



# **REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP AND CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE:**

## **A GUIDE FOR ADDRESSING MEMBERS' WORKFORCE NEEDS THROUGH REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP**

From the Ground Up: Real-World Knowledge and  
Experience from Chamber Professionals in Action

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Chamber of Commerce members are employers who all share on common ongoing need core to their business success: attracting, recruiting, hiring, training, and upskilling workers.

As employers are increasingly challenged to navigate a tight labor market, accelerating technology changes, and rapidly evolving skills needs, they are looking for partners and a proven process to build a strong talent pipeline. Chambers can help with both by communicating the benefits of Registered Apprenticeship and connecting members with key apprenticeship system stakeholders.

The U.S. Department of Labor's Registered Apprenticeship Technical Assistance Center of Excellence (COE) for Strategic Partnerships and Systems Alignment partnered with the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives (ACCE) to help Chambers of Commerce nationwide more effectively support and expand RA programs. Through a comprehensive process involving member surveys, interviews, and focus groups, the COE identified key opportunities and challenges in chamber engagement with RA. This resulting guide provides Chambers with a practical roadmap to leverage their roles as conveners, partners, and sponsors in advancing RA efforts. By engaging their members and regional stakeholders, Chambers can promote RA as a high-value workforce solution that addresses labor shortages, enhances American worker skills, and strengthens our national and local economies.

This Guide outlines the core components of RA, explains its benefits for chambers and member businesses, and provides actionable strategies for chambers to become active facilitators in their regions. It includes real-world case studies from Chambers across the country—including the Charleston, South Carolina Metro Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Cleveland Partnership, the Kentucky Chamber Foundation, and the German American Chamber of Commerce—to highlight successful approaches and scalable practices. The document concludes with practical next steps to help Chambers assess their members' workforce development needs, align with apprenticeship systems, and create strategic partnerships that maximize impact. Through these efforts, Chambers can expand their role as vital workforce development leaders.

# INTRODUCTION

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## Why Did the Center of Excellence Partners Conduct This Work?

The U.S. DOL Registered Apprenticeship (RA) Technical Assistance (TA) Center of Excellence for Strategic Partnerships and Systems Alignment (“Center”) was established in 2021. The focus of the Center’s work is to bridge the gap between America’s RA and public workforce systems and support accelerated adoption of RA nationwide.

Recognizing the value of chambers of commerce in engaging and educating their membership on workforce issues, the Center collaborated with the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives (ACCE) to assess their members’ understanding of, and involvement in, RA. Center staff worked with ACCE to collect member feedback through a knowledge assessment, interviewing member chambers, and hosting a focus group. The cumulative work provided insight into chambers’ involvement in RA, their knowledge gaps, and resources required for greater engagement. This guide is a result of that work, offering chambers an overview of RA; a summary of findings from chambers; and tips on how chambers can support their members in RA expansion.

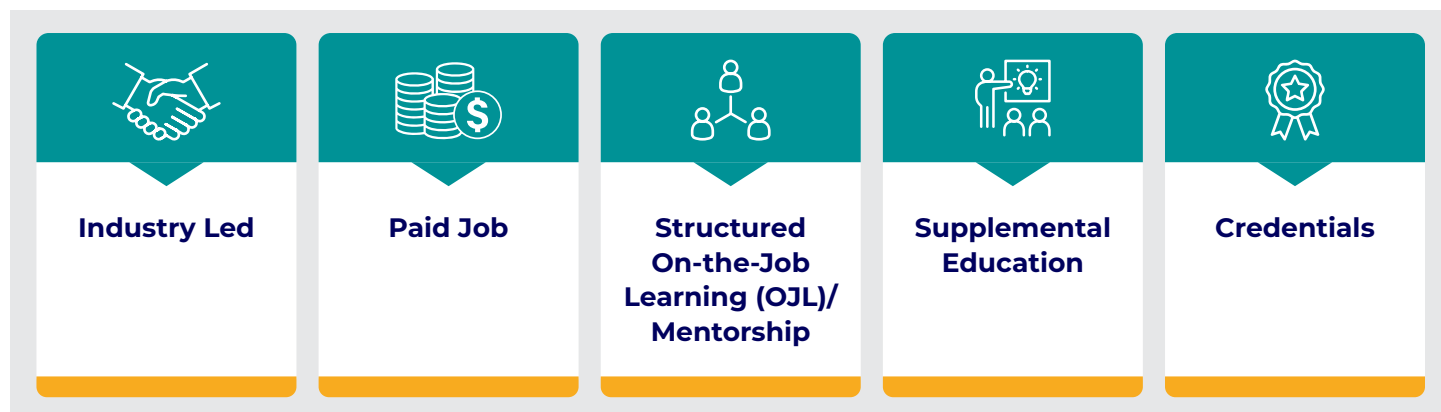




## WHAT IS REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP (RA)?

RA is a proven, customizable, structured model of workforce development that enables employers to find and train new talent and upskill current workers in critical occupations. While historically used to train workers in the skilled trades, employers nationwide are now using RA to fill workforce gaps in almost every sector and occupation.

### Five Core Components of RA



1. **Industry Led:** Programs are industry-vetted and approved to ensure alignment with industry standards and that apprentices are trained for highly skilled, high-demand occupations.
2. **Paid Job:** Registered Apprenticeships are jobs! Apprentices earn progressive wages as their skills and productivity increase.
3. **Structured On-the-Job Learning/Mentorship:** Programs provide structured on-the-job training to prepare for a successful career, which includes instruction from an experienced mentor.
4. **Supplemental Education:** Apprentices are provided supplemental classroom education based on employers' unique training needs to ensure quality and success.
5. **Credentials:** Apprentices earn a portable, nationally recognized credential within their industry.



## Four Roles for RA Implementation

RA programs are implemented through four primary roles:



### Sponsor

An organization that develops and registers an RA program and is responsible for ensuring compliance with regulations. Sponsors can be individual employers labor unions, associations, government agencies, community-based organizations, and educational institutions.



### Employer

Employers hire and provide paid OJL for apprentices who work under the supervision of a skilled mentor.



### RI Provider

RI providers are responsible for delivering instruction to apprentices as outlined in the RA program standards. RI providers can be public or private secondary and post-secondary educational institutions (e.g., high schools, Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, community and technical colleges, four-year colleges and universities), non-profit or for-profit training providers, or in-house instructors for the program sponsor.



### Partner

Organizations that share the sponsor's goal in workforce development and support RA programs by providing supportive services, funding, or other resources.

## WHY SHOULD CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE GET INVOLVED IN RA?

### Benefits to Chambers

The primary benefit for Chambers supporting RA is that by producing a more skilled workforce, RA strengthens local industry and can attract new businesses to the region. By collaborating with stakeholders across workforce, industry, and education, Chambers can help develop RA programs that target industries crucial to a regional economy, ensuring that workforce development aligns with actual and projected market demands rather than investing in less targeted training that may not help grow local industry. More relevantly skilled workforce development can reduce unemployment rates, strengthen the local economy and potentially result in additional job creation beyond those directly tied to RA programs. Additional benefits to chambers include:

#### Ability to Provide Enhanced Services to Members, Small and Local Businesses

As membership-driven organizations, chambers can promote their role as an RA hub and convener as a unique value proposition to members. By streamlining access to RA information, resources, potential funding, and partners chambers are making it easier and faster for members to understand and adopt RA. This service is critically important especially for small and medium-sized businesses which often struggle to develop independent training programs. Chamber-supported or chamber-sponsored RA programs allow these businesses to participate in talent development they could not afford on their own, helping ensure their competitiveness and potential for growth.

#### Strengthening Relationships in the Local Community

### CHAMBERS CAN DEVELOP STRONG, ONGOING RELATIONSHIPS WITH



**Chambers are uniquely positioned to champion the development of an apprenticeship ecosystem that fosters streamlined and efficient partnership efforts.**

## Benefits to Employers and Chamber Members

As the most time-tested method for workforce development, RA has clear benefits for businesses of all sizes. Chambers add critical capacity, which can be particularly useful to new and small businesses. Often-cited benefits for businesses to utilize RA include:

### Creating a Skilled Workforce

#### RA PROVIDES A CUSTOMIZABLE, STRUCTURED METHOD FOR



**TRAINING NEW HIRES**  
or upskilling current workers that employers can tailor to their unique company/organizational needs.



**KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER**  
from experienced, in-house mentors who oversee apprentices and support their skills development.



**VALIDATION OF SKILLS**,  
allowing apprentices to earn at least one, and often more, nationally recognized, portable credentials.

By accessing a network of partners to recruit and support new hires (e.g., local workforce development boards, community-based organizations, etc.), employers have a larger pool of candidates from which to hire.

### Reducing Turnover, Increasing Employee Retention, and Enabling Scaling

- RA provides clear career pathways so employees can see opportunities for ongoing development and professional growth, which reduces the likelihood that they will leave, lowering costly churn for employers.
- Apprentices who have successfully completed a program are high value long-term employees; 94% of apprentices are retained as full-time employees a year after completing their program.
- Apprenticeships offer businesses a dependable pipeline of skilled workers trained to meet specific industry needs, helping to reduce hiring and onboarding costs.

### Creating a Positive Return on Investment

RA has proven to create a positive return on investment (ROI) in several ways:

DOL has found that employers and sponsors participating in its Apprenticeship America Investment grant program, achieved a tangible, **positive financial ROI of approximately 44.3%, or \$144 for every \$100 invested** in an RA program.

Employers may be able to **access external funding support** through local workforce board Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and non-WIOA programs, federal and state grant programs, tax credits, and incentives.



Apprenticeship increases employee productivity as **apprentices learn company-specific processes and their work is monitored** by an experienced professional.

Increased company loyalty and higher-term retention **reduces the cost of employee turnover - which can be as high as 33% of their salary.**



## KEY ROLES A CHAMBER CAN PLAY TO SUPPORT RA

A chamber of commerce can choose to play one or more of three primary roles in accelerating their members' awareness and adoption of RA: sponsor, convener, and partner.

### Sponsor

Chambers may determine that the best role they can play to benefit their members is to act as a group, non-joint RA program sponsor. As a group non-joint sponsor, chambers take on the responsibility for registering and administering the program and member organizations are invited to join and implement the program for one or more occupations at their worksites. Programs are considered non-joint because chambers are not labor unions or labor management associations. Serving as a group program sponsor allows members to use RA while the chamber handles administration. Additionally, by serving as a sponsor, Chambers may become eligible to access Federal or state funding to support their program's operation. While there is no cost for a chamber – or any organization – to develop and register a program, sponsors will need to have adequate resources to administer and publicize the program and support participating employers.

**A sponsor's administrative duties typically include, but are not limited to:**

- recruiting employers and executing employer acceptance agreements;
- educating employers on their responsibilities, supporting to ensure compliance with program quality standards, worker protections, etc.;
- helping employers with apprentice orientation;
- ensuring apprentices complete onboarding and required training;
- maintaining apprentice files, including signed RA agreements; and
- entering apprentices into the required registration database (e.g., RAPIDS) for tracking progress from the RA start date through the issuance of the U.S. DOL credential and receiving state tax credits or funding.

You can find many of these resources on [Apprenticeship.gov](https://www.apprenticeship.gov).



### CHAMBER SPOTLIGHT



#### German American Chamber of Commerce (GACC)

The GACC helps implement German-style RA programs across the Midwest and Southern U.S. through its Midwest and South offices. Apprentices in these programs typically spend 70% of their time doing OJL and 30% on RI from community college partners.

As an intermediary RA program 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, and 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 RA initiatives based on workforce needs identified by member companies, partnering with workforce development organizations, and aiming to scale programs to a self-sustaining level.



## CHAMBER SPOTLIGHT



### **Greater Cleveland Partnership (GCP)**

GCP promotes RAs 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.

Through the receipt of an Apprenticeship Building America grant from DOL, GCP funds four employer navigator roles to develop RA standards and promote adoption.

GCP builds partnerships and supports RA programs, working with the state RA agency (Apprentice Ohio) on regulatory requirements. They offer employer incentives, such as \$2,000 per first-year apprentice.

GCP raises awareness, promotes RA, develops pre-RA programs, and highlights employer testimonials, aiming to simplify RA adoption for businesses through a supportive intermediary role.

### **Convener**

Chambers can easily facilitate their members' understanding and adoption of RA by acting as conveners. In this role, chambers leverage their relationships and platforms to bring together their members, regional stakeholders, elected officials, public entities, industry associations, community-based organizations, and local workforce and education systems to accelerate RA partnerships and programs. Chambers can:

- promote RA through existing chamber events (e.g., meetings, conferences, etc.) and vehicles (e.g., newsletters, social media posts, etc.);
- host informational sessions for employers, member organizations, and key partners;
- organize industry roundtables to discuss workforce needs and inviting RA system staff to gain insight and offer information on existing apprenticeship program frameworks for identified occupations;
- collaborate with local Apprenticeship Training Representatives (ATRs) or Apprenticeship Navigators (ANs), or other partners such as DOL National Industry Intermediaries, to host Apprenticeship Accelerators, which are "how to" workshops on RA – how to sponsor, participate in, or support a program, and how to network with other system partners and stakeholders;
- create networking events for employers to connect with potential program applicants;
- develop "how-to" workshops on RA program development;
- link employers with educational institutions for RI;
- facilitate partnerships between state and local workforce boards and employers for program support;
- identify and promote funding opportunities;
- share best practices and program templates; and
- coordinate shared training resources among employers.

**There are several key stakeholders that should be involved in your efforts including:**

- Regional and local employers
- Regional and local economic development organizations
- Workforce development boards
- State agencies (e.g., vocational rehabilitation)
- Local school superintendents, Career and Technical Education (CTE) directors, and other school district staff
- Post-secondary education institutions
- Community-based organizations
- Industry associations
- U.S. DOL RA industry [intermediaries](#)
- Current or former apprentices
- Current or former apprentice mentors/trainers
- DOL OA and SAA staff



## CHAMBER SPOTLIGHT



### **Kentucky Chamber Foundation**

Active for over 75 years, the Kentucky Chamber Foundation represents 3,800 member businesses employing over half the state's workforce. Partnering with over 80 local chambers encompassing more than 25,000 professionals, the Foundation advocates for RA to address labor shortages and workforce development. They collaborate closely with the Kentucky Career Center's Office of Employer and Apprenticeship Services to raise awareness about RA programs and connect employers with resources.

The Foundation engages local chambers of commerce, providing tools and information to help member businesses establish RA programs. They equip smaller chambers, which often lack dedicated workforce-development staff, to guide employers through the RA process.

The Foundation also fosters partnerships between educational institutions and the RA ecosystem, helping universities and colleges become intermediaries or sponsors for RA programs. These partnerships enable students to earn college credit, and potentially academic certificates or credentials, for their required RI.

## Partner

Chambers can also serve as a partner to [their local ATR\(s\)](#), driving interest among members, facilitating members' access to resources, and helping members more quickly and easily develop or expand RA programs. Partnership services a chamber could offer include:

- Leveraging National Apprenticeship Week to publicize RA and drive member awareness and participation;
- posting information about RA resources, opportunities, and information on the process for registering or participating in a program and working with the apprenticeship system in their state on their website;
- serving as a talent pipeline connection for employers, i.e., providing a central place online for potential applicants to submit resumes for participating employers to review, posting new apprenticeship program opportunities, hosting apprenticeship career fairs for applicants to meet hiring employers, etc.;
- offering employability skills training for potential candidates;
- coordinating support service provision for cohorts of apprentices (e.g., transportation, childcare);
- offering mentorship training for workplace supervisors;
- helping standardize curriculum across multiple employers;
- sitting on participating employers' interview panels for program applicants;
- offering incentive funding for businesses and apprentices;
- interviewing RA experts on podcasts or social media; and
- allowing the local ATR or AN to hold office hours at the chamber.

A partner's role can vary based on member needs.



## CHAMBER SPOTLIGHT



### **Charleston, South Carolina Metro Chamber of Commerce**

The Charleston Metro Chamber of Commerce has been involved in RA 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 RA to nontraditional industries, brought employers on board, arranged interviews for potential apprentices, hosted signing days, and contributed private investment to cover RI costs at Trident College through Accelerate Greater Charleston.

Participation in the RA initiative has soared to more than 200 employers spanning all major industries in South Carolina. Trident Technical College 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.

The Chamber recruits employers, shares information through outreach events, and facilitates alignment between regional workforce boards and employers to encourage board utilization of WIOA funding to help offset employers' apprenticeship program training costs.

The Chamber also makes members aware of available RA funding from the South Carolina Technical College System, U.S. DOL grants, state legislature appropriations, and various tax credits for participating employers.

## PRACTICAL NEXT STEPS FOR CHAMBERS

The first and most crucial step a chamber can take is convening key stakeholders to explore RA opportunities and assess current engagement and interest among members. This meeting helps determine the chamber's commitment level and sets the stage for deeper involvement. Establishing an apprenticeship working group or task force can be a best practice to sustain engagement efforts.

### 1

#### Assess Workforce Needs



Evaluate members' workforce needs through soliciting direct member feedback and analyzing local labor market data. Understanding which industries and sectors are facing the most significant workforce challenges, including for which specific occupations, is crucial to starting the RA conversation.

### 2

#### Engage the Workforce System



Understand funding sources for RA and related programs. Explore options like WIOA funding, state tax credits, and grant funding to offset program costs.

- Connect with [your state RA director](#) to learn about RA requirements in the state as well as active RA programs.
- Determine other public agency divisions, offices, or initiatives that are involved in or could have resources to support your members' RA programs. 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.
- Learn about funding, partner resources, and more through the [DOL RA Academy](#).

### 3

#### Create a Strategy



Decide how your chamber will be involved in RA based on feedback from members and information on current regional and state efforts from apprenticeship system staff.

- Determine your primary and secondary roles in RA based on your members' needs and your chambers' resources. Can you work with your apprenticeship system to become a Sponsor or is the need at this point to serve as a Convener to raise awareness and interest?
- Reach out to local workforce development board(s) in your area to discuss their RA strategy and which of the Key Components of RA Alignment they currently are, or are planning to, implement in serving local employers. Determine areas where you can collaborate to complement one another's RA strategies, making it easier and more efficient for employers to access a range of resources across your organizations.
- Visit the [Partner Finder](#) to help identify potential organizations to partner with to develop RA programs. You can search local RA program sponsors, intermediaries, RI providers, and other apprenticeship stakeholders in state and local communities. The search function also provides accessibility by industry and occupation.
- Connect with active grantees in your state who are working to expand RA programs in different industries and occupations.
- Learn which jobs have been approved for RA by using the [Occupation Finder](#) website.



## 4

### Kick off with a Convening



Once you have determined your RA strategy, host a convening of members and local industry, economic development, workforce, and education stakeholders to communicate the benefits of RA and how your chamber plans to streamline access to RA resources and stimulate program development. Invite your local OA/SAA staff to participate in the planning and consider leveraging National Apprenticeship Week (NAW) for the kick-off. Apprenticeship.gov provides numerous NAW event resources.

## 5

### Be Proactive



Implement your engagement strategy to benefit members and in close collaboration with your state and/or local apprenticeship system staff.

- Share information: Include details about RA on your website and member communications (newsletters, brochures, etc.). Use or develop collateral from U.S. DOL OA, the State Apprenticeship Agency, or other verified sources.
- Connect Employers: Help connect employers to the appropriate contacts for creating an RA program.
- Create a communication strategy. Share information about RA, its benefits, and how to get involved. Use chamber-led events, such as community meetings, to integrate the concept into the community.

## CONCLUSION

Chambers of Commerce have a unique opportunity to enhance their role as workforce leaders by engaging in Registered Apprenticeship. Whether serving as conveners, partners, or sponsors, chambers can champion RA as the gold standard for workforce development by helping their members access, understand, and implement programs that address critical talent needs. This guide outlines the essential steps, resources, and real-world examples to support that effort. By embracing RA as a proven workforce strategy, chambers can not only strengthen their members' businesses but also contribute to broader economic growth that puts American workers and jobs first.



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## ABOUT SAFAL PARTNERS

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Safal Partners is a national leader in mission-driven education and workforce consulting, helping clients bridge the gap between ideas and outcomes. Safal is a recognized federal leader in technical assistance provision, and, together with our clients, we are revolutionizing public sector programs and services to catalyze positive societal change at scale. Safal's apprenticeship team has built, expanded, and sustained hundreds of Registered Apprenticeship programs across virtually every sector of the U.S. economy. We work with employers, colleges, workforce boards, career and technical education centers, unions and labor management associations, and intermediaries to identify workforce needs and develop high-quality Registered Apprenticeship programs that provide workers with family-supporting wages and promising career pathways. Safal's work on the Center of Excellence for Strategic Partnerships and Systems Alignment builds on our expertise as an apprenticeship, workforce, and technical assistance provider.

For further information about the American Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives or chamber-related support, please contact [foundation@acce.org](mailto:foundation@acce.org). For further information about Safal Partners or the U.S. Department of Labor Registered Apprenticeship Technical Assistance Center of Excellence for Strategic Partnerships and Systems Alignment, please contact [RA\\_COE@safalpartners.com](mailto:RA_COE@safalpartners.com).