

Solving Challenges Facing Registered Apprenticeship Programs in Rural Areas



Rural areas are diverse, unique, and resilient. However, their low-density populations can present systemic and multi-cultural challenges that often impact historically marginalized and underrepresented populations. If established properly, Registered Apprenticeship (RA) programs can help employers address these challenges.

Each individual set of challenges must be approached with innovation and creativity. If successful, RA programs can benefit employers, apprentices, and the surrounding community as a whole. This tool provides information that stakeholders can use to 1) identify their unique challenges and 2) develop potential solutions that leverage the strengths of their specific community.

Common Challenges:

Lack of awareness about the benefits of RA



Difficulty securing the funds necessary to effectively establish and oversee an RA program



Difficulty obtaining Related Instruction (RI) providers due to limited post-secondary options



Lack of access to reliable transportation due to limited income or limited availability of public transportation



Questions to Ask Yourself:

- How can we reduce stigma around RA and its intended audience?
- How can we ensure our staff representation and publications reflect the diversity found in the community?
- Considering the rarity of job fairs and employers in low population areas:
 - What events attract community members?
 - Can we connect with local high schools or extra curricular organizations?
 - Are there respected and trusted community figures we can leverage?
- Can we restructure our budget to prioritize RA?
- Do we have access to available braided funding opportunities?
- Can we link our program to the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act?
- What grants could we apply for? How do we apply?
- Can we use community relationships or advocacy groups to secure funding?
- What supportive services can we utilize to assist RA participation?
- Can we collaborate with state vocational rehabilitation agencies or employment networks?
- How can we align program requirements to existing licensing and certification regulations?
- Do we have access to existing online curriculum?
 - If so, how can we make this training accessible to those without dependable internet?
- Could we create and deliver our own RI?
 - What will that entail and who will deliver it?
 - What materials or facilities do we need?
- How do individuals currently navigate without a dependable vehicle?
- How does weather impact transportation in the specific area?
- Should we:
 - Provide online courses for RI?
 - Coordinate carpools?
 - Provide a shuttle service or gas card?
 - Offer pre-paid bus or train passes?
- Can instruction or training providers reduce the number of necessary commutes by “blocking” required meeting times?



Fact or Myth?

Access to high-speed internet is a universal challenge across the country.

MYTH! As of 2019, 95.6% of all Americans had access to fixed broadband at the minimum speed benchmark of 25/3 Mbps. However, this percentage decreases to 82.7% when you focus on rural communities.¹ The disparity is more evident when considering that 80% of all U.S. households without high-speed internet are located in rural areas.² As you address this issue, consider providing cell phone hotspots or satellite internet. Coordinate a consortium³ to provide internet or look for available grants that may help provide internet (e.g., the Affordable Connectivity Program).

While U.S. population is still increasing generally, it is decreasing in rural communities.

FACT! According to the Pew Research Center, most U.S. counties are considered rural. Compared to urban and suburban counties, however, rural counties have a higher share of adults aged 65 and older. This trend is magnified when considering that young people often settle in urban and suburban counties. Between 2000 and 2014, rural counties experienced a net decrease in migration (400 thousand) while urban (1.6 million) and suburban (11.7 million) counties both experienced net increases.⁴ Work with local and state community leaders to build RA programs in rural areas, ask young people what would motivate them to settle in a rural area, and focus on community improvement projects.



Promising Practices

Develop relationships with local K-12 and post-secondary **education institutions**



Contact local **workforce boards**, **grant-awarding agencies**, and **philanthropic organizations**



Offer remote work or **align work schedules** with the public transportation schedule



Offer stipends for transportation, internet access, technology, and certifications



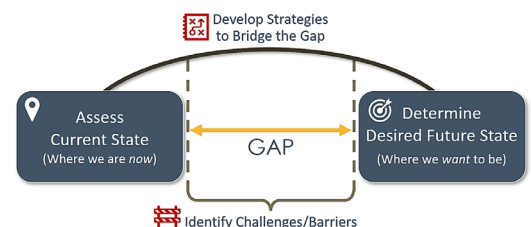
Conduct a Gap Analysis

One of the first tasks for your planning team is to conduct a gap analysis—**assessment of your current workforce** and the **desired future state** of your program.

It is vital that you take an ample amount of time to reflect on the community and its traditions. Change is inherently challenging, but respectful acknowledgement of the existing rural structure will set a strong foundation for progress.

The difference between this current state and the future state is the gap; this is where most of your challenges and barriers will lie.

To reach your desired state, **you need to bridge the gap** by developing new strategies and removing the barriers that are preventing you from having the type of program you want. Once you've conducted your gap analysis, you can start working on solution strategies.



1. "The Persistent Digital Divide: Selected Broadband Deployment Issues and Policy Considerations," Congressional Research Service, last modified April 18, 2023, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/R47506.pdf>.
 2. "2018 Broadband Deployment Report," Federal Communications Commission, last modified February 2, 2018, <https://www.fcc.gov/reports-research/reports/broadband-progress-reports/2018-broadband-deployment-report>.
 3. The Wireless Infrastructure Association (WIA) is an Office of Apprenticeship Intermediary focused on the telecommunications industry. To contact them, or any of the other OA Intermediaries, visit: <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/investments-tax-credits-and-tuition-support/registered-apprenticeship-industry-intermediaries>.
 4. "Demographic and economic trends in urban, suburban and rural communities," Pew Research Center, last modified May 22, 2018, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2018/05/22/demographic-and-economic-trends-in-urban-suburban-and-rural-communities/>.