

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE TOOLKIT

Why Did Safal Partners Conduct this Work?

Safal Partners (Safal) was awarded the opportunity to lead the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Registered Apprenticeship Technical Assistance Center of Excellence for Strategic Partnerships and Systems Alignment in 2021. Safal aims to bridge the gap between the Registered Apprenticeship and workforce systems by accelerating partnerships across education, economic development, and other sectors to increase the adoption of Registered Apprenticeship nationwide. The U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) tasked Safal with assessing the involvement of chambers of commerce in Registered Apprenticeship systems to understand their level of engagement, identify knowledge gaps, and determine resources needed for greater involvement.

Safal collaborated with the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives (ACCE) to survey members, interview member chambers, and host a focus group. This provided insights into chambers' involvement in Registered Apprenticeships, their knowledge gaps, and the resources required for greater engagement. This toolkit offers an overview of Registered Apprenticeship; a summary of discussions and surveys with chambers, including the importance of Registered Apprenticeship to chambers; and guidance on how chambers can become more involved in Registered Apprenticeships.

What is Registered Apprenticeship?

Registered Apprenticeship is a proven, customizable, and structured model to find and train diverse new talent and upskill current workers in critical occupations. While traditionally serving the skilled trades, employers nationwide are now using Registered Apprenticeship as a long-term solution to workforce issues in almost every major industry.

Talent gaps remain in many high-growth jobs, and chambers play a crucial role in closing these gaps. As conveners, chambers foster relationships and connect their members to key stakeholders in education, public service, and community, economic, and talent development. Recognizing that available talent does not meet capacity needs, employers are turning to innovative approaches like Registered Apprenticeship to create their own talent pipeline through training.

Five Core Components of Registered Apprenticeship



**Employer
Involvement**



**Structured
On-the-Job
Learning
(OJL)**



**Related
Instruction
(RI)**



**Rewards
for
Skill Gains**



**National
Occupational
Credential**

There are five core components of Registered Apprenticeship:

1. **Employer Involvement:** Employer involvement is crucial in a Registered Apprenticeship. This paid, hands-on training must occur at a job site or through a virtual setup to provide adequate learning opportunities.
2. **Structured On-the-Job Learning:** This core component of Registered Apprenticeship involves apprentices shadowing subject matter experts on the job, following a structured training outline, and receiving mentorship that creates a high-quality training environment.
3. **Related Instruction:** Registered Apprenticeships require supplemental education, aiming to make apprentices fully proficient in their occupation. This instruction must meet the minimum requirement of 144 hours per and can take various forms, such as community college courses, employer-provided programs, certification courses, or employability skills training.
4. **Rewards for Skill Gains:** Registered Apprenticeships are paid opportunities with a structured wage progression. Programs must start with an initial wage adhering to state requirements and progress to a higher wage upon demonstrating proficiency in required competencies.
5. **Nationally Recognized Credential:** Graduates receive a portable, nationally recognized credential that signifies full proficiency in their occupation. This credential is accepted nationwide and proves mastery of industry-driven competencies.

There are also four main roles within the Registered Apprenticeship space:



Sponsor:

An organization that operates a Registered Apprenticeship program. This can include employers, labor unions, associations, community-based organizations, and educational institutions.



Employer:

Provides paid on-the-job learning for apprentices under the supervision of a skilled mentor.



Related Instruction Provider:

Offers instruction to apprentices in core knowledge, skills, and abilities to supplement on-the-job learning.



Partner:

Organizations that support Registered Apprenticeship programs by providing technical assistance, supportive services, and funding.

Why Should Chambers Engage with Registered Apprenticeship and What Resources are Needed to Become More Involved?

The benefits of Registered Apprenticeship for businesses are manifold and can not only improve a company's skills training, but also their bottom line. Chambers of commerce can not only benefit themselves but also their chambers by promoting Registered Apprenticeship in several ways:

Benefits to Chambers

Enhanced Portfolio of Opportunities

- Engage more deeply with member businesses by offering Registered Apprenticeship support and resources, including registration assistance, funding information, and apprentice connections.
- Strengthen relationships with educational institutions, government agencies, and community organizations through collaboration on Registered Apprenticeship initiatives.

Stronger Contributions to the Local Community

- Support Registered Apprenticeships to reduce workforce shortages and fill jobs.
- Help critical and emerging industries meet their workforce needs.

Improved Policy Advocacy

- Gain a stronger voice in shaping policies that benefit members and the local economy by participating in Registered Apprenticeship initiatives.
- Help to secure federal and state funding for Registered Apprenticeship programs.

Benefits to Businesses

- Provide apprentices with hands-on training and classroom instruction tailored to industry needs.
- Ensure programs are industry-driven and aligned with industry standards.
- Help apprentices earn nationally recognized credentials, validating their skills.

Improving Productivity

- Allow apprentices to apply skills directly to work assignments.
- Combine on-the-job learning with classroom instruction to produce highly skilled workers.
- Achieve approximately a [\\$1.50 return](#) on investment for every dollar spent on Registered Apprenticeship.

Reducing Turnover

- Improve workplace morale and increase company loyalty through Registered Apprenticeships.
- Encourage long-term retention with the "earn while you learn" model.
- Provide clear career pathways, reducing the likelihood of employees leaving and lowering costs for businesses.

Customizing Training

- Design curricula aligned with specific goals and industry needs.
- Address skill gaps and future workforce demands.

Retaining Workers

- [Retain 94% of apprentices a year](#) after completing a Registered Apprenticeship.
- Offer structured career pathways with clear advancement opportunities.
- Boost loyalty and job satisfaction by investing in employee development through Registered Apprenticeships.

Promoting Diversity

- Ensure programs reflect the communities in which they operate.
- Implement strong non-discrimination, anti-harassment, and recruitment practices to ensure access, equity, and inclusion.
- Offer underrepresented groups opportunities to enter and advance in various industries

Three Key Roles a Chamber Can Play

A chamber of commerce can choose to play one or more of three primary roles: Convener, Partner, and Sponsor. Each role varies in terms of level of involvement and will depend on the chamber's capacity, interest, and community engagement in workforce development.

Convener

Chambers can easily engage with Registered Apprenticeship by acting as conveners. Representing their members and collaborating with regional stakeholders, they bridge elected officials, public entities, industry associations, community-based organizations, and the private sector. Chambers can promote Registered Apprenticeship through information sessions, briefings, or community gatherings. Bringing in subject matter experts to highlight benefits and share next steps is crucial. Additionally, keeping information on their website and in the chamber office is helpful. It's important for chambers to understand the state registration process to guide interested businesses.

Kentucky Chamber Foundation

- Active for over 75 years, the Kentucky Chamber Foundation represents 3,800 member businesses employing over half of the state's workforce. Partnering with over 80 local chambers encompassing more than 25,000 professionals, the Foundation advocates for Registered Apprenticeships to address labor shortages and workforce development. They collaborate closely with the state's Office of Employer and Registered Apprenticeship Services to raise awareness about Registered Apprenticeship programs and connect employers with resources.
- A key initiative is engaging local chambers of commerce, providing tools and information to help member businesses establish Registered Apprenticeship programs. They equip smaller chambers, often lacking dedicated workforce-development staff, to guide employers through the Registered Apprenticeship process.

- The Foundation fosters partnerships between educational institutions and the Registered Apprenticeship ecosystem, connecting universities and colleges to become intermediaries or sponsors for Registered Apprenticeship programs. This enables students to earn both educational credentials and Registered Apprenticeship certificates, creating a seamless pathway to skilled employment.
- Additionally, the Foundation emphasizes diversity and inclusion, working to remove barriers and support underrepresented groups, such as women, minorities, and individuals with disabilities, to increase participation in Registered Apprenticeships. By promoting inclusive practices, they ensure Registered Apprenticeship opportunities are accessible to a diverse talent pool.

Partner

Chambers can support Registered Apprenticeship by partnering with the local representative to drive interest and help members understand the system. They can identify potential program sponsors, candidates for existing programs, assist with interviews, host employability skills training, connect sponsors to funding sources, and collaborate with the state Registered Apprenticeship team. Examples include:

- Creating marketing campaigns to drive participation.
- Offering incentive funding for businesses and apprentices.
- Publishing press releases for Registered Apprenticeship events.
- Hosting industry roundtable discussions.
- Interviewing Registered Apprenticeship experts on podcasts or social media.
- Allowing the state RA contact to hold office hours at the chamber.

The role of a partner can vary based on community needs.

Charleston, South Carolina Metro Chamber of Commerce

- The Charleston Metro Chamber of Commerce has been involved in Registered Apprenticeship growth and expansion in the Charleston tri-county region for over a decade through their talent development program of work. Initially, this program of work addressed talent issues for existing industries in the region and South Carolina. The Chamber promoted Registered Apprenticeship to nontraditional industries, brought employers on board, arranged interviews for potential apprentices, hosted signing days, and contributed private investment to cover related instruction costs at the local technical college through Accelerate Greater Charleston.
- Participation in the Registered Apprenticeship initiative has soared, with over 200 employers spanning all major industries in South Carolina. Trident Technical College (TTC) now primarily manages creation, expansion, and implementation efforts as a group sponsor for most of the region's participating employers and handles all administrative duties. TTC also serves as a National Learning Hub for youth Registered Apprenticeship.

- The Chamber recruits employers, shares information through outreach events, and facilitates alignment between regional workforce boards and employers to encourage accessing WIOA funding to offset training costs.
- South Carolina supports Registered Apprenticeship with significant funding from the South Carolina Technical College System, USDOL grants, state legislature appropriations, and various tax credits for participating employers.

Sponsor

The most involved role for a chamber is acting as a sponsor, registering their Registered Apprenticeship program as group non-joint. This allows members to use Registered Apprenticeship while the chamber handles administration. There are no costs other than related salary costs and promotional materials.

Administrative duties include:

- Signing employer acceptance agreements with participating employers.
- Interviewing and hiring apprentices alongside employers.
- Helping employers with apprentice orientation.
- Ensuring apprentices complete onboarding and required training.
- Maintaining apprentice files, including signed Registered Apprenticeship agreements.
- Entering apprentices into the state's database (e.g., RAPIDS) for tracking progress from the Registered Apprenticeship start date through the issuance of the USDOL credential. This database entry is also required for state tax credits or funding.

Chambers can choose their level of involvement based on their capacity and community needs.

German-American Chamber of Commerce (GACC)

- The GACC helps implement German-style Registered Apprenticeship programs across the Midwest and Southern US through its Midwest and South offices. These programs typically involve 70% on-the-job training and 30% related instruction from community college partners.
- As an intermediary sponsor, GACC works with 56 employers in fields like mechatronics, advanced manufacturing, CNC machining, pharmaceutical manufacturing, industrial electronics, and business operations (e.g., purchasing, marketing, HR, accounting). They train company instructors, assist with recruitment and outreach, connect with college providers, and liaise with stakeholders. Apprentices earn both a USDOL certification and a German journeyworker credential.
- GACC expands Registered Apprenticeship initiatives based on workforce needs identified by member companies, partnering with workforce development organizations, and aiming to scale programs to a self-sustaining level.

Greater Cleveland Partnership (GCP)

- GCP promotes Registered Apprenticeships across Northeast Ohio's 14 counties. As the regional chamber of commerce and economic development organization with 12,000-13,000 members, GCP focuses on expanding work-based learning to strengthen the talent pipeline and attract businesses.
- They received a Registered Apprenticeship Building America grant from USDOL, funding four "employer navigator" roles to develop Registered Apprenticeship standards and promote adoption, especially in non-traditional industries like IT, finance, insurance, and healthcare.
- GCP builds partnerships and supports Registered Apprenticeships, working with the State Registered Apprenticeship Agency (Apprentice Ohio) on regulatory requirements. They offer employer incentives, such as \$2,000 per first-year apprentice, doubled if they complete GCP's equity and inclusion assessment.
- GCP raises awareness, promotes Registered Apprenticeships, develops pre-Registered Apprenticeship programs, and highlights employer testimonials, aiming to simplify Registered Apprenticeship adoption for businesses through a supportive intermediary role.

Resources for Chambers to Get More Involved in Registered Apprenticeship

Existing Registered Apprenticeship Activity in the State

The first and most important step a chamber can make is to know and understand Registered Apprenticeship efforts in their state. Take note of who is already working in the Registered Apprenticeship space and who the chamber can align with to support growth and expansion efforts. Key information to research and identify:

- Whether the state [operates as a State Registered Apprenticeship Agency or has a USDOL Office of Registered Apprenticeship](#).
- Any existing state government Registered Apprenticeship divisions or offices. These efforts can be housed under various departments such as the Department of Commerce, the Department of Employment and Workforce, the community or technical college system, or a workforce commission.
- Where [Registered Apprenticeship funding](#) flows through the state and how program sponsors and employer partners can access it. Furthermore, what funding is available and what it covers.
- Industries and employers involved in Registered Apprenticeship in the state.
- Other Registered Apprenticeship partners and stakeholders working to grow and expand Registered Apprenticeship. These could include educational institutions, [industry intermediaries](#), industry associations, economic development organizations and/or partnerships, state, regional, and local workforce boards, community-based organizations, and Registered Apprenticeship networks (both official and unofficial).

- You can also learn more at <https://www.apprenticeship.gov> and <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/registered-apprenticeship-academy>.

Registered Apprenticeship Networks for Connection and Development

Chambers can play a pivotal role in the Registered Apprenticeship space by establishing a Registered Apprenticeship ecosystem. Engaging stakeholders in growth and expansion efforts facilitates employer participation in Registered Apprenticeship programs with proper support from partners.

Who Should Be at the Table?

- Local and regional economic development organizations
- Chambers of commerce
- Workforce development boards
- State agencies (e.g., vocational rehab)
- K12 school districts
- Higher education institutions
- Community-based organizations
- Industry associations
- Registered Apprenticeship intermediaries
- Employers

Important First Steps

1. **Assess Workforce Needs:** Evaluate chamber members' workforce needs and develop strategic plans to advance talent development projects.
2. **Analyze Labor Market Data:** Identify where the region will draw talent from and potential talent gaps. Both workforce and education systems can provide a talent pipeline through Registered Apprenticeship.
3. **Engage the Workforce System:** Understand funding sources for Registered Apprenticeship and related programs. Explore options like Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funding for pre-Registered Apprenticeship programs, state tax credits for employers, and grant funding to offset program costs.

Specific Steps for Chambers to Get Involved

- **Contact Your Local State Registered Apprenticeship Office:** Establish a relationship to get the latest information and support.
- **Share Information:** Include details about Registered Apprenticeship on the chamber's website. Use or develop collateral from USDOL, the State Registered Apprenticeship Agency, or other verified sources. Make this accessible to members.
- **Connect Employers:** Help connect employers to the appropriate contacts for creating a Registered Apprenticeship program.

- **Create a Communication Strategy:** Share information about Registered Apprenticeship, its benefits, and how to get involved. Use chamber-led events, such as community meetings, to integrate the concept into the community.
- **Ensure that Registered Apprenticeship is Included in Long-Term Regional Strategy.** Engagement for our future workforce starts in early childhood and supports individuals at various touchpoints. Research has shown that when individuals are engaged and supported starting in early childhood, a region “dramatically improve[s] educational outcomes resulting in individuals, families, and communities who have economic stability with productive careers and who contribute positively to a civic and equitable society.”



***Disclaimer:** Prepared by Safal Partners for the Center of Excellence grant for the U.S. Department of Labor. This workforce product was funded by a cooperative agreement awarded by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Employment and Training Administration. The product was created by the recipient and does not necessarily reflect the official position of the U.S. Department of Labor. The U.S. Department of Labor makes no guarantees, warranties, or assurances of any kind, express or implied, with respect to such information, including any information on linked sites and including, but not limited to, accuracy of the information or its completeness, timeliness, usefulness, adequacy, continued availability, or ownership. This product is copyrighted by the institution that created it.*