

J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College

American Apprenticeship Initiative (AAI) Grantee (2015) funded through the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration and H-1B training funds.¹

BACKGROUND: ABOUT THE GRANT AWARD

J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College (JSRCC) manages a complex set of partnerships to promote and expand apprenticeship opportunities in Virginia through an American Apprenticeship Initiative (AAI) grant. John Tyler Community College, Danville Community College (DCC) and Southside Virginia Community College (SVCC) partner with JSRCC to lead the Apprentice Virginia: Collaborative Workforce Solutions in Information Technology (ApprenticeVA) project, which is the primary recipient of AAI grant funds.² Together, the four colleges utilize their reach and partnerships to expand registered apprenticeships in the advanced manufacturing and IT sectors and transition participants from pre-apprenticeship to apprenticeship. When ApprenticeVA designed its AAI grant plan, IT was an emerging, high-demand field in the region that had not previously adopted the apprenticeship model. Additionally, several companies, including HP and Microsoft, opened large data centers in the region and required a skilled workforce to fill their open jobs. Based on these factors, ApprenticeVA saw the IT industry as a prime target for apprenticeship and accordingly focused its AAI grant efforts on both the advanced manufacturing and IT industries.

KEY LEARNINGS

ApprenticeVA's success showcases the importance of strategic relationships among community colleges, industry partners, and other key apprenticeship partners such as state and local workforce investment boards.

CONSISTENT AND ONGOING ENGAGEMENT WITH EMPLOYERS IMPROVES RELATIONSHIPS

Industry Engagement

One of ApprenticeVA's biggest challenges was keeping employers engaged past their initial interest in the apprenticeship program. The manufacturing companies in the region are frequently asked to participate in numerous workforce projects and have become increasingly selective with their time commitments. ApprenticeVA's partner colleges help protect the companies' time by fielding external workforce requests. The objectives of doing this are to become the first point of contact when companies need training and to have a sustainable training model in place when the grant ends. By staying in touch with each employer every month, the partner colleges developed trusted relationships that helped the program thrive. The amount of time required for recruiting new employers to the program is often another challenge. ApprenticeVA focuses on forming relationships with employers and developing a common plan with the

¹ In 2015, building on historic bipartisan support from Congress for "earn and learn" training opportunities, the U.S. Department of Labor launched the American Apprenticeship Initiative (AAI), which awarded \$175 million to 46 public-private partnerships across the country. These grants are financed by a user fee paid by employers to hire foreign workers into the United States under the H-1B nonimmigrant visa program. This initiative is intended to provide a catalyst in supporting a uniquely American Apprenticeship system that meets our country's particular economic, industry, and workforce needs. American Apprenticeships (also referred to as Registered Apprenticeships) are innovative work-based learning and post-secondary earn-and-learn models that meet national standards for registration with the U.S. Department of Labor (or federally recognized State Apprenticeship Agencies).

² Virginia Awarded \$6.9 Million in American Apprenticeship Grants. (2015, September 10). Retrieved May 28, 2019, from <http://ccwatraining.org/virginia-awarded-6-9-million-in-american-apprenticeship-grants/>

business community. The ApprenticeVA partner colleges found that initiating a plan and sticking to it was the best way to engage employers and keep them at the table.

The ApprenticeVA partner colleges also hold meetings with employers and representatives from the Virginia Department of Labor to promote the value of apprenticeship across companies and influence their hiring processes. The colleges partner with over 30 companies that have active apprentices, including Rolls-Royce and Microsoft. The colleges also actively promote their Manufacturing Technician program with the Virginia Manufacturers Association, increasing demand for and interest in the training program.

Marketing and Outreach

To assist with communicating with employers about its program ApprenticeVA accomplished the following:

- Created a set of marketing materials, promoting the ApprenticeVA brand, which each college could customize to fit their specific needs.
- Developed a new website for promoting apprenticeship to businesses and potential apprentices,
- Disseminated printed promotional materials,
- Developed and highlighted a video with apprentice success stories and the employers engaged in the apprenticeship program.

Throughout the life of the grant, colleges also leveraged their personal relationships to recruit employers and support apprentices.

LEVERAGING PARTNERS AND EMPLOYERS TO ENGAGE UNDERREPRESENTED POPULATIONS

Workforce Development Board Expertise and Resources

At the start of the grant, ApprenticeVA expected that meeting its performance targets for underrepresented populations would be the most challenging metric to achieve. However, the colleges found that working with Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) partners, aided the recruitment of underrepresented populations, which went far in contributing towards its goals. The ApprenticeVA partner colleges work with five local workforce boards to enroll WIOA eligible candidates in pre-apprenticeship programs. These individuals receive a nationally recognized credential and are eligible to become apprentices once they complete their training. As of June 2019, over 70% of the participants served by ApprenticeVA (apprentices and pre-apprentices combined) came from underrepresented populations.

Southside Virginia Community College (SVCC), one of the ApprenticeVA partners, serves a diverse population, particularly in rural areas, which helped meet targeted metrics for engaging underrepresented populations. SVCC set a goal to increase women represented in IT occupations. To do this, the college partnered with local companies to develop a *Careers for Women in IT* conference featuring women employed in the IT sector. Women working in local businesses, including Microsoft and Red Hat, spoke about their work experience and opportunities at their respective companies. The event was hosted on SVCC's campus but was advertised broadly and open to anyone interested. The event generated strong interest in SVCC's pre-apprenticeship programs and now occurs annually.

DEVELOP WIN-WIN SOLUTIONS WITH PARTNERS

Partnership Building

Workforce partners across different fields often operate on different timelines, which presents challenges when trying to implement a shared plan. The ApprenticeVA partner colleges found that adjusting to meet partners' working styles, understanding their cultures, and learning what metrics are most important to them

are keys to creating a successful partnership. By finding win-win solutions, ApprenticeVA and partners can make progress on their shared goals.

As an example of a successful partnership, SVCC and Danville Community College (DCC) created programs in the IT sector by partnering with Microsoft. Microsoft's new data center in Boydton, Virginia, was growing rapidly and had pressing needs for trained technicians. Using AAI grant funds, ApprenticeVA partnered with Microsoft to create and implement an apprenticeship training program for their technicians. To ensure that apprentices were trained on the latest equipment, Microsoft donated equipment to the new Center for Information Technology Excellence (CITE) lab, a data center workplace simulation, at SVCC.³ With the successful apprenticeship training program in place, Microsoft is now replicating the model at its other data center.

³CITE Lab Opens. (n.d.). Retrieved May 28, 2019, from <http://southside.edu/news/cite-lab-opens>