



Bridging the Gap for Disability Service Providers: Encouraging Equity in Registered Apprenticeships for Neurodiverse Youth

Pursuant to the National Apprenticeship Act, the Department of Labor works to expand opportunities related to apprenticeship programs. This project has been funded, either wholly or in part, with Federal funds from the Department of Labor, Employment & Training Administration under the contract number/work order DOL-OPS-16-A-0012/1605DC-18-F-00060. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of Labor, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement of same by the U.S. Government.





Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Resource 1: Career Exploration and Recruitment.....	6
Resource 2: Leveraging Disability Experience to Collaboratively Support RAPs	8
Resource 3: Resource List	10



Introduction

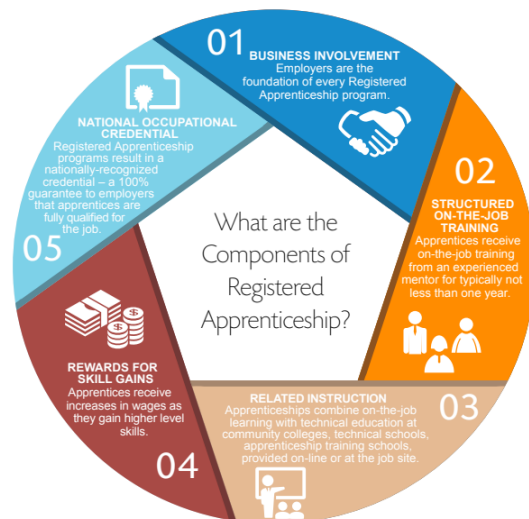
Despite opportunities to gain experience with core job skills, and gain industry specific knowledge while earning wages, Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs) are traditionally underused as an employment option for neurodiverse youth¹. This resource bundle highlights ways in which employment support professionals from state, education, and community-based organizations should identify and partner with RAP sponsors to create an apprenticeship pathway for neurodiverse youth.

Neurodiverse youth are individuals aged 16-24 who possess unique strengths and experience challenges due to the way their brain processes information. Neurodiversity includes the autism spectrum, ADHD, executive functioning challenges, and developmental disabilities.

The information technology (IT) job sector provides a [variety of opportunities](#) that may appeal to the broad-range of interests of neurodiverse youth. Overall employment in IT occupations is [projected to grow 15 percent by 2031](#). With the right support, apprentices are more likely to complete their training, develop strong relationships with their employer, and become a productive member of the workforce.

Building a strong and diverse pipeline of skilled workers is critical for young adults to compete in a global economy as well as for companies to grow their business. RAPs that foster inclusion of neurodiverse youth can meet both participant and employer needs. Research shows that hiring people with disabilities provides many benefits, including [increased productivity and decreased likelihood of employee turnover](#). A diversified workforce results in [more innovative problem solving and increased ability to respond to complex problems](#). There are a variety of [government supports](#) for RAPs. Expenses such as wages and benefits for participants and mentors, one-time costs for new employees, general equipment, certification expenses, and supplies can be offset through tax incentives and government funding.

Figure 1: Components of a RAP



Source: *A Quick-Start Toolkit: Building Registered Apprenticeship Programs*, U.S. Department of Labor

What is a Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP)?

¹Administered by ICF, the [Cybersecurity Youth Apprenticeship Initiative \(CYAI\)](#) is working with disability employment partners to explore the lack of engagement with neurodiverse youth in cybersecurity/IT apprenticeships. Key resources are embedded throughout each of these documents to help leverage partnerships that bridge the gap and build equity in registered apprenticeships for neurodiverse youth.



A Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) is typically at least one year in duration and match apprentices with an employer that provides on-the-job training and Related Training Instruction (RTI). Apprenticeships have specific salary scales tied to mastery of subject matter. Some may offer credit towards a college degree. With Diversity as well as Quality and Safety integrated throughout the RAP elements, the five components of a RAP are illustrated in Figure 1.

How is an apprenticeship different from any other type of work-based learning?

Apprenticeship programs are distinguished from other types of work-based learning by several factors, including paid work experience, classroom instruction, mentorship, and receipt of an industry recognized credential. To become a RAP, the earn and learn model must meet national standards for registration with the U.S. Department of Labor or a federally recognized State Apprenticeship Agency.

Who are the key players in a Registered Apprenticeship Program?

There are several roles that are important to understand in a RAP:

Role	Responsibilities
Related Technical Instruction (RTI) Providers: Community-based organizations, training providers, employers, or community colleges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides learning opportunities through curriculum development and classroom instruction. • Creates pathways to a career, college degree or credits, and/or an industry recognized credential. • Works with employers and industry leaders to understand the needs of the workforce to best prepare students for apprenticeships and employment. • Partners with employers to help manage a RAP and offers support resources including tutoring, job coaching, and career counseling.
Intermediaries: Community-based organizations, training providers, or community colleges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruits, screens, tests, or assesses potential apprentices for placement within a RAP sponsor. • Can work with employers to take on administrative tasks AND help design and deliver a customized apprenticeship model that meets the employers' business needs. • As a workforce intermediary, CYAI is administered by ICF with a focus on engaging young people in the growing IT and cybersecurity industry. CYAI offers a continuous rolling application process to enroll 900 young people aged 16-21 across CYAI partner organizations until 2024.
RAP Sponsor: Employer, community-based organization, training provider, or community college	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitates and administers the program. • Assumes full responsibility for the design, administration, and operation of the RAP, including registering the program with the U.S. Department of Labor or State Apprenticeship Agency. • Hires the apprentice depending on the program model.
Employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides on-the-job training and opportunities to learn, earn, and gain experience in the industry. • Collaborates with RTI Providers to develop a detailed training plan. • Creates opportunities for mentorship to equip apprentices with connections with experienced mentors for support, guidance, and professional goal completion.





	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hires apprentices and upon successful completion of the RAP, provides full-time employment.
Mentors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Guides apprentices on topics such as on-the-job skill building, the company's workplace culture and community, and the industry.• Supports apprentices through challenges and questions that arise during the program.



Resource 1: Career Exploration and Recruitment

Finding a job can be an overwhelming challenge for neurodiverse youth. This process can be made easier through career exploration that allows youth to actively participate in employment experiences and career related discussions with community-based organizations, educators, or community colleges. Through structured experiences, neurodiverse youth can learn more about their interests and identify what skills they have or may need to develop for their chosen career pathway. Review these steps that [Employment Support Professionals \(ESPs\)](#), and school-based professionals should take to bolster career exploration and the [recruitment](#) of neurodiverse youth to RAPs.

Employment Support Professionals (ESPs)

- **ESPs should empower neurodiverse youth to make an informed choice about career pathways in IT and cybersecurity.** Neurodiverse youth can benefit from support to identify their professional interests and abilities, as well as information about the local job market, including job descriptions, wages, and career opportunities in the IT and cybersecurity field to make appropriate career decisions. The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth) identified [guideposts for the successful transition of neurodiverse youth to adulthood](#). Since many neurodiverse youth have not received sufficient exposure to—or information about—possible employment options by the time they leave high school, ESPs are uniquely positioned to bridge this gap. ESPs should review [CYAI's Cybersecurity Career Guide](#) to discuss what jobs exist in IT and cybersecurity, as well as the education or experience necessary for those positions. Career discussions should include information on how to secure a Benefits Analysis² to understand the impact of employment on their eligibility for public benefits, as well as resources such as [Social Security Administration Ticket to Work funds](#), [ABLE Accounts](#), and the development of a traditional and [visual resume](#).

- **ESPs should connect neurodiverse youth to RAPs. ESPs should share numerous resources to help youth navigate the process of career selection.**

Apprenticeships and internships are a notable mechanism to achieve career exploration goals. By working with RAP sponsors and employers, ESPs should create opportunities for career exploration, recruitment, and on-the-job training.

ESPs should offer a wide range of employment services to empower neurodiverse youth with understanding about the value of apprenticeships. To do so, it is important for ESPs to develop relationships with workforce professionals and professional groups, such as local Chambers of Commerce and workforce boards. These workforce experts can share nuanced information about a wide range of occupations in the Cybersecurity/IT field for ESPs to share with neurodiverse youth as they make their career decisions.

For more information on how employers, RAP sponsors, and RTI providers can support equity and inclusion for neurodiverse youth see our resource guide for RAP Sponsors.

² A Benefits Analysis provides information about personal income thresholds in relation to an individual's benefits.



School-Based Professionals

- **School-based professionals should prioritize person-centered planning with neurodiverse youth as a critical tool for customizing career goals.** Educators and guidance counselors should schedule recurring career check-ins with neurodiverse youth to increase understanding of their strengths and needs relative to industry standards. A focus on [person-centered planning](#), increasing [self-determination](#), setting realistic goals, and building awareness of possible [workplace accommodation needs](#) or modifications is essential prior to graduation. A professional, such as a guidance counselor, school psychologist, or special education instructor should help select an appropriate career or interest assessment, interpret the results, and offer career counseling and resources for youth to browse as they identify their career preferences and transition from school to work. There are many [templates](#) to assist school-based professionals and ESPs with best practices in employment for youth and adults with disabilities, including how to develop a “Descriptive Profile” which is essential to employment planning.
- **School-based professionals should connect neurodiverse youth to discovery experiences and the American Job Centers (AJCs) as part of transition planning.** AJCs are required by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to be both physically and programmatically accessible to individuals with disabilities. By working with the AJCs (also known as Career One Stop Centers), school-based professionals can secure up-to-date information and connect youth to services for RAP entry, job searches, and training.
- **School-based professionals should utilize a variety of tools to assist neurodiverse youth with their career journey.** While there are benefits to traditional assessments, such as [CareerOneStop](#) which offers numerous career exploration and occupational tools, job seeker resources, and [My Next Move](#), an interactive career exploration assessment, other tools may better support neurodiverse youth. While assessments are a useful starting point in one’s career journey, for neurodiverse youth, the result of comparative assessments may perpetuate exclusion from employment.

Discovery is an [evidence-based alternative to traditional assessment](#) that serves as the foundation for customized employment.

Coordinating individualized Discovery opportunities can help youth determine their interests and potential job match and identify if a referral to Vocational Rehabilitation or other agencies may be needed for career success. The information gleaned from Discovery can assist ESPs, school-based professionals, AJC staff, and the youth in understanding their employment needs and preferences, as well as aid the AJC business services representatives in identifying employers and RAPs that will meet these requirements in a mutually beneficial way.

Resource 2: Leveraging Disability Experience to Collaboratively Support RAPs

[Vocational Rehabilitation \(VR\)](#) providers, Employment Support Professionals (ESPs) and School-based Professionals have valuable experiences that can be leveraged to support neurodiverse youth in registered apprenticeship programs. Disability Service Providers should cultivate relationships with RAP Sponsors to support neurodiverse youth throughout various elements of the apprenticeship process. Collaborate using the strategies below:

Neurodiversity-Specific Resources and Funding Opportunities

There are many available resources and funding streams to support neurodiverse youth that RAP Sponsors and other key players may not know about without the collaboration of a disability support professional, including Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and [Level Up services](#).

- **VR Providers can connect RAP sponsors, job seekers, apprentices, and employers to free disability related resources and services including those related to:**
 - Recruitment
 - Onboarding
 - Retention
 - Consultations on workplace modifications
 - Low-cost technology solutions
 - Accessibility and disability awareness trainings
 - Guidance regarding the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 503 compliance
 - Pipeline development
 - Paid on-the-job-training.
 - Job coaching
 - Tax credits specific to neurodiverse youth
- **School-based Professionals at [community colleges](#) can offer valuable resources to the training component of the RAP.** Their experience with diverse learners can support the inclusive design of the [related training instruction](#) and they can provide the instruction. RAPs who partner with community colleges gain apprentice access to:
 - [Federal Pell Grants](#)
 - [Perkins V funds](#)
 - State-funded college grant and scholarship programs
 - State education appropriations to secondary and postsecondary institutions

By developing community partnerships, connections to local funding, [CYAI incentive funding](#), discretionary grants from federal and state agencies, philanthropic grants, private funding, and community donations can often be secured and braided through a solid partnership that serves a diverse talent pool.

Planning for Success

Disability support professionals can implement the following strategies to leverage their experience to establish equitable and [inclusive](#) RAPs for neurodiverse youth:

- **School-based Professionals** should leverage [transition planning](#) requirements in IEPs to support neurodiverse youth's successful transition into RAPs. As required by [the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#), a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) must include transition planning by the time a student reaches the age of 16. A students'



IEP or 504 accommodations offer options for the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives.

- **ESPs can assist employers in structuring academic and vocational training to meet the needs of neurodiverse learners.** When creating a RAP, there is the ability for an intermediary³, program sponsor, community-based organization, and employer to collaborate and customize all elements of the RAP model. [Customized employment](#) is a successful strategy for achieving [competitive integrated employment](#) that benefits many people, including neurodiverse youth, who may not have found success through traditional employment methods.
- **ESPs can educate workplace mentors and supervisors at work sites about the capabilities and strengths of neurodiverse youth to reduce negative perceptions.** The experience of ESPs will emphasize the use of [inclusive language](#), and its impact on a positive workplace culture. ESPs can provide information to [dispel myths and share facts](#) about workplace accommodations or modifications to employers and discuss how disclosure of one's disability is a personal choice. ESPs can share information with workplace mentors about the role of a job coach or share insight on how to effectively work with and train neurodiverse youth.

Customized employment is noted as a strategy under the definition of [supported employment](#) in Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). ESPs can use their skills in customizing employment to assist with RAP design, assessments, assistive technology, on-the-job training, task analysis, job preparation, and job coaching.

³ Intermediaries are the connection between the key players in a RAP and the workforce system. They uphold the registered apprenticeship model as a solution for career readiness and human capital within various career paths at the national, state, and local level.



Resource 3: Resource List for Disability Service Providers and RAP Sponsors

Career Exploration and Recruitment

- AskEARN.org – *Build the Pipeline: Outreach & Recruitment*
 - [AskEARN | Build the Pipeline: Outreach & Recruitment](#)
- Nationaldisabilityinstitute.org – *Self-guided Discovery Facilitator’s Guide*
 - [Self-Guided Discovery Facilitator’s Guide Helping People Discover Their Own Path To Employment](#)
- Careeronestop.org – *Finding key resources for career counselors, academic advisors and other workforce professionals*
 - [Career advisor | CareerOneStop](#)
- Youth.gov – *National Collaborative on Workforce & Disability for Youth*
 - [National Collaborative on Workforce & Disability for Youth | Youth.gov](#)
- Youth.gov – *Career Exploration and Skill Development*
 - [Career Exploration and Skill Development | Youth.gov](#)
- ACTEonline.org (October 2020) – *Students with Disabilities Benefit from Career Exploration*
 - [Students with disabilities benefit from career exploration - ACTE \(acteonline.org\)](#)
- Apprenticeship.Gov - *Bobby Moran’s Apprenticeship Journey*
 - [Bobby Moran’s Apprenticeship Journey | Apprenticeship.gov](#)
- My Next Move – *What do you want to do for a living?*
 - [My Next Move](#)
- Apprenticeship USA – *Jumpstart Your Career Through Apprenticeship*
 - [Career Seekers | Apprenticeship.gov](#)
- Partnership on Inclusive Apprenticeship - *Advancing Your Career through Inclusive Apprenticeship*
 - [Advancing Your Career through Inclusive Apprenticeship](#)
- Training Resource Network – *Visible Resumes*
 - [Visual Resumes – TRN Online Disability Training \(disabilitywebtraining.com\)](#)
- CYAI2024.org - *CYAI Cybersecurity Career Guide*
 - [Rapid Cycle Evaluation: MEAP Learning Assessment Summaries \(cyai2024.org\)](#)
- Certified Employment Support Professional - *Glossary of Employment Support Professional Titles*
 - [Glossary of Employment Support Professional Titles - CESP \(helpscoutdocs.com\)](#)



- US Bureau of Labor Statistics – *Computer and Information Technology Occupations*
 - [Computer and Information Technology Occupations: Occupational Outlook Handbook: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics \(bls.gov\)](#)
- RADD Training - *Related Training Instruction (RTI) for Apprentices*
 - [Related Training Instruction \(RTI\) for Apprentices - RADD Training, LLC](#)
- Job Accommodation Network – *State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies*
 - [State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies \(askjan.org\)](#)
- Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services – *A Transition Guide to Postsecondary Education and Employment for Students and Youth with Disabilities*
 - [A Transition Guide to Postsecondary Education and Employment for Students and Youth with Disabilities. Revised May 2017. \(Digital Version\) \(PDF\)](#)
- Apprenticeship USA - *What are the benefits of apprenticeships for employers?*
 - [What are the benefits of apprenticeships for employers? | Apprenticeship.gov](#)
- Apprenticeship USA - *"Tear The Paper Ceiling" Campaign*
 - [Explore Apprenticeship | Apprenticeship.gov](#)
- Apprenticeship USA – *What is a Registered Apprenticeship Program?*
 - [Registered Apprenticeship Program | Apprenticeship.gov](#)

Funding Registered Apprenticeship Programs

- CYAI2024.org – *Government Support for Registered Apprenticeships*
 - [CYAI – Government Support for Registered Apprenticeships \(2022\) \(cyai2024.org\)](#)
- Apprenticeship.Gov - *Partner Finder*
 - [Partner Finder | Apprenticeship.gov](#)
- DOL.gov – *Funding Inclusive Apprenticeships: Strategies for Braiding, Blending, and Aligning Resources*
 - [Funding Inclusive Apprenticeships: Strategies for Braiding, Blending, and Aligning Resources \(dol.gov\)](#)
- Marc Gold & Associates – *Forms, Samples, Guides, and Plans*
 - [Forms, Guides, and Examples – Marc Gold & Associates](#)
- IRS – *Work Opportunity Tax Credit*
 - [Work Opportunity Tax Credit | Internal Revenue Service \(irs.gov\)](#)
- Congress.gov - *Disabled Access Credit Expansion Act of 2021*
 - [S.2481 - 117th Congress \(2021-2022\): Disabled Access Credit Expansion Act of 2021 | Congress.gov | Library of Congress](#)



- CYAI2024.org – *Government Support for Registered Apprenticeships*
 - [CYAI – Government Support for Registered Apprenticeships \(2022\) \(cyai2024.org\)](https://cyai2024.org)
- CYAI2024.org – *Incentive Funding*
 - [CYAI Incentive Funding \(cyai2024.org\)](https://cyai2024.org)
- Perkins Collaborative Research Network – *Perkins V*
 - [PCRN: Perkins V \(ed.gov\)](https://ed.gov)
- Federal Student Aid - *Federal Pell Grants are usually awarded only to undergraduate students.*
 - [Federal Pell Grants | Federal Student Aid](#)
- Workforce GPS - *The Role of Community Colleges in Registered Apprenticeship*
 - [WorkforceGPS](#)
- Congressional Research Service - *The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and the One-Stop Delivery System*
 - [R44252.pdf \(fas.org\)](#)
- Social Security Administration – *Ticket to Work Program*
 - [The Work Site \(ssa.gov\)](https://ssa.gov)

Equity and Inclusion

- AskJAN.org – *Building a Disability-Inclusive Organization*
 - [Building a Disability-Inclusive Organization \(askjan.org\)](https://askjan.org)
- Inclusiveapprenticeship.org – *Designing Inclusive Apprenticeships: A Guide for Recruiting and Training Apprentices with Disabilities*
 - [Designing Inclusive Apprenticeships - Partnership on Inclusive Apprenticeship](#)
- Apprenticeship.gov – *Advancing Apprenticeship Opportunities for People with Disabilities*
 - [Advancing Apprenticeship Opportunities for People with Disabilities](#)
- DOL.gov – *Competitive Integrated Employment and Blending, Braiding, and Sequencing Resources*
 - [Competitive Integrated Employment and Blending, Braiding, and Sequencing Resources \(Services and Funding\) \(dol.gov\)](#)
- AskJAN.org – *Disability Employment and Inclusion: Your Guide to Success*
 - [Disability Employment and Inclusion: Your Guide to Success \(askjan.org\)](https://askjan.org)
- AskJAN.org – *Building Your Inclusive Workplace – JAN’s Workplace Accommodation Toolkit*
 - <https://askjan.org/toolkit/>
- American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities



- [Self-Determination \(aaidd.org\)](http://aaidd.org)
- Identifor.com - *Use Person-Centered Planning for People with Disabilities*
 - [Use Person-Centered Planning for People with Disabilities - Identifor Blog](#)
- Mathematica - *National Longitudinal Transition Study 2012*
 - [National Longitudinal Transition Study \(mathematica.org\)](http://mathematica.org)
- ABLEnow - [Disability Savings Account | ABLE Account | Eligibility Quiz & News | ABLEnow](#)
- Social Security Administration - *Ticket to Work Program*
 - [The Work Site \(ssa.gov\)](http://ssa.gov)
- Youth.gov - *Employment Considerations for Youth With Disabilities*
 - [Employment Considerations for Youth With Disabilities | Youth.gov](#)
- Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion - *Build the Pipeline: Outreach & Recruitment*
 - [AskEARN | Build the Pipeline: Outreach & Recruitment](#)
- StrengthScape - *Role of Diversity and Inclusion in Employee Engagement*
 - [Role of Diversity and Inclusion in Employee Engagement \(strengthscape.com\)](http://strengthscape.com)
- Forbes - *New Research: Diversity + Inclusion = Better Decision Making at Work*
 - [New Research: Diversity + Inclusion = Better Decision Making At Work \(forbes.com\)](http://forbes.com)
- Workplace Initiative - *Disability Employment and Inclusion: Your Guide to Success*
 - [Disability Employment and Inclusion: Your Guide to Success \(askjan.org\)](http://askjan.org)
- USCode.house.gov - Chapter 33 - *Education of Individuals with Disabilities*
 - [20 USC Ch. 33: EDUCATION OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES \(house.gov\)](http://house.gov)
- National Archives - *Part 363 - The State Supported Employment Services Program*
 - [eCFR :: 34 CFR Part 363 - The State Supported Employment Services Program](#)
- Office of Disability Employment Policy - *Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE)*
 - [Competitive Integrated Employment \(CIE\) | U.S. Department of Labor \(dol.gov\)](http://dol.gov)
- Office of Disability Employment Policy - *Customized Unemployment*
 - [Customized Employment | U.S. Department of Labor \(dol.gov\)](http://dol.gov)
- Office of Disability Employment Policy - *Employers and the ADA: Myths and Facts*
 - [Employers and the ADA: Myths and Facts | U.S. Department of Labor \(dol.gov\)](http://dol.gov)
- National Institutes of Health - *Person-first and Destigmatizing Language*
 - [Person-first and Destigmatizing Language | National Institutes of Health \(NIH\)](http://nih.gov)
- American Institutes for Research - *Improving Career Readiness for Students with Disabilities*



- [Improving College and Career Readiness for Students with Disabilities.pdf](#)
(ccrscenter.org)
- Partnership on Inclusive Apprenticeship - *Designing Inclusive Apprenticeships*
 - [Designing Inclusive Apprenticeships - Partnership on Inclusive Apprenticeship](#)
- Office of Disability Employment Policy - *Partnership on Inclusive Apprenticeship (PIA)*
 - [Partnership on Inclusive Apprenticeship \(PIA\) | U.S. Department of Labor \(dol.gov\)](#)
- Job Accommodation Network – *Building a Disability-Inclusive Organization*
 - [Building a Disability-Inclusive Organization \(askjan.org\)](#)

