

APPRENTICESHIP BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT Strategies in Action



The scenarios in this document illustrate ways that effective business engagement strategies can be applied to achieve better results when working with businesses on Registered Apprenticeship. These scenarios are based on real challenges and solutions that organizations promoting Registered Apprenticeship, such as state agencies, colleges, workforce development organizations, and others are effectively working through. Related *questions for action* for each scenario will help you apply these strategies to your own work. To learn more about business engagement for Registered Apprenticeship expansion, see the related toolkit:

<https://apprenticeship.workforcegps.org/resources/2018/05/11/17/01/Apprenticeship-Business-Engagement-Tools>.

SCENARIO 1

THE CHALLENGE: ARTICULATING THE VALUE OF APPRENTICESHIP FOR BUSINESS

A community college develops an innovative partnership with a statewide information technology (IT) association to help them expand Registered Apprenticeship to address IT workforce challenges. While this partnership helps the community college business services staff get their foot in the door for meetings with IT employers, they struggle to articulate the value proposition—what makes Registered Apprenticeship attractive to companies—and close the deal.

A BETTER APPROACH

Understanding how the Registered Apprenticeship model aligns with businesses' current hiring and training processes helps community college business services staff effectively communicate the value of the model to employers. When engaging with IT employers, business services staff translate apprenticeship terms into business language: discussing onboarding instead of "supplemental education," skill needs instead of "work processes," and merit raises rather than "wage progression." This approach demonstrates how Registered Apprenticeship can enhance employers' hiring, training, and retention practices.

Once IT employers see how Registered Apprenticeship relates to their current hiring and training processes, the business services staff show them how Registered Apprenticeship can also formalize and improve existing recruitment and training methods. For instance, once developed, the Registered Apprenticeship training becomes repeatable. Every new hire has someone to show them the ropes, but

Business Engagement Strategies

- **SPEAK THE LANGUAGE OF BUSINESS** TO DEMYSTIFY APPRENTICESHIP.
- DEMONSTRATE HOW **APPRENTICESHIP FORMALIZES WHAT COMPANIES ALREADY DO**, BUT WITH BETTER RESULTS.
- **ADD VALUE** TO EACH BUSINESS INTERACTION.

identifying mentors under the Registered Apprenticeship model clarifies relationships and expectations. Companies spend money on training, but under apprenticeship, training costs are offset by recruitment savings, lower initial wages, and reduced turnover.

Typical business practices dictate that pay raises are standard, but Registered Apprenticeship ties them to clearly articulated skill and competency levels. Helping companies connect the dots between their employee development processes and the components of Registered Apprenticeship, and then demonstrating the value of formalizing their processes through Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs), can help companies see the value.

Finally, business services staff look for opportunities to build customer relationships by adding value for employers whenever possible. For example, they offer IT companies assistance in developing Registered Apprenticeship standards for help desk positions. Through this process, one company sees the standards' usefulness for measuring competencies and assessing effectiveness at various stages of training. The company asks for help to go a step further and define "basic," "competent," and "expert" levels for various competencies. By doing so, the community college business services staff add tremendous value for this company, building a stronger relationship with them in the process.

QUESTIONS FOR ACTION

- ☑ Do you use business language to demystify apprenticeship and articulate its benefits?
- ☑ How can you relate apprenticeship to a business's current hiring, training, and retention processes?
- ☑ How can you add value for your business client to build the customer relationship?

SCENARIO 2

THE CHALLENGE: OVERCOMING APPREHENSIONS ABOUT REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP

A business engagement team at a local American Job Center thinks Registered Apprenticeship can help local companies struggling to find skilled talent. However, they have difficulty overcoming companies' fears about paperwork and compliance burdens, in part because team members do not fully understand Registered Apprenticeship benefits and requirements.

A BETTER APPROACH

Recognizing that local businesses are struggling to find job candidates and are even considering moving jobs out of the United States, the business engagement team sees Registered Apprenticeship as a potential solution. To explore this further, they collaborate with the state apprenticeship office to organize training sessions for their team and other American Job Center staff. Additionally, they visit and consult with employers who have successful RAPs to gain insights into how apprenticeships address their talent needs.

The team quickly realizes that Registered Apprenticeship can fill talent gaps because it enables companies to tap into a much wider pool of hard-working candidates who are willing to be trained. Registered Apprenticeship also allows companies to pay entry-level apprentices at the lower end of the wage scale and invest the savings into the training and mentoring that will grow employees' talents to perfectly meet company requirements. Now when they reach out to businesses, the team understands and can help businesses make this paradigm shift in their thinking about the prospective candidate pool, too.

Even so, employers still express apprehension over paperwork and state compliance requirements. The business engagement staff investigate the administrative requirements for RAPs—tasks that include registering the employer into an approved RAP, providing access to state and federal registration tools to record new apprentices, and ongoing monitoring and review of the program. They learn that an intermediary organization sometimes acts as the sponsor of a RAP to ease the burden on businesses of handling these responsibilities. This is particularly helpful for small businesses that do not have the personnel capacity to sponsor a program. Since these requirements are similar to the work the local workforce board already does for other training programs, the board decides that it will address company concerns by becoming the apprenticeship sponsor.

Business Engagement Strategies

- **UNDERSTAND THE TALENT CHALLENGES** A BUSINESS IS FACING AND HOW APPRENTICESHIP CAN ADDRESS THEM.
- **IDENTIFY AND ADDRESS BUSINESS CONCERNS** THAT MAY STAND IN THE WAY OF **ESTABLISHING APPRENTICESHIPS**.
- **ADD VALUE** BY SHIFTING ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES FROM THE EMPLOYER TO AN INTERMEDIARY.

QUESTIONS FOR ACTION

- ☒ Are there any gaps in your understanding of the RAP model or administrative processes that you need to fill so that you can speak comfortably and fluently with employers about apprenticeship?
- ☒ How do companies in your community perceive apprenticeship? Are there concerns about apprenticeship that you can address or alleviate?
- ☒ Which intermediaries might be willing to serve as sponsors and take on the administrative responsibilities for employers?

SCENARIO 3

THE CHALLENGE: CONVERTING INTEREST INTO APPRENTICESHIPS

A state economic development agency wants to partner with large companies that could make significant commitments to expanding Registered Apprenticeship but does not know how to sustain momentum to convert interest into apprenticeships. Their usual methods of identifying business customers and marketing workforce development programs are not working, particularly considering company concerns about the perceived costs of Registered Apprenticeship.

A BETTER APPROACH

This state agency initiates a different approach by targeting specific industries and offering registering apprenticeship as a viable, cost-effective approach to talent development. The business services team focuses on two high-growth industries in the region—healthcare and IT—and begins researching major employers to identify companies with the greatest numbers of job openings. The team then focuses on those companies with a demonstrated skill requirement and takes a deeper dive to better understand the companies' needs.

Next, the business services team:

- Creates spreadsheets to track job titles and job descriptions, capturing the skill demands for each.
- Looks for the positions that can be apprenticed, especially noting those which are labeled “entry-level” or “junior”.
- Researches unfamiliar terms and technologies in the healthcare and IT sectors to understand company lingo and skill demands and better identify workforce training pain points.

This preparation gives the business services team a comprehensive understanding of how Registered Apprenticeship could effectively address a company's workforce challenges, even before they reach out. It enables team members to demonstrate from the first contact that they understand and want to work with a company to help them recruit, train, and retain a skilled workforce. For companies that decide to try Registered Apprenticeship, the spreadsheets also become a useful tool to identify skills and

Business Engagement Strategies

- **USE RESEARCH TO IDENTIFY BUSINESSES** A BUSINESS IS FACING AND HOW APPRENTICESHIP CAN SOLVE THEM.
- **PREPARE FOR THE FIRST CONVERSATION** BY UNDERSTANDING HIGH DEMAND JOBS AND THEIR RELATED SKILL NEEDS.
- **FOCUS ON FACTS** BY THAT BUSINESSES CARE ABOUT, SUCH AS THEIR PAIN POINTS AND COSTS AND BENEFITS TO DEMONSTRATE THE VALUE OF APPRENTICESHIP.

QUESTIONS FOR ACTION

- ☒ What type of research do you conduct on in-demand occupations and skills to identify potential business customers for apprenticeship?
- ☒ Are there any in-demand technologies or skills that you need to better understand to talk fluently with a company about its workforce needs?
- ☒ Could a cost-benefit analysis chart or some other tool help businesses understand the apprenticeship model and the benefits for them?

competencies and develop related instruction and on-the-job learning outlines that align with job descriptions—steps that sometimes scare companies away.

To help address employer concerns about Registered Apprenticeship Program costs, the state agency also completes a cost-benefit analysis to help companies explore why they might want to use Registered Apprenticeship. They ask questions to allow a business to compare their current approach (e.g., recruitment, screening, supervision, higher wages, unfilled positions, retention rate) compared against the costs of hiring through apprenticeship (e.g., lower recruitment costs, lower initial wages, fewer unfilled positions, higher retention rate). The business services team also factors in available state resources, including help through the workforce system, to screen candidates and provide work readiness training and related instruction. Hard cost comparison figures that speak to a company's bottom line help demonstrate the value of Registered Apprenticeship.

LOOKING FOR MORE RESOURCES AND TOOLS ON APPRENTICESHIP BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT?

VISIT

Apprenticeship Industries

www.apprenticeship.gov/apprenticeship-industries

Apprenticeship Professional Learning Network

www.apprenticeshipprofessionals.org