



Driving Employer and AJC Collaboration to Increase WIOA/Registered Apprenticeship Co-enrollment

A Guide for Business Services Representatives



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Introduction

This guide provides business services representatives (BSRs) with strategies to effectively engage employers and American Jobs Center (AJC) staff to increase co-enrollment of customers in WIOA Title I—Adult, Dislocated Worker, or Youth—and Registered Apprenticeship (RA).

What is Co-Enrollment?

As used in this guide, co-enrollment refers to simultaneously enrolling WIOA participants in more than one of the six WIOA core programs:

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- Title I—Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth Programs
 - Title II—Adult Education
 - Title III—Wagner-Peyser
 - Title IV—Vocational Rehabilitation
 - WIOA partner programs (e.g., Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP] Employment and Training [E&T], Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF])

What is Registered Apprenticeship (RA)?

As a BSR, you play a vital role in helping local employers with talent pipeline development. Employers need more than just a job order posting or a resume referral; they need a longer-term solution to recruit, train, retain, and upskill staff. You can help employers by engaging them not only in WIOA Core and Partner Program services, but also by introducing them to RA.

RA offers employers a customizable, proven talent development strategy that combines paid On-the-Job Learning (OJL) with Related Instruction (RI), utilizing standards validated by industry and approved by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) or your State Apprenticeship Agency (SAA).

Key RA Benefits for the Employer

WORKFORCE QUALITY & PRODUCTIVITY



- Apprentices receive structured OJL aligned to an employer's exact skills needs.
- Apprentices often reach full productivity faster due to targeted training.
- Standardized training improves quality control through reduced error rates and increased customer satisfaction.

RECRUITMENT & RETENTION ADVANTAGES



- RA programs create a natural talent pipeline for hard-to-fill roles.
- RA participants are more likely to stay with the employer for a year or more following program completion compared to their non-apprentice peers. According to the [U.S. Department of Labor](https://www.dol.gov/eis/ra), 94% of RA completers remain employed after completion.
- Having a structured training plan for new hires on day one opens pathways for candidates without traditional qualifications but with high potential.

COST EFFICIENCY



- RA reduces hiring and onboarding expenses due to improved retention.
- Employers realize tangible ROI by recouping training investments through apprentices' increased productivity before program completion.
- Employers may qualify for financial support such as federal or state workforce grants, tax credits, or direct incentives, funding, or subsidized costs.

CUSTOMIZED TRAINING & SCALING



- Employers can specifically tailor their programs to their own equipment, processes, and standards.
- Consistent skills standards ensure all apprentices meet the same performance benchmarks.
- RA is an easily scalable model, enabling an employer to expand their program to multiple occupations or sites.

EMPLOYER BRANDING AND SUCCESSION PLANNING



- RA programs demonstrate an employer's investment in workforce development, appealing to customers, partners, and future candidates.
- RA program supervisors and mentors can observe apprentices' performance to determine candidacy for supervisory and technical leadership roles.

Think of RA as a strategic investment for employers who want to build a hands-on, fully customizable training program and talent pipeline that produces skilled, loyal workers capable of thriving and advancing within their organization.

Conversation Starters and Questions for Employer Engagement

Employers often hold preconceived ideas built on outdated stereotypes about apprenticeship. Instead of using a “cold call” approach to selling RA, start by asking them to describe their workforce challenges and pain points to help them see how RA can be a solution. The following are a few questions you can use to begin the conversation:

- Tell me about the toughest roles you are working to fill right now.
- What skills or competencies give your top performers their edge?
- What is your current average turnover rate for your most critical occupations?
- What does it cost you, in time and money, to replace each experienced person who leaves?
- Where do your workforce gaps impact production, customer commitments, or customer service the most?
- How do you currently train new hires in critical tasks and safety procedures?
- How valuable would it be to guarantee industry-recognized credentials for every new team member?
- Would it help to have up to 50% of their wages reimbursed during their initial training?
- What supportive services, such as transportation or childcare, would make it easier for employees to stay on track?
- If we designed an RA program customized to develop the skills your workers need, what would your ideal curriculum include?
- Would you be interested in joining an already-approved RA program so you can pilot a small cohort of your own apprentices and not need to take on program sponsorship responsibilities?

Using these prompts to guide the conversation can help you uncover your employer's priorities and position RA as a tailored solution to their challenges.

Busting the Most Common RA Myths

Many employers have outdated beliefs and misperceptions about RA. Engaging employers will require addressing those issues; the following are scenarios that you may have run into, along with suggested responses used by BSRs:



MYTH: “RA programs take too long”

SCENARIO: PHASED APPRENTICESHIP AT ACME MANUFACTURING

ACME manufacturing was skeptical that RA would work because they felt that “apprenticeship takes too long” when they first explored the model. To address this, their BSR worked with their local ATR to design a three-phase RA pathway:

Foundation Phase (4-weeks)

New apprentices complete a short, intensive ‘boot camp’ on shop safety, basic machine operation, and blueprint reading. At the end, they earn a certificate of foundational skills, immediately qualifying them for entry-level production tasks.

Core Skills Phase (6 months, stackable)

In the next six months, apprentices rotate through OJL stations, milling, turning, and quality inspection, while also completing 5 hours of RI. Completing this phase earns a technical operator credential and a wage increase.

Advanced Specialization Phase (3 months required, up to 9 more months optional)

Finally, apprentices move into a specialized track, such as CNC programming or tool design, over the following year. They work with senior mentors, finishing with an advanced technician certification after they have completed a minimum of 144 hours of RI and 2,000 hours of OJL.

Because each phase builds on the last and awards a tangible credential, ACME can onboard apprentices, see productivity gains quickly, and let individuals choose a specialization as they complete their RA program. This flexible, phased approach shatters the ‘too long’ myth by delivering early wins and allowing employers and apprentices to tailor the journey to their goals.



MYTH: “We don’t have time to train.”

SCENARIO: MICRO-LEARNING AT SUMMIT SOLUTIONS

Summit Solutions worried that setting aside time for apprentices’ OJL would halt production on their busy shop floor. Their BSR helped them adopt a micro-learning model where apprentices spend just two hours each week on focused skill-building sessions and apply new techniques immediately under the guidance of their mentor. Modularized online instruction is delivered in 30-minute blocks during natural downtime between production runs, and OJL is woven into regular shifts so that apprentices learn by doing rather than stepping away from their duties.

Within eight weeks, the apprentices learned critical CNC setup procedures without disrupting the production schedule. This approach demonstrates that with smart scheduling and mentorship, RA can fit seamlessly into demanding operational environments.



MYTH: “WIOA is too time-consuming for my staff.”

SCENARIO: SUPPORTING SANDERS HOSPITAL SYSTEM

Sanders Hospital System agreed that an RA program would help them fill openings for roles in which they were having difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified candidates. However, they were concerned that WIOA co-enrollment would be overly bureaucratic. Their BSR transformed the process into a guided, paper-light experience.

First, the BSR met with the hiring team and collected job descriptions, the company’s payroll schedule for wage reimbursement, and any special requirements the employer wanted for evaluating RA candidates.

With this information in hand, the BSR completed a two-page referral form for the AJC team to use. As career coaches found interested candidates, they filled out the referral form and provided it to the BSR, who then forwarded it to the hospital’s HR team with the candidate’s resume for review. This system ensured that hospital HR staff were receiving only qualified WIOA-eligible RA candidates for consideration.

To create a seamless two-way referral system, the BSR also developed a referral form and a checklist for the hospital HR team to use when sending potential candidates they sourced to the AJC. The checklist included basic eligibility information so that HR staff could make a preliminary decision on whether the candidate might qualify for WIOA funding. The form requested basic data that the HR team would collect for any candidate, including personal information (name, contact information, work history, and any assessment results), the occupation they were considering hiring the candidate for, and the wage level.

The BSR gave the HR team the names of two AJC staff members whom candidates should request when they came in for their eligibility and intake appointments. All AJC staff were trained in using the ‘reverse referral’ forms and were committed to confirming eligibility within 48 hours.

At every step, the BSR assisted by scheduling intake appointments, ensuring AJC staff understood when there was a reverse referral, and helping hospital HR with any questions about candidates along the way.

Developing A Value Proposition for the Employer

A useful tool to use with employers is a value proposition, which is a simple outline of the benefits the organization can gain by creating a WIOA/RA co-enrollment strategy. Components of a value proposition could include

- The cost-effective nature of building a talent pipeline with RA (e.g., it increases worker loyalty and retention, thereby lowering the cost of constant recruiting and backfilling).
- The wage subsidies and support services the employer can access through WIOA and working with the AJC.
- Long-term retention and productivity gains.
- Measurable ROI.
- Positive community impact by being known as an employer that invests in employee skill building.

Please note the following example of a value proposition:

1. COST-EFFECTIVE TALENT PIPELINE

- Apprenticeship is an earn-as-you-learn model resulting in longer worker retention, which in turn results in lower recruiting and turnover costs. By asking an employer about their current turnover rates and associated costs, you can help them estimate how much RA would save through longer-term worker retention.
- The AJC may be able to provide funding to help offset training costs, wages, and supportive services for WIOA-eligible apprentices.
- According to a [DOL-commissioned ROI study](#) of American Apprenticeship Initiative (AAI) employers, they found a median ROI of 44.3% on the value of apprentice productivity. An even more important benefit to the employers was a reduced turnover rate. In [Oregon, a study](#) found that there was a 10% lower turnover cost compared with non-apprentice hires.

The following value proposition example uses hypothetical figures you can replace with your own employer data:

Training Line Item	Traditional Training Cost	WIOA-Subsidized Cost for RA Program	Savings to Employer
Related Instruction	\$6,000	\$0 (covered by WIOA)	\$6,000
Recruitment & Onboarding	\$2,500*	\$1,000**	\$1,500
Total Direct Training Cost	\$8,500	\$1,000	\$7,500

*Determined by employer

**Could be more depending on the amount of wages covered by the local board

2. WAGE SUBSIDIES AND SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

- WIOA may reimburse up to 50% of the apprentice wages for the first 600 hours, equating to \$4,800 in support per wage step (based upon hypothetical wage amount and could be higher if local board allows 75% reimbursement)
- Additional wraparound supports, such as transportation and childcare subsidies, have been shown to reduce absenteeism by up to 30% according to a study done by [UC Berkeley Labor Center](#).

3. RETENTION AND PRODUCTIVITY GAINS

- Progressive wage increases, strong mentoring, and hands-on learning are key reasons why DOL has been able to demonstrate that RA completers have a one-year 91% retention rate compared to non-apprentice hires.
- Mentor programs can cut safety incidents, which leads to more productivity in the workplace. One study in a healthcare system noted that their mentor program “resulted in a demonstrated decrease in reported events with major outcomes and an increase in reported near-miss medication events that were corrected before they reached the patient.”

4. MEASURABLE ROI

- Co-enrolled cohorts can exceed non-apprentices’ credential attainment rates because RA requires that apprentices complete occupationally-related instruction combined with OJL.
- RA results in reduced overtime and unplanned downtime attributable to skill gaps, which can be determined by multiplying the reduction in hours by the wage rate.

Coordinating with AJC Staff

Coordinating with the AJC Staff and WIOA partners is vital. It ensures your apprenticeship initiatives are fully supported and seamlessly integrated into the broader workforce system. By working together with WIOA Career Coaches or WIOA Partner staff, you can tap into training funds, wage reimbursements, and wraparound services that remove barriers for apprentices and offset program costs. Below are some steps to take to increase your coordination with AJC Staff and WIOA Core and Partner staff.

Establish referral protocols: Define clear trigger points, such as when an employer has identified an apprentice candidate or the employer is recruiting for apprentices. At these trigger points, you should loop in Career Coaches with as much information as possible on either the candidate or the RA program.

Develop shared workflows: Create joint intake and co-enrollment checklists that AJC Staff, WIOA coaches, and RA navigators can use to streamline handoffs. Below are two concrete examples of how AJCs have built shared workflows between their apprenticeship navigators and partner staff to streamline co-enrollment and support:

MAINE’S VR-EMBEDDED APPRENTICESHIP NAVIGATOR

In Maine, the Department of Labor partners with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services to embed an Apprenticeship Navigator directly within the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) statewide service team. When VR counselors identify a candidate interested in RA, they immediately loop in the navigator, who



- **Joins the Career Seekers Service Planning** meeting to confirm RA eligibility and share occupational openings.
- **Coordinates the warm handoff** back to the VR counselor for intake and supportive service referrals.
- **Tracks participant milestones** in a shared case management dashboard, flagging when OJT or RI begins so VR can trigger accommodations.

This ‘Navigator in VR’ model breaks down silos by giving one staff member ownership of both disability supports and RA pathways, ensuring that no handoff is lost, and that all supports are activated in real time.

TENNESSEE'S REGIONAL APPRENTICESHIP NAVIGATORS

Apprenticeship TN, a consortium of seven state agencies, deploys three regional apprenticeship navigators who sit within the Tennessee Workforce Development System but co-locate weekly with AJC Business Services Teams. Their workflow includes



- **Joint business engagements:** Navigators and BSRs conduct employer outreach together, capturing employer needs and immediately mapping applicable funding streams (e.g., WIOA ITAs, OJT reimbursements).
- **Shared Candidate Pipeline:** Employer-identified roles feed into a shared Excel tracking sheet; navigators screen and refer interested job seekers to WIOA Case managers for eligibility intake.
- **Regular case staffing calls:** Every two weeks, the apprenticeship navigator, BSR, and WIOA coaches meet virtually to review each apprentice's status, triggering WIOA Supportive Services or sponsored check-ins as needed.

This formal navigator-BSR-Coach cadence ensures that once an employer commits to RA, everyone shares the same To-Do List, deadlines, and performance metrics, driving faster replacements and reducing duplication.

WIOA/RA Co-Enrollment Workflow Overview

The following is a high-level workflow overview for engaging employers in RA and coordinating with AJC staff.

1

Identify Employer RA Interest

The BSR reviews the employer's current and projected workforce needs, and then reaches out to employers via email or in person visits to discuss their talent challenges, understand their current training methodology and how it may fit with apprenticeship, and gather key information about their workforce needs including job titles, skill requirements, and hiring timelines. The BSR also explains the use of WIOA funding for training services and/or supportive services.

2

Connect or Develop RA Sponsor

BSRs either connect with current RA program group sponsors or assist businesses with establishing their own RA program. As the BSR helps employers establish their own RA program, they also work closely with the local RA system ATR to ensure the programs' compliance and sustainability. When talking to group sponsors, the BSR makes them aware of potential new employers interested in joining their RA program.



A group sponsor is an organization (such as a workforce board, industry association, or education provider) that administratively manages an RA program on behalf of multiple employers. Instead of each employer registering and maintaining its own program, the group sponsor oversees the design, registration, and compliance. Employers simply sign a participation agreement to join and gain access to a ready-made structure for training, recordkeeping, and reporting.

3**Coordinate WIOA Eligibility**

Once the RA program is approved by either DOL Office of Apprenticeship (OA) or SAA staff and ready to accept apprentices, the BSR begins coordination of WIOA eligibility procedures. This includes collecting and providing information from the candidates to an AJC career coach. BSRs should also provide RA program information to the career coach so they can include goals and milestones in the candidate's Individual Service Plan (ISP).

4**WIOA Supportive Services and OJT Funding**

BSRs should communicate with career coaches if they are aware of any supportive services an apprentice candidate might require for the program, such as special tools, equipment, or uniforms. Career coaches will also look for any supportive services necessary to remove barriers to successful program completion (e.g., childcare, transportation). Additionally, BSRs develop any OJT contracts to support apprentice wages during the initial training period. Examples of OJT contracts can be found in the [OJT Toolkit on WorkforceGPS](#).

5**Monitor Onboarding**

BSRs should consider RA as an active project. This means they should be aware of milestones, setting up communication checkpoints, and tracking KPIs/relevant data. BSRs may want to build a simple spreadsheet that lists each new apprentice, their start date, their employer, the RI schedule, and key support services they are receiving.

Within the first week, BSRs should confirm that the apprentice completed orientation, received any necessary safety gear, and attended their first classroom session. The BSR should schedule check-ins over the next three to six months with the employer, the mentor, and the apprentice to review their progress against competencies and attendance, and proactively identify and mitigate any barriers to successful program completion.

The BSRs should also track whether supportive services are provided and accessed, and whether they are assisting the apprentice to overcome barriers. Should an issue emerge, the BSR should notify the necessary staff to develop an action plan with agreed-upon steps, responsible parties, and a target date for service delivery.

6**Track Outcomes**

BSR can track RA co-enrollment outcomes by setting up a simple, consistent measurement system that incorporates both employer and program performance metrics. Below are some items that could be considered:

- Define key outcome metrics such as the completion of milestones, obtaining a credential, and remaining employed throughout the RA process.
- Review with AJC staff the use of supportive services as a means of ensuring outcomes will be met.
- Regularly review with the RA sponsor how the apprentice is progressing, including their wage progressions.
- Treat all outcomes as living data that must be updated regularly and can drive program improvements.



Resources

[Innovations in Apprenticeship: 5 Case Studies That Illustrate the Promise of Apprenticeship](#)—This report examines a suite of innovative apprenticeship models from around the country. It provides detailed case studies of Vermont Healthcare and Information Technology Education Center (Vermont HITEC), the Michigan Advanced Technologies Training program (MAT2), the SEIU Healthcare NW Training Partnership, the National Institute for Metalworking Skills (NIMS) Certified Registered Apprenticeship program, and Apprenticeship Carolina.

[Engaging Employers to Scale Apprenticeships: The Employers' Perspective](#)—In this webinar, employers talked about their partnerships with H1-B apprenticeship programs, their challenges, and their positive experiences. Grantees came away with

- An understanding of employer hiring practices from various sectors.
- Strategies for engaging employers after COVID-19 crisis challenges.
- Effective employer recruitment strategies.

[Tips for Employer Engagement and Incorporating Sector Strategies](#)—Resources are provided for basic employer engagement, sector strategy engagements, and evidence about employer engagement strategies.

[Employer-Centered Strategies: Engaging New Employers in Apprenticeships](#)—This webinar provided information about effective employer-centered engagement strategies that can help grow apprenticeship programs.

[Registered Apprenticeship Center of Excellence for Strategic Partnerships and System Alignment](#)—This website is focused on helping key stakeholders build and scale strategic partnerships to put more American workers on high-quality apprenticeship career pathways.