



Leveraging Registered Apprenticeship in Sector Strategy Planning for Workforce Development

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Introduction

Regional economies increasingly compete on their ability to develop and retain skilled talent in key industry sectors. With an aging and shrinking workforce, and rapidly developing technology impacting workforce development across the board, traditional approaches may increasingly fail to align with employer needs, resulting in skills gaps that limit business expansion and reduce competitiveness. State and local economies will increasingly be forced to develop and quickly scale more innovative approaches to supporting current and prospective employers' talent strategies.

Registered apprenticeship (RA) programs have successfully proven to bridge the skills divide, utilizing industry-driven training that solves labor shortages by producing workers with the precise skills and competencies that employers need. Modern RA programs have helped employers in both traditional (e.g., skilled trade, construction) and rapidly emerging sectors (e.g. financial services, health care, advanced manufacturing, etc.) optimize their human capital investments, lower recruiting costs, increase employee retention, improve productivity and more quickly and effectively identify future leaders.

Registered apprenticeship represents a critical yet underutilized tool for workforce system and economic development agencies seeking to build robust sector strategies. By combining structured learning with mentor-led, hands-on experience, RA programs create direct pathways between education and employment while addressing skilled worker shortages that often constrain regional economic growth.

Registered Apprenticeship: A Proven Approach, A Competitive Advantage

Registered apprenticeship is the most time-tested, proven solution for businesses to recruit, train and retain skilled workers. Established through the National Apprenticeship Act ("Fitzgerald Act") in 1937, today the model is being used by employers across every sector of the American economy to create and maintain strong talent pipelines. In so doing RA programs are providing American workers with clear career pathways and opportunity for professional advancement and economic mobility. As a unique "earn and learn" talent development solution, RA programs provide workers with paid on-the-job work experience and occupationally related classroom instruction. This approach gives businesses a clear, organizationally aligned and scalable training model that ensures economic growth through a more stable and competitive workforce.



RA is the nation's most proven 'earn and learn' model - helping businesses grow a strong talent pipelines while providing workers with paid training and clear career pathways.'

Five Core Components of RA Programs



EMPLOYER INVOLVEMENT

Employers are the primary drivers for RA programs. They play an active role in designing, developing, and implementing apprenticeship training to meet their organizational and industry standards as well as the needs of their current and future workforce. RA doesn't exist without employers!



REWARDS FOR SKILL GAINS

Apprentices receive hands-on training and guidance from mentors with directly relevant occupational expertise. The On-the-Job Learning (OJL) is clearly mapped out for apprentices from Day 1 and aligned with industry and organizational standards.



STRUCTURED ON-THE-JOB LEARNING

Apprentices are required to complete a minimum of 144 clock hours of classroom or online education related to their occupation annually that complements their OJL. Employers either provide the Related Instruction (RI) in-house or work with a local education/training provider.



NATIONAL OCCUPATIONAL CREDENTIAL

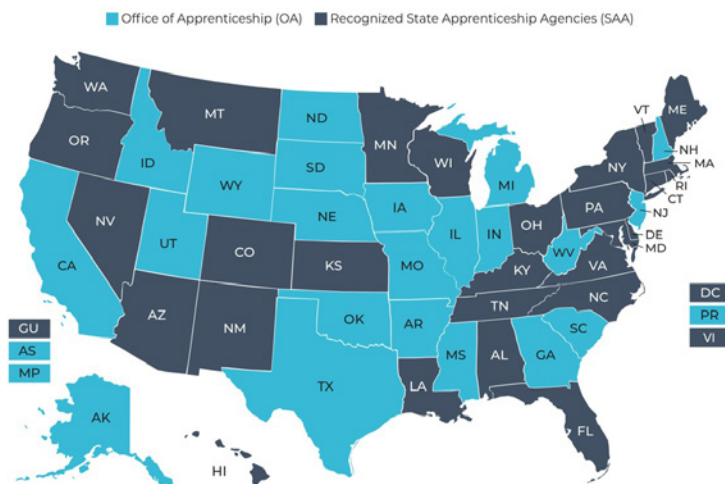
Apprentices earn progressive wage increases as they demonstrate increased skills, competencies, and productivity.



RELATED INSTRUCTION

Upon completion of the program, apprentices earn a portable, nationally recognized occupational credential from DOL and often one or more industry certifications or credentials.

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Office of Apprenticeship (OA) oversees the American apprenticeship system; RA programs are developed by sponsors and approved by either DOL OA staff or State Apprenticeship Agency (SAA) staff. Apprenticeship system structure and contact information is available for each state and territory on [Apprenticeship.gov](https://www.apprenticeship.gov).



RA PROGRAM ROLES

Successful RA programs engage a network of partners that play key roles.



Sponsor: Every RA program requires sponsorship. A sponsor is the organization which agrees to operate an RA program, complying with federal and state regulations, and in whose name the program is registered. Program sponsors can be companies, labor unions or labor management associations, workforce boards, trade/industry associations, community-based organizations, K-12 school systems, colleges/universities, or other intermediaries.



RI Provider: The entity providing apprentices with instruction related to an occupation's core knowledge, skills, and abilities. The employer can select their RI provider or provide it in-house through qualified instructors. RI partners can be community colleges, technical schools, universities, industry associations, K-12 school systems, and intermediaries.



Employer: The employer hires and provides paid OJL for apprentices under the supervision of a designated mentor who is a skilled professional in that occupation. An employer may sponsor their own program (playing both the Sponsor and Employer roles) or join an existing group RA program sponsored by another entity, freeing the organization to focus solely on the Employer role.)



Partner: Organizations committed to assisting RA programs. They can play one or more roles and provide a number of different resources such as supportive services, program marketing, and funding.



Successful RA programs thrive through strong partnerships - sponsors, employers, educators, and community organizations working together to build talent and opportunity.

Clear, Defined Benefits

RA offers multiple benefits for both employers and apprentices.

EMPLOYER BENEFITS

Positive ROI

Employers report earning on average \$1.44 for every \$1 invested in RA (US DOL 2022).

Standardized Skillset

Every apprentice that completes an employer's RA program becomes fully proficient in the same set of skills, creating a more agile workforce.

Accessing Financial Resources

Employers with RA programs can qualify for federal and state tax credits, workforce funding, and a network of partners to support program implementation.

Proven Retention

The typical employer experiences a [44.3% ROI on RA programs](#) (myONEFLOW: 10 Amazing Stats That Show the Value of RA Programs).

Veteran Recruitment

RA programs approved for GI Bill use enable Veterans to access VA resources, including a Monthly Housing Allowance, which can provide significant tax-free monthly housing funding, in addition to their apprentice wages.



APPRENTICE BENEFITS

Earn-and-Learn Training Model

Apprenticeship is a job; apprentices are paid for the duration of their program and are eligible to receive one or more wage increases upon demonstrated skill growth over the course of the program.

Lowens or Eliminates Post-Secondary Education Costs

All RA programs provide apprentices with RI aligned with their select occupation; typically, the employer pays all or most of the course costs, whether instruction is delivered onsite, through a training provider, or at a local community college. In many cases, this RI equips an apprentice to earn one or more industry certifications and may result in college credit.

Pathway into a High-Demand Career

All RA programs are designed as an entry point to a career pathway and full-time, non-apprentice employment with the employer providing the OJL. [According to DOL](#), most successful program completers are hired by their program sponsor/ employer with an average annual salary of \$84,000.

Success is Defined

Unlike other work-based learning models, RA has a specific, tangible set of competencies that an apprentice must become fully proficient in to complete their program.

Earn-and-Learn Training Model

Apprentices receive pay and potential wage increases

Lowens Education Costs

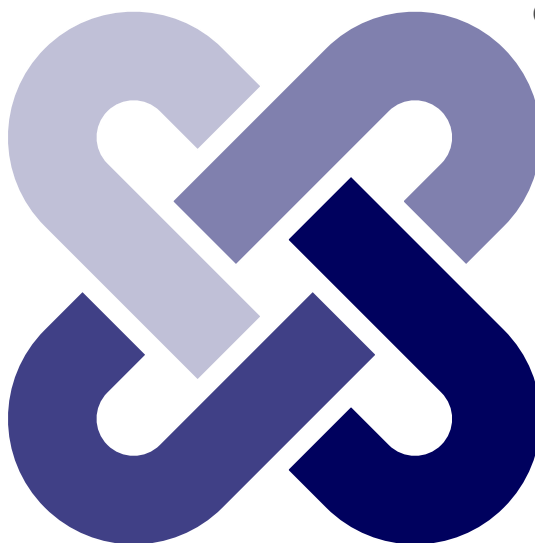
Employers cover most education expenses

Pathway to High-Demand Career

Leads to full-time employment with high salary

Success is Defined

Clear competencies for program completion



Evidence-Based Impacts of RA for Employers

In 2022 DOL produced a report entitled “[Beyond Productivity: How Employers Gain More from Apprenticeship Findings from the American Apprenticeship Initiative \(AAI\) Evaluation.](#)” According to the AAI grant program findings, participating employers noted overwhelmingly positive impacts of incorporating RA as a workforce strategy:



RA’s Role in a Sector Strategy

Sector strategies are regional, industry-focused approaches to building a skilled workforce and critical to aligning public and private resources in order to address employers’ talent needs. While the approach is not new, there is a growing body of evidence showing that sector strategies can simultaneously improve employment opportunities for jobseekers and the competitiveness of industries. As a result, there is a growing call, supported by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to utilize sector strategies to meet both the needs of workers and the needs of state and local economies.

At the core of sector strategies are **sector partnerships**, also referred to as industry partnerships, workforce collaboratives or regional skill alliances. These sector partnerships are responsible for convening employers in key industry clusters and critical players within a region. These partnerships are often employer-led, and work in concert with workforce development entities, education and training providers, economic development agencies, labor and community-based organizations to solve critical workforce needs.

Integrating RA into these sector partnership discussions and resulting sector strategy planning can help regional economies more quickly respond to immediate skills shortages for key industries while also building future-fit talent pipelines to help recruit and retain more industry investment.

For a clear overview of the newly updated Sector Strategies Framework, please refer to the following resources that provide detailed explanations, visual graphics, and peer-to-peer exchanges to better understand the foundational aspects:

- [Sector Strategies Framework](#)
- [Framework Listening Sessions](#)
- [Sector Strategies Resources](#)



RA Inclusion in Sector Strategies to Meet Real-Time Industry Needs, Build Talent Pipelines, and Contribute to Regional Economic Growth

A talent pipeline is a programmed and preemptive method of generating a ready pool of skilled labor which should match an employer or sectors' current and future workforce requirements. This pipeline provides employers with a steady pool of candidates who are trained for the in-demand jobs they need to fill. Unlike short-term hiring fixes, a talent pipeline model incorporates:

- 1. Workforce planning** – assessing future talent needs based on business goals
- 2. Sourcing** – building a network of partners to provide the widest possible outreach to interested, qualified, and motivated candidates
- 3. Industry-validated job training** – educational partners implementing classroom and work-based learning instruction to prepare candidates for hiring and advancement.

RA programs are founded on the same three building blocks. Integrating RA program planning in sector strategies helps economic development agencies and state and local governments better position their communities for employer investment, demonstrating to prospective and current business owners a well-aligned network of workforce boards, secondary and post-secondary educational institutions, industry associations, chambers of commerce, and other community stakeholders ready to provide a pipeline of workers for immediate and long-term occupational needs. This is even more critical for high-growth sectors already experiencing critical workforce shortages and skills gaps such as advanced manufacturing, healthcare, and information technology (IT).

In addition to enhancing the value proposition of a state, regional or local area for potential business investors, RA programs also have a clear, demonstrated economic multiplier effect, contributing to regional economic growth. A [2012 DOL evaluation of 10 states](#) calculated that every \$1 invested in apprenticeship generated a tax return to the state of \$27 and total public benefit value of more than \$35.

Following are key steps to effectively and strategically integrating RA into sector strategies.

STEP 1: UNDERSTANDING INDUSTRY DEMANDS

Strong sector partnerships use labor market information (LMI), employer surveys, and job posting analytics to determine which skills and occupations are in demand. This information provides a critical baseline from which to craft an RA integration strategy and shape apprenticeship program design.

Start by leveraging already-established sector intelligence drawing on real-time LMI to identify specific occupations within priority sectors where RA models can address persistent talent pipeline challenges. Focus on industries and occupations with high job growth projections (>5-10% annually), documented skills gaps (as validated by employers), existing employer networks or associations to support RA program development at scale, and ideally median wages above regional average.

Suggested Resources:

- [U.S. Department of Labor – LMI Resources](#) – Support identifying industry trends and skill gaps to inform training development.
- [Deeper Dive into Demand-Side Data: Identifying Target Sectors](#) – Resources that guide the use of data to identify regional target sectors.
- [Voices of Experience: Sector Partnerships in Action](#) – This video documents how the Wichita, KS Workforce Board convened its partners to address the area’s aviation sector needs.
- [Sector Strategies in Action: Driving Sector Approaches into Workforce Services](#) – A brief to help workforce practitioners build a range of skills needed to launch and advance sector strategies – providing resources, best practices and tools.
- [WIOA: Advancing Apprenticeship as a Workforce Strategy](#) – WIOA provides an extraordinary opportunity for the public workforce system to transform the quality of life for jobs seekers and workers through RA.

STEP 2: MAPPING THE CURRENT REGIONAL RA AND TRAINING LANDSCAPE

Working closely with the DOL OA or SAA leadership and staff in your region, inventory existing, active RA programs in the region to:



understand current sectoral use of the RA model



assess current RA program strength and capacity



document gaps where RA could expand, particularly for sectors identified as high-priority and high-growth for the region.

This step is critical to ensure that your integration of RA into sector strategy planning enhances, rather than competes with existing workforce development infrastructure. You may also want to consider mapping RA programs in adjacent or competing regions to assess competitive positioning and potentially inform funding/investment recommendations.

Because RI is a required component of all RA programs it will be important to audit existing training provider capacity and apprenticeship readiness as well.

STEP 3: ENGAGING KEY EMPLOYERS

Successful RA integration into a sector strategy entirely relies on industry’s willingness to adopt the model. Simply put, industry listens to industry. It is critical to identify a handful of RA “champions” from industry, ideally 2-3 per target sector and employers already engaged in sector initiatives, that can validate RA programs’ ROI and training value. Potential candidates could come from existing industry advisory committees.

These industry champions can also help contextualize a sector partnership’s labor market analyses by sharing surveys with industry peers or participating in listening sessions, providing additional quantitative and qualitative data on specific workforce challenges and RA questions/concerns to incorporate into the sector strategy. They can also help develop RA business use cases specific to each sector’s competitive dynamics, and lead employer consortiums to share apprenticeship development and delivery costs.

Employer engagement at the outset can also help set expectations and benchmarks for program design and development. Employers will be crucial to implementation, pinpointing skills gaps, defining job roles and shaping the OJL and RI for program standards development.

This participation will help secure formal commitment to sponsor or participate in programs once built as well as ongoing collaboration with workforce boards, educational institutions, and community-based organizations to continually refine programs in response to industry and market changes, apprentice feedback, and performance data.



DOL research demonstrates that the typical employer experiences a 44.3% ROI on Registered Apprenticeship programs.

Suggested Resources:

- [Hiring Can Be Frustrating: Apprenticeships Can Make It Easy](#) - Bridge the skills gap with tailored apprenticeship programs.
- [Engaging Employers to Register Apprenticeship Programs](#) – Under the American Apprenticeship Initiative, MassHire deployed a structured consultative sales approach to engage employers – starting with research, outreach, and securing commitments to establish RA program.
- [U.S. Department of Labor – Apprenticeship Toolkit: Employer Guide](#) – Explains how employers can use apprenticeship to meet industry demands and customize training.
- [Turning Potential into Performance: RA as a Business Strategy](#) – How the Manufacturing Skills Institute is providing resources to the manufacturing industry to build RA programs to support talent pipeline development.
- [Employ Prince George’s \(EPG\) Partners with Local Employers to Create New RA Programs in Healthcare and Law Enforcement](#) – EPG workforce board is partnering with local employers to create livable wage jobs through their Apprenticeship Innovation Program.
- [Cleveland Clinic](#) – Launched a pharmacy and IT apprenticeship designed to open up career pathways without a four-year degree requirement.

STEP 4: ARTICULATING RA INTEGRATION IN SECTOR STRATEGY GOVERNANCE

Because effective sector strategies already coordinate multiple stakeholders, integrating RA into existing, or planned, sector partnership governance should strengthen these relationships rather than creating a disconnected, parallel workforce development structure. Suggested methods of integrating RA include:

- **embedding apprenticeship strategy oversight** within existing sector advisory committees;
- **designating apprenticeship liaisons** from labor, education, and workforce partners;
- **aligning apprenticeship goals metrics** with broader sector strategy KPIs and, ideally, other state and regional workforce planning (e.g., State WIOA Unified or Combined Plan); and
- **leveraging existing data sharing agreements** between sector strategy participants to expand for RA program metrics tracking.

STEP 5: DEVELOPING RA PROGRAMS

RA implementation as part of a sector strategy will eventually require review and potential updating of existing RA program standards and/or developing new RA program standards for individual employer sponsors or group-sponsored, cohort-based programs that advance sector strategy goals. The industry champions designated in Step 3 can take the lead in developing programs, working with both educational training providers in the region to create stackable credentials and, ideally, academic credit-conferring instructional programs, as well as with the DOL OA or SAA staff in your region on program registration.

Demonstrating your region’s ability to offer employers approved programs as well as the ability to adapt RA models to incoming industry needs can be a key component of attracting new industry investment. When designing models to align with high priority sectors and occupations, take into consideration that:

- program competencies should be aligned with existing sector skills frameworks which employers can validate;
- program models should facilitate seamless lateral movement for workers between related occupations (to support incumbent upskilling);
- programs should be aligned with existing sector credentialing and training programs or pathways, potentially through pre-apprenticeship when applicable;
- RI should leverage current, proven educational institutions and partnerships; and
- local workforce board RA policies should ensure compatibility with incumbent worker training and other RA-aligned training programs.

Industry-validated RA program design for priority occupations in critical sectors produces two high-value benefits:

1. It strengthens the connection between education and employment for local workers and career seekers.
2. It ensures prospective industry investment that your region has the capability to reduce skills mismatches and build a quality talent pipeline able to satisfy both the current and future demands of the industry.

In short, all stakeholders benefit from a demand-driven approach to program design: **employers** secure the skilled workforce they need; **jobseekers** gain industry-recognized credentials and in-demand skills; and **local policymakers** demonstrate effective investment of taxpayer funds to produce market-relevant training programs that attract investment.

Suggested Resources:

- [Urban Institute – Competency-Based Occupational Frameworks](#) – Provides detailed occupational competencies used to structure industry-aligned apprenticeships.
- [Building Programs & Systems to Last: A Case Study of Maine’s RA Expansion Efforts](#) – State-level study describing how Maine anchored apprenticeship in state workforce strategy through partnerships, policy alignment, and sector engagement.

STEP 6: INTEGRATING SECTORAL SUPPORT, RESOURCES

With the surge in federal and state investment in RA since 2015, sector partnerships have a wide variety of potential resources to integrate into RA planning to support regional economic investment. Planning may include:

- **Federal and state funding:** Several federal agencies including DOL, the U.S. Department of Commerce, the U.S. Department of Education, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) have implemented RA-focused or RA-supportive grant programs over the past decade and a growing number of states are doing the same, as well as providing innovative RA incentives such as tax credits, subsidized training, and direct per-apprentice funding.
- **Intermediaries:** RA intermediaries whether private sector, nonprofits, union-affiliated or education-based, can play a number of roles in RA program development and sustainability. The common denominator across all intermediaries is that they exist to work with a collective of employers and RA stakeholders to accelerate adoption and expansion of RA. Intermediaries are leading outreach, developing curriculum frameworks, serving as RI providers, convening employers, sponsoring group programs for individual employer participation, providing funding, and much more.
- **Pre-apprenticeship programming:** Pre-apprenticeship programs are designed to help accelerate candidates’ readiness for RA programs through fundamental skills training.

Suggested Resources:

- [Apprenticeship.gov Investments, Tax Credits and Tuition Support](#)
- [A Solution to America’s Teacher Shortage is Hiding in Plain Sight](#) – Solutions to the teacher shortage requires a new link of thinking – enter Reach University.
- [Virginia’s HIRED Apprenticeship Fund](#) – An example of how one state dedicated grant funding to incentivize employers to start or expand RA programs in key sectors.

STEP 7: ONGOING PROGRAM MONITORING, EVALUATION AND INNOVATION

Monitoring and evaluation are essential to ensuring that a sector's strategy for talent development is delivering results. For RA program analysis, the DOL OA or SAA staff can provide needed evaluation data by reviewing key performance indicators like new/expanded program registration rates, apprentice completion rates, post-apprenticeship retention, apprentice wage growth, etc. The goal of program evaluation is to establish positive, documented outcomes and ROI as part of a sector strategy's work to engage and support participating businesses as well as apprentices. Continuous improvement based on period reviews may include altering program design, modifying training curriculum, expanding or improving outreach strategies, etc. Benchmarking RA program data against national and sector specific RA program data can also help improve competitiveness in meeting labor market needs.

Suggested Resources:

- [Building Programs & Systems to Last](#) – A case study of Maine's Registered Apprenticeship Expansion Efforts.

Policy Considerations

When integrating RA into a sector strategy, economic development leaders should consider potential policy recommendations to support successful implementation. Investments in sector strategies and RA-aligned career pathway development provide an incentive for education, workforce, human services, and community support systems to collaboratively design an approach to RA implementation that provides industry with a clear and comprehensive continuum of services to train, upskill, and support their employees.

Developing RA-focused policies and targeted investments can:

- **incentivize** adoption of RA by industry;
- **accelerate** development of clear, RA-aligned academic pathways and training opportunities (e.g., academic certificate and degree programs, pre-apprenticeship programs) by local secondary, CTE and post-secondary educational institutions;
- **stimulate** local workforce boards and American Job Centers to increase utilization of RA to meet goals for service delivery to job seekers and employers while simultaneously meeting WIOA performance metrics; and
- **provide** a more integrated and sustainable approach to long-term program success across sectors.

RA policy and investment recommendations should be tailored both to a regional economy's needs and sector strategy priorities while acknowledging the need for flexibility to plan for long-term growth. Potential policy and investment recommendations could include:

- integrating RA as a priority service delivery tool in state and local WIOA planning, including setting specific actionable goals (e.g., # of new programs developed, # of new, co-enrolled apprentices in WIOA and RA, etc.);
- developing state tax credits or direct incentives for employers utilizing RA;
- subsidizing the cost of RI when provided by a state secondary or post-secondary educational institution;
- leveraging federal formula funds streams (e.g., state apprenticeship expansion formula funds) to create state-based grant programs for priority sectors;
- developing a regional consortium to apply for federal and state discretionary/competitive grants to support RA expansion;
- developing a state-subsidized, shared funding model that aggregates RA training demand and costs across multiple employers within sectors; or
- formally recognizing and incentivizing RA Intermediaries to provide streamlined, sector-specific and ongoing technical assistance (e.g., RA program standards development), program sponsorship, apprentice candidate recruiting and training, etc. to lower potential barriers to adoption by employers.

Suggested Resources:

- [Leveraging RA to Build a Thriving and Inclusive Economy](#) – A playbook for Governor’s to ensure that residents can enter into well-paying, stable careers through accessible, affordable education and training.
- [Registered Apprenticeship and Career Pathways in Massachusetts](#) - A resource that focuses on how apprenticeship can be used to build stronger and more robust career pathways.
- [State Apprenticeships Promising Practices: Career Pathways and Education Alignment](#) – A series of promising practices for state-driven efforts to grow RA programs.

RA and the Road Ahead for Regional Sector Strategy Planning

Integrating RA into a comprehensive sector strategy requires intentional, collaborative effort by all workforce stakeholders including education, workforce, economic development, industry, state and local government, and community-based organizations. Furthermore, effective implementation to drive ROI will require the commitment of each stakeholder group. That commitment will look different for each stakeholder.

For example,

- **For employers**, getting institutional buy-in to drive program design and then participate in a multi-employer RA consortium that provides group sponsorship and shares costs as well as training resources and planning with local education providers can de-risk any one employers’ new entry into RA.
- **Educators** can focus on developing CTE and dual enrollment-aligned RA pathways as well as stackable programs that allow seamless student/apprentice progression from academic certificates through degrees.
- **Workforce boards** should engage in cross-jurisdictional coordination with workforce system partners to streamline service delivery by, for example, facilitating data sharing to track employment outcomes and wage progression and standardizing RA-supportive policies to lower barriers to adoption by employers.
- **State and local governments and policymakers** can craft RA-aligned policies and make legislative recommendations to accelerate expansion and resourcing for RA programs in critical sectors. They can also support or lead development of formal public-private partnerships to leverage federal, state, philanthropic and private sector/employer funding toward RA development.

Apprenticeship can serve as the scalable, flexible, and industry-validated training model that meets current and prospective employers’ projected labor market needs while ensuring that workers are well positioned for both immediate employment and long-term professional and economic advancements.

Developing new or expanded RA programs to meet rapidly growing or changing sectoral workforce needs cannot be done at scale in isolation. Engaging stakeholders through sector strategy planning can be that driver. Sector partnerships can build on real-time labor market data, employer needs, and regional, state and local resources to build responsive RA programs that address industry-specific workforce challenges. When pursued collaboratively, with key stakeholders, and institutional commitment, the resulting RA offering will deliver clear, demonstrated value to employers, workers, and regional economies alike.



Suggested Resources:

- [Advancing Apprenticeship: Opportunities for States and Business to Create and Expand RA Programs](#) – A publication that highlights the significance of RA programs as one of several strategies and opportunities that employers and states can implement to offer individuals a viable path toward securing and prospering in a career.
- [U.S. Department of Labor's RA TENS and TEGLs](#) – Employment and Training Administration's Training and Employment Notices (TENS) and Training and Employment Guidance Letters (TEGLs) pertaining to RA for the public workforce system.
- [Wisconsin's Registered Apprenticeship Program](#) - Wisconsin has earmarked substantial budget investments - \$9 million for IT, \$500,000 for Healthcare curriculum development, plus funding for Manufacturing as part of its biennial workforce strategy.
- [WorkforceGPS: Integrating & Implementing Career Pathways and Apprenticeship within a Sector Strategy](#)
- [Do Employers Earn Positive Returns to Investments in Apprenticeships?](#)
- [Sector Strategies Framework](#)
- [Apprenticeship.gov](#)
- [RA Center of Excellence for Strategic Partnerships & Systems Alignment](#)