



# Aligning Registered Apprenticeship with Economic Development Organizations



# Table of Contents

<b>Summary</b>	2
<b>What is RA?</b>	2
<b>Five Core Components of RA Programs</b>	3
<b>Why RA?</b>	4
Employer Benefits	4
Apprentice Benefits	5
RA Program Roles	6
<b>Alignment of RA With Economic Development</b>	6
Talent as a Commodity	6
Evidence-Based Impacts of RA	6
<b>Why EDOs Should Use RA as a Tool</b>	7
Business Attraction and Attention	7
Economic Resilience	7
Real-Time Labor Market Responsiveness	8
<b>The Value of RA to EDOs</b>	8
Workforce Alignment	8
Wrap-Around Supportive Services	9
Enhanced Competitiveness	9
<b>Process for EDOs to Use RA Solutions with Businesses</b>	10
<b>Building a Successful Registered Apprenticeship Program</b>	11
<b>Additional Resources</b>	12

## Summary

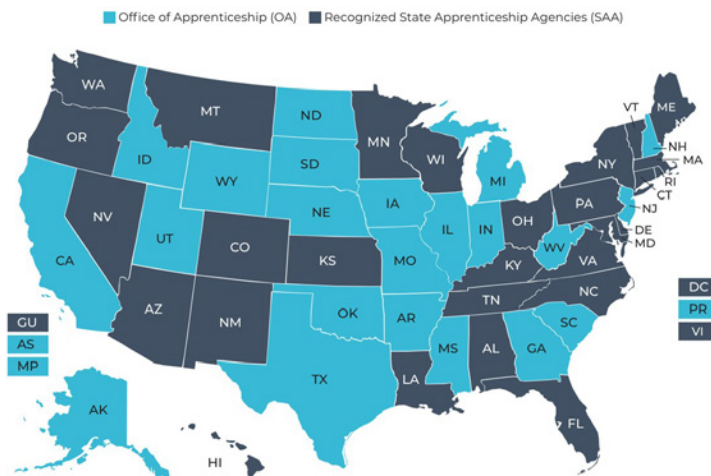
Access to an adequate pool of skilled labor is the most critical site-selection factor for firms looking to either launch new operations or relocate. Firms want readily available, skilled talent to sustain operations and growth. Successful firms rely heavily on demographic and occupational data, workforce analytics, and local training infrastructure in site feasibility models.

Building local talent pipelines to ensure skilled labor availability requires having industry-driven, scalable plans for recruiting, training, retaining, and upskilling workers. Registered Apprenticeship (RA) is the most proven, yet customizable strategy to meet that need. RA connects local education, workforce, and industry stakeholders, providing workers with accessible, structured pathways to gaining critical competencies for in-demand roles. RA strengthens and grows reliable talent pipelines by ensuring that local employers have a plan and resources for skills training. While RA is most often thought of in building skilled trades workforce capacity, today, RA is utilized by employers to address skill shortages through new hire training and incumbent upskilling across virtually every industry, including sectors such as advanced manufacturing, IT, healthcare, finance, hospitality, and aerospace.

Offering existing firms as well as potential new businesses a network and model of robust RA programming should be considered a key factor for Economic Development Organizations' (EDOs) work to support local and regional workforce sustainability. Incorporating RA into economic development strategies can help EDOs attract and retain businesses, enhance local workforce readiness, and promote regional prosperity and growth. This guide will explore the strategic value of RA for EDOs, the current policy environment that supports this alignment, and the collaborative roles of state RA staff and the public workforce system.

## What is RA?

RA is a proven workforce solution. It is a customizable, structured model driven by industry to help employers strategically recruit, train, and develop talent for critical occupations. RA was established in the U.S. through the National Apprenticeship Act of 1937 and overseen by the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Office of Apprenticeship (OA). RA programs are developed by employers and sponsors and approved by either DOL OA staff or State Apprenticeship Agency (SAA) staff. Slightly more than half of U.S. states have a DOL-recognized SAA; you can also see the breakdown for each state and territory on [Apprenticeship.gov](https://www.dol.gov/eis/officeofapprenticeship).



## 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.

## Why RA?

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

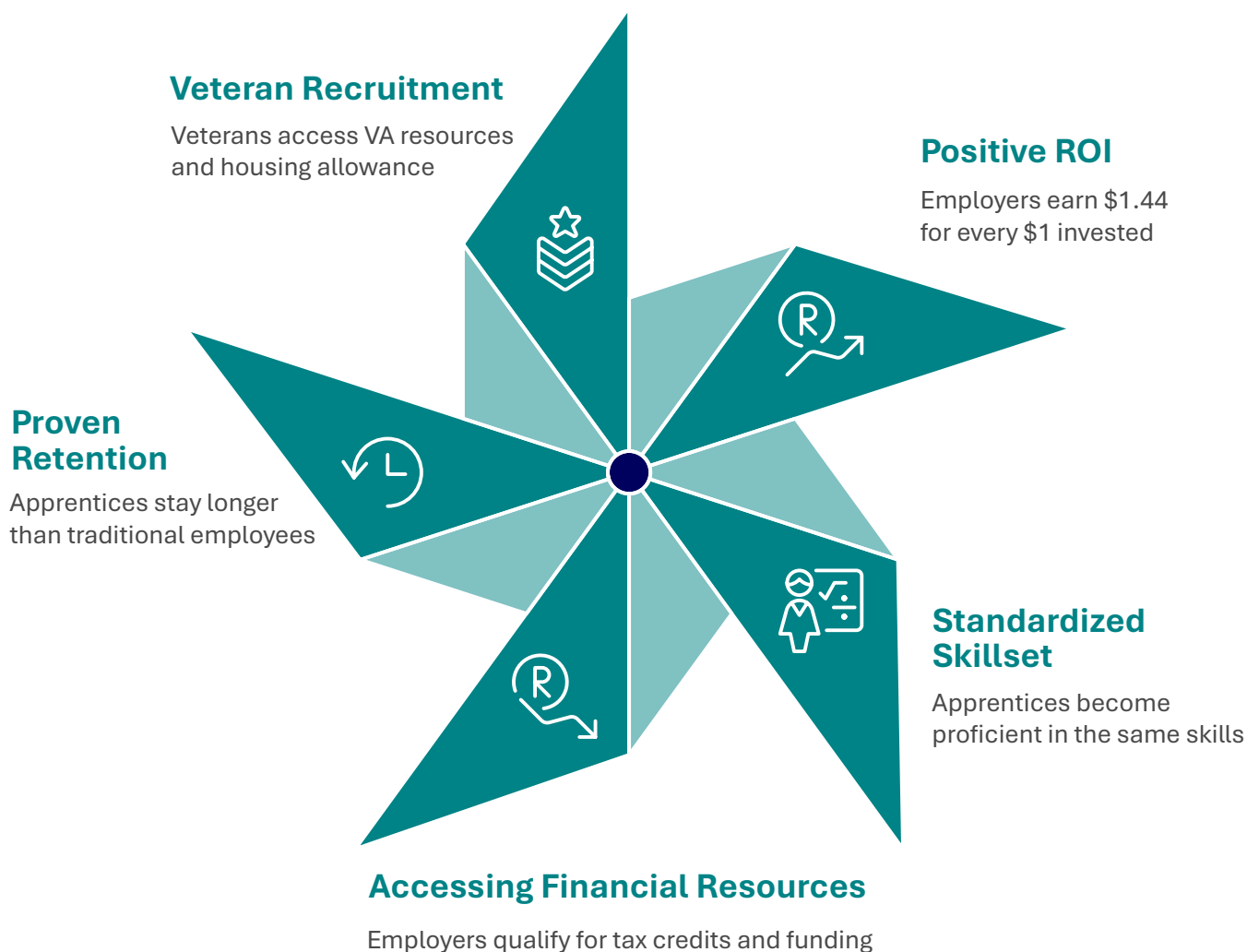
Employers with RA programs can qualify for federal and state tax credits, workforce funding, and a network of partners to support program implementation.

#### Proven Retention

Apprentices are proven to stay with employers an average of 2.8 years longer than traditional employees (Apprenticeship Carolina ROI Study 2023).

#### 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.

### Lowers 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

### Lowers 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



## RA PROGRAM ROLES

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



**Sponsor**—An organization that agrees to operate an RA program 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**—Entity that provides 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**—Hires and provides paid OJL for apprentices under the supervision of a designated mentor who is a skilled professional in that occupation.



**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 a network of engaged partners - employers, educators, and workforce organizations all play essential roles.**

## Alignment of RA With Economic Development

### TALENT AS A COMMODITY

RA is a proven workforce strategy combining paid OJL with RI to meet employer needs and build talent pipelines, providing a structured pathway for developing a skilled workforce aligned with regional economic goals. EDOs can leverage RA to attract and retain businesses, address skill gaps, and promote expanded growth.

### EVIDENCE-BASED IMPACTS OF RA

The DOL American Apprenticeship Initiative (AAI) recently focused on expanding Registered Apprenticeship in the United States and documented findings in a report titled [“Beyond Productivity: How Employers Gain More from Apprenticeship Findings from the American Apprenticeship Initiative Evaluation.”](#) The report demonstrates that RA programs have the following benefits, and highlights the percentage of surveyed employers who reportedly experienced each benefit:



RA promotes external economic adaptability by helping workers upgrade their skills and adjust to shifts in industry demand. RA programs also provide employers with an organized, cost-effective way to grow their talent in-house. It's crucial to dispel the myth that RA programs only serve unionized companies, when in fact, 80% of RA programs are non-union programs across industries as diverse as advanced manufacturing, healthcare, IT and cybersecurity, transportation and logistics, and hospitality. By supporting RA, EDOs help businesses reduce turnover and increase productivity, which are key to making long-term investments in the region. EDOs can also use RA to assist businesses in small, regional, and niche industries that lack the capacity to develop training programs, giving them a strong and adaptable employer-driven training program model to follow in creating and developing their talent pipelines.

RA connects employers, educators, and workforce organizations to create an economically demand-driven, regional talent pipeline. Through the pairing of paid work experience with education and training, RA programs create clear routes to sustainable jobs, increasing economic opportunity for the region's workers, and supporting the economic resilience of communities. Regions with established apprenticeship systems are more nimble and better able to respond to industry needs while spurring innovation and supporting sustainable economic growth. For EDOs, this translates into a **more stable** and **competitive** local economy.

## Why EDOs Should Use RA as a Tool

### BUSINESS ATTRACTION AND RETENTION

RA programs have been proven to create a steady supply of qualified employees with nationally recognized occupational credentials. RA may be used by EDOs to show potential investors that the workforce is ready to work. Talent-heavy regions also attract the lion's share of business investment. And, as EDOs recognize, talent is now deemed the number one economic driver over infrastructure and tax incentives in regional competitiveness. RA programs keep talent in-state with visible paths of professional growth. This helps to “plug the brain drain”, retain talent and provide the basis for long-term regional growth.



**Talent is now the number one economic engine ahead of both infrastructure and tax incentives in regional competitiveness.**

### ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

RA supports upskilling and adaptability, helping regions respond to economic disruptions and industry shifts. For example, after major layoffs and plant closures in the automotive sector, Michigan invested in RA to reskill dislocated workers, creating RA programs like [Michigan Advanced Technician Training](#) to reskill dislocated auto workers for advanced manufacturing roles.

RA allows communities to address local labor shortages, reducing the need for companies to look outside the area for skilled workers. By training residents in demand occupations that are critical to economic development, apprenticeships ensure that communities have the expertise needed to address local needs without relying on outside resources. This self-sufficiency builds community resilience, particularly in rural or economically challenged areas where skilled workers are essential, and keeps jobs and wages circulating within the local economy, strengthening small businesses and supporting economic stability.



**RA provides an opportunity for communities to respond to local labor shortages, rather than requiring companies to import workers from outside the region.**

## REAL-TIME LABOR MARKET RESPONSIVENESS

RA allows for the rapid development of training programs aligned with employer needs. There are many examples of RA initiatives that are proactively preparing and responding to employers' needs:

- South Carolina's [Apprenticeship Carolina](#) program is a model for how RA can be scaled quickly to meet demand. RA programs also promote stackable credentials and career ladders, enabling both new and returning workers to build the skills needed to align with and support regional industry growth strategies.
- [California](#) and [Maryland](#) invest in trusted partners who develop, register, and support RA programs in high-growth industries to create aligned talent pipelines and build out sector strategy partnerships.
- [Minnesota](#) links RA data with unemployment insurance wage records and education outcomes to assess impact and ROI for unemployed and/or underemployed individuals. This ensures the supply and demand of talent balances employers' needs.
- [Indiana](#) and [Ohio](#) provide startup funds or Apprenticeship Accelerator Grants to reduce employer cost burden.

As new technologies and business needs emerge, RA programs can be quickly adjusted or newly developed to support evolving job functions, helping economic regions remain competitive and ensuring that workers are trained for the jobs of today and tomorrow.



**RA allows for training plans to be developed quickly in response to employer needs. This creates a continuous calibration of supply and demand between the needs of employers.**

## The Value of RA to EDOs


### WORKFORCE ALIGNMENT

RA supports the alignment of workforce supply and business demand using real-time labor market data to make training investments more strategic and impactful. [State and local workforce boards](#) represent invaluable resources that provide access to the labor market and instructional training providers. Their Business Services Representatives are staffed to analyze this information to assist with workforce supply and demand planning. Workforce boards can help with screening, recruitment, career advice, and the coordination of training providers and partnering resources for career seekers and employers.

EDOs also need to understand that RA programs can play a critical role in a region's plan for dislocated worker services (for those who have been laid off, whose businesses have closed, or in times of economic disruption) by offering a structured earn-and-learn path to reemployment in high-demand sectors. Workforce boards can leverage WIOA Dislocated Worker funding and resources to help support dislocated workers onto RA career pathways, enroll eligible individuals in RA, pay for some or all of the costs of training, and fund wraparound and supportive services to lower or remove barriers to employment.

EDOs should work closely with state and local workforce boards to influence priorities that are supportive of and aligned with regional plans for economic growth. States receive WIOA set-aside funds that can be used to support innovative workforce solutions, such as the scale-up of RA programs. EDOs can have a significant impact on how these funds are distributed by promoting RA to attract and retain businesses, close skills gaps, and encourage regional economic development.

**States need to effectively integrate RA into economic development strategies so that human capital investments support long-term regional competitiveness. This includes efforts such as**

- 
- aligning RA to work with sector strategies and regional planning;
  - adopting legislation that provides state tax credits and grants for financial incentives to employers that sponsor RA programs, particularly in in-demand occupation sectors; and
  - supporting the integration of workforce, education, and economic development data to ensure early and comprehensive awareness of supply and demand data for talent pipeline strategies.

Such initiatives facilitate improved planning and successful outcomes of RA.

## WRAP-AROUND SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

EDOs are working with businesses that have incumbent employees, apprentices, or career seekers who are going through training programs and/or relocating for employment (whether due to new job opportunities or company expansions). As such, these workers may face challenges in securing employment, childcare, transportation, and supplies for their occupation. Often, the employer may not be able to assist with these needed resources. However, through RA program connections, key supportive services can be offered. EDOs should incorporate these resources and services into their workforce planning conversations with employers. Access to educational resources, housing assistance, banking, and connections to social and community networks may also be provided by creating resource connections with state and local workforce boards and their holistic workforce system of partners.

## ENHANCED COMPETITIVENESS

EDOs that incorporate RA into their business development initiatives can provide a more persuasive selling proposition for businesses.

- Colorado's [TalentFOUND](#) has incorporated RA into its economic development messaging.
- [Apprenticeship Missouri's](#) RA program registration is part of an economic development service of the state, and this is built into their outreach messaging, playing a role in marketing RA programs to employers and job seekers.

In the end, it is in the EDO's best interest to provide messaging, connections, and partnering information to employers to ensure their reach is broad enough to create linkages to services and resources that are holistic in nature.

## Process for EDOs to Use RA Solutions with Businesses

There are seven steps EDOs should strategically integrate into their business outreach and development plans.

### BUILD INTERNAL RA KNOWLEDGE

- 1
  - Designate someone on staff to lead RA work.
  - Reach out to your state's [OA](#) or [SAA](#) leadership to discuss your interest in RA and gaining information—including on current active RA programs—for your planning purposes.
  - Review foundational RA material on the [Apprenticeship.gov RA Academy](#).

### ESTABLISH PARTNERSHIPS

- 2
  - Develop partnerships with local workforce boards, community colleges, and RA intermediaries.
  - Participate in or establish regional apprenticeship collaboratives to share best practices and resources.

### IDENTIFY BUSINESS NEEDS

- 3
  - Work with state and/or local workforce boards to access labor market information to confirm key sectors facing labor shortages.
  - Survey local businesses, making site visits to evaluate workforce needs.
  - Pose pointed questions about hiring challenges, turnover, and training deficits.

### PROVIDE RA INFORMATION AND TA TO BUSINESSES

- 4
  - Create a basic RA information packet or one-pager tailored to your region's industries.
  - Consider introducing RA sponsors, training providers, and intermediaries.
  - Assist businesses through the registration process and provide funding resources.

### PROMOTE RA SUCCESS STORIES

- 5
  - Spotlight local employers that have successfully implemented RA programs.
  - Document their testimony and statistics on employee retention, productivity, and cost savings.
  - Highlight these stores in newsletters, on social media, and at events

### LEVERAGE FUNDING AND INCENTIVES

- 6
  - Educate businesses about tax credits, grants, and wage subsidies available.
  - Work with workforce boards to braid funding and deliver wraparound services.
  - Promote the availability of state-level set-aside for RA expansion in priority sectors.

### TRACK AND REPORT OUTCOMES

- 7
  - Coordinate with workforce partners to gather RA participation data and outcomes.
  - Use that data to show stakeholders the impact of RA and pull in more investments.

## **Building a Successful Registered Apprenticeship Program**

Prioritizing Internal Expertise, Strong Partnerships, Effective Business Support and Tracking Outcomes to Demonstrate Impact.



### **GROWING INTERNAL EXPERTISE**

To have a thriving and successful RA program, EDOs must start by growing internal expertise. They should train staff to become RA knowledgeable, which would include identifying a lead expert contact for RA initiatives, completing necessary training from the State Apprenticeship Office or intermediary, and educating staff about RA frameworks, funding models, and evidence-based impact.



### **STRONG PARTNERSHIPS**

Strong partnerships are also essential. The EDO lead should have a strong working relationship with the state OA or SAA staff, work with local workforce boards, community colleges, and intermediaries, and engage with the regional apprenticeship collaborative to share best practices. It's also essential to understand what businesses want; this can be done through business retention and expansion visits, asking specific questions about challenges to hire and train, and selling RA as a flexible, high-ROI option.



### **HELP NAVIGATE RA PROCESS**

To facilitate business support, EDOs should provide customized RA information packages, introduce businesses to sponsors and trainers, and help them navigate the RA process. These packages can include RA success stories (testimonials, data on retention and productivity, etc.), existing sources of funding and incentives, and information on partnerships and wraparound services, and are a powerful way to show local RA impact and inspire broader adoption.



### **TRACKING AND REPORTING**

Lastly, tracking outcomes and reporting them back with workforce partners can be used to showcase impact, attract investment, and maintain accountability. It may help to identify gaps in knowledge and service, as well as learn how to improve accountability and programming.



## Additional Resources

[Apprenticeship.gov](#)—One-stop Resource Hub that provides apprenticeship resources ranging from fact sheets, research, data, case studies, and more for the RA ecosystem.

- Notable Resources
  - » [Apprenticeship Finder](#)—A tool to find apprenticeship opportunities, by occupation and registered partner, across the nation.
  - » [Partner Finder](#)—A tool to connect you with the right partners to help you design, develop, or enhance your RA program.

[ApprenticeshipUSA Fact Sheet](#)—A quick reference guide on the technical assistance provided by DOL OA, national RA ‘fast facts,’ and program structure overview.

[WorkforceGPS – Apprenticeship Community](#)—Community of Practice that connects workforce professionals with tools to expand and strengthen RA, explore employer engagement strategies, funding opportunities, and industry best practices.

- Notable Resources:
  - » [Funding Sources for RA Programs](#)
  - » [Introduction to Apprenticeship](#)
  - » [Apprenticeship: Industry-Specific Resources](#)
  - » [Expanding Apprenticeship - ROI](#)

[Leveraging RA to Build a Thriving and Sustainable Economy](#)—A brief by the NGA on how Governors can adopt several strategies to effectively scale and grow RA programs in their regions.

[Advancing RA – Opportunities for States and Business to Create and Expand RAPs](#)—A brief by the NGA that highlights the significance of RA as a strategy that employers and states can implement to show a viable path toward securing prosperous careers.

[RA Center of Excellence for Strategic Partnerships & Systems Alignment](#)—Safal Partners leads the DOL-funded Center on Alignment that offers tools and resources on how to establish, build, and sustain partnerships supporting alignment of industry, workforce, and education to accelerate RA adoption and expansion.

[The Value of Employers Working with Local Workforce Development Boards](#)—A tip sheet developed by the RA Center of Excellence for Strategic Partnerships & Systems Alignment on the benefits and opportunities to employers for working with their local workforce boards on developing and implementing RA programs.