



Bridging the Gap for RAP Sponsors: Encouraging Equity in Registered Apprenticeships for Neurodiverse Youth

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Introduction

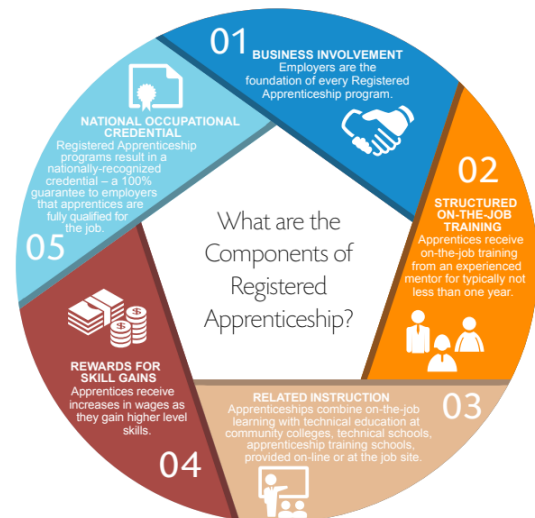
Despite opportunities to gain experience with core job skills, and gain industry specific knowledge while earning wages, Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs) are traditionally underused as an employment option for neurodiverse youth¹. This resource bundle highlights ways in which RAP sponsors should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

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. With Diversity as well as Quality and Safety integrated throughout the RAP elements, the five components of a RAP are illustrated in Figure 1.

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.

Figure 1: Components of a RAP



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

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.



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 RAP sponsors and employers should take to bolster career exploration and the [recruitment](#) of neurodiverse youth to registered apprenticeship programs.

- **Employers should provide hands-on opportunities for youth to experience the IT and cybersecurity workforce.** Across all industries, [neurodiverse youth](#) are less likely to be employed than their peers without disabilities. As such, neurodiverse youth seeking employment may be entering the world of work for the first time. They may have limited understanding of job titles or tasks. To mitigate this, employers should forge connections with [Employment Support Professionals \(ESPs\)](#) who will speak to youth about career pathways and offer work site tours, informational interviews, internships, or job shadows prior to the apprenticeship interview or full-time employment.
- **RAP Sponsors should leverage various forms of media to provide context and information about available job opportunities.** Identifying or creating videos, graphics, brochures, and photos of employees in the workplace will help neurodiverse youth understand expectations and roles. Social media platforms such as Tik Tok, YouTube, and Instagram can be leveraged to gain the attention of youth during career related discussions. Developing visuals for these platforms can be a useful engagement strategy for recruitment, especially helpful if in-person opportunities at the job site are unavailable. Employers seeking to recruit young adults should also consider posting visuals and infographics on their website that provide a snapshot and overview of occupations, [RAPs](#), and other key considerations for IT and cybersecurity careers.
- **RAP sponsors and Employers should offer career exploration as a unique recruitment strategy.** This approach provides the opportunity for youth to try out hands-on job experiences, which serves a dual purpose to the employer of a “working interview.” This is an in-person interview that takes place on-the-job where youth can be assigned some job duties and be observed through paid experiences in the work environment. During the working interview, sponsors and employers can observe a candidate’s interest and ability performing a specific job or task, rather than rely upon a traditional interview, which is not always a successful determinant of these factors or an inclusive hiring practice.

For more information on how ESPs and School-Based Professionals can support career exploration and recruitment for neurodiverse youth see our resource guide for Disability Service Providers.

Resource 2: Funding Registered Apprenticeship Programs Through Collaboration

There are various funding options for sponsors and employers of Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs) to braid funding to support neurodiverse youth. Opportunities specific to neurodiverse youth include [Vocational Rehabilitation \(VR\)](#) and [Level Up services](#). The following suggestions outline potential collaboration opportunities to support program development.

RAP Sponsors should partner with high schools. As required by [the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#), [transition services](#) must be included in a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) by the time a student reaches the age of 16, though preferably sooner. A student's IEP or 504 accommodations offer options for the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives.

RAP Sponsors should cultivate relationships with [Vocational Rehabilitation \(VR\)](#) to support neurodiverse highschoolers. VR offers in-school youth, 14-21, Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) until age 22. Through Pre-ETS, schools and community resource providers may be available to provide neurodiverse students with opportunities for career exploration and informational interviewing. Depending upon the infrastructure and expertise of a RAP sponsor in the disability services field, there may be options through VR to become Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP)² or approved on the job training program. CRPs may be contracted or non-contracted dependent on state process. RAP sponsors should consider becoming a CRP or partnering with an established CRP to secure funds for job shadowing, trial work experiences, job placement, on-the-job training, and job coaching for neurodiverse youth.

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) focuses on five core services:

1. career exploration and counseling
2. workplace readiness training
3. work-based learning experiences
4. counseling on post-secondary education or training
5. self-advocacy and peer mentoring.


Through Pre-ETS, neurodiverse youth participate in work experiences with VR contracted providers. These experiences help them make decisions about career pathways and develop a customized plan for their future.

RAP Sponsors should partner with VR providers to support neurodiverse youth in apprenticeships. Neurodiverse students under the age of 22 who are eligible for VR services and enrolled in vocational schools, apprenticeships, college courses, or training programs, can still benefit from Pre-ETS services. VR provides job seekers, apprentices, employees, and employers with access to free services and resources related to recruitment, onboarding, retention, consultations on workplace modifications and low-cost technology solutions, guidance regarding the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 503 compliance and accessibility, disability awareness training, pipeline development, paid on-the-job-training, job coaching, and tax credits.

RAP sponsors should braid funding to support training. Funding streams such as [WIOA Title I, Title III Employment Services, and Title IV funds](#), and [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\) employment and training funds](#) can be braided to support the apprentice, RAP sponsor, trainer, and employer. RAP sponsors should facilitate connections for their training providers so they can apply to receive WIOA funding through Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) for adult and dislocated workers, or to become a youth activity provider on a competitive basis through a grant or contract.

² A CRP is an agency or individual approved as a vendor to provide VR services to individuals with disabilities.





Partnerships with [community colleges](#) can also 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.



Resource 3: Equity & Inclusion: Ensuring Success for Neurodiverse Youth in Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs)

Inclusive apprenticeships foster a culture that creates an environment where everyone can contribute in meaningful ways. There are numerous approaches to creating successful inclusive apprenticeship programs. Implement the following strategies to create inclusive apprenticeship programs for neurodiverse youth:

RAP Sponsors

- **Sponsors should advocate that inclusion starts in recruitment.** Throughout recruitment to onboarding, training and retention, RAP sponsors can provide employers with [information](#) on how RAPs offer great [benefits](#) through an inclusive work-based learning model and assist employers by administering accessible hiring and training practices.
- **Sponsors should cultivate diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible workplaces.** Accessibility is essential to inclusion. Inclusive models are distinguished by full access, work accommodations, and essential support throughout all phases of the RAP. The U.S. Department of Labor's [Partnership on Inclusive Apprenticeship \(PIA\)](#) developed an [inclusive apprenticeship toolkit](#) that can be used by intermediaries or employers when developing inclusive apprenticeships.

RTI Providers

- **RTI providers should ensure that training is accessible.** Integrate inclusive principles such as Universal Design. Inclusive apprenticeships include reasonable accommodations and resources that ensure all apprentices can participate in training. Accessibility can be provided through technology, job coaching, and training materials offered in an accessible format.
- **RTI providers should support neurodiverse apprentices with attaining the necessary credentials and skills to succeed in IT and cybersecurity.** Offer an industry credential—which could be a license, certificate, certification, or degree—verifies an individual's qualifications or competence when issued by a third party possessing the authority to issue relevant credentials.



Resource 4: 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 \(ccrcenter.org\)](http://ccrcenter.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 \(askjan.org\)](#)



Frequently Asked Questions about Registered Apprenticeship Programs

What is a Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP)?

A Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) RAPs are typically two to four years, 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 and include an industry recognized credential. Some may offer credit towards a college degree.

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 a receipt of a nationally recognized credential. To become a registered apprenticeship program, 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.





	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Creates opportunities for mentorship to equip apprentices with connections with experienced mentors for support, guidance, and professional goal completion.• 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.

