different characteristics that are listed here. Systems Thinking is one, which really is about maintaining that big picture, refers to that idea of mission over organization. Your system leader—which is, I presume, many of you who are on the line today—the fact that you've made it onto this webinar is an indication that you are really trying to wrestle with this idea of Systems Thinking: how are you going to achieve regional impact?

Having an open mindset. Another kind of disposition that has come out of the research in terms of a key way of working, which really is about, as Joy was saying, they're really into improvement science in Tulare Kings College and Career Collaborative. So, really, like embracing the learning, embracing that ambiguity, taking risks, being willing to experiment and try things on. That's a disposition of leaders that can really kind of help this system change work.

Another kind of aspect here is the unwavering attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion. This is another really critical piece on many different levels, but in part around the lens in which all of the work is being undertaken.

Relationships and trust is another component on this wheel that we've talked a lot about today. How system leaders are really treating productive working relationships and building that shared trust among multiple stakeholders so that you can find those champions, so that you can open up the hood and look at that data that folks have.

Another component here is focusing on results. So, really, kind of helping the other partners who are in your consortia really stay focused on that mission, really stay focused on those results.

Another big piece of this that we really love and both Tim and Joy have done fantastic work on in their own consortia is around this idea of co-creation of the structures to support the work. So, really, collaborating with the partners and the other stakeholders to develop the processes, to develop the structures for that joint work, really, as a way of kind of building that ownership within your cross-sector consortia.

And the last two here, we've got empowerment. So, system leaders really promoting the collective as the unit of influence rather than the individual and really leaning into that. And then the idea here of incentives and pay off. So, creating opportunities for individuals at multiple levels of the system to see the benefit of their participation in the short term and the long term. So, return on investment for your employer and workforce partners; really, what's in it for each of your partners and helping folks see and make that connection.

The other thing that we had kind of for today to just share is really so much about what both of our presenters are talking about, which is, really, like that critical piece around collaboration. And our quote here, "Collaboration moves at the speed of trust." So, the work of those

collaboratives and consortia is really accelerated through deep trust amongst the partners. And I don't know if Tim wants to speak any more to why he thinks the first few attempts at cross-sector work might not have been successful in Lake County, but part of it is, really, how are folks trusting each other? How are you building the capacity of your group to work in a way in which that continues to be nurtured and continues to be a part of the work? So, our implications here around trust are really bringing the folks to the table and securing institutional commitments and data sharing agreements.

We've seen this several times. Institutions might be wary of signing up or signing onto data sharing agreements, but if they trust in the mission, if they trust in the collective, then they're more likely to sign up and come to the table in that way.

So, just again, two kind of pieces of additional framing for folks to think about in terms of their own work and moving forward. So, I'm going to go back to our Q&A, if there was any final questions that folks had. Otherwise, we will do a kind of final wrap-up.

Okay. I'm not seeing any questions come through. Again, you can always email us afterwards. But we did want folks...in terms of our wrap-up today, a couple of things. One is to just acknowledge and deeply appreciate both of our presenters who are on the line today. Tim and Joy, you're doing phenomenal work in California and we are all so supportive of your efforts and can't wait to see what's happening next in both of your regions. So, thank you, and thank you to all of our folks on the line today. We have some great questions and a real diversity of participants. So, really looking forward to your feedback today in terms of what you find useful for your own work moving forward and how we can continue to use this research project, the REL West research project, for you to unpack the enabling conditions for you to be successful in your cross-sector data collaborative.