In June 2019, the TechHire technical assistance (TA) team held a peer learning group (PLG) call for a select number of H-1B TechHire grantees seeking strategies to address employer concerns with Registered Apprenticeship. The call allowed grantees to discuss their specific challenges among one another and to hear from Eric Seleznow, senior advisor at JFF and subject matter expert on RA, on recommendations for addressing these concerns. This resource brief explores how the following promising practices, shared on the PLG call, can play a role in helping H-1B TechHire grantees effectively engage employers on the benefits of RA:

- Convene regional information technology (IT) employers to deepen their understanding of the model and value of RA;
- Elevate partnerships with employers who “get it,” particularly when there is buy-in from both human resources (HR) and frontline managers;
- Highlight the ways in which RA can help increase diversity and retention, particularly in the tech industry.

The PLG call featured three TechHire grantees who are actively working to better promote RA or considering it as a strategy, especially within the IT industry. Their goal is to better support the advancement of their TechHire graduates while also strengthening their employer relations. The featured grantees were Employ Milwaukee, Miami Dade College, and Forward Careers, Inc.

**Grantee Challenges around RA**

To kick off the PLG call, grantees shared overviews of their programs and then spoke about some of the challenges they are experiencing, which include:

**Connecting RA to IT occupations.** It is difficult to engage IT employers around RA, given that so many of the existing RA models are focused on manufacturing.

**Helping Employers Navigate the Process of Designing and Registering an Apprenticeship Model.** Employers struggle to visualize how to effectively leverage and transform existing training resources and strategies into a successful RA model.

**Getting Buy-In from HR and Frontline Managers.** It’s often HR representatives, not frontline managers, who attend meetings that focus on the purpose and benefits of RA. These two roles can, at times, work against each other in terms of who is “on board” and committed to RA models for both incumbent and entry-level positions.

**Skepticism of Quality and Credentials.** Some employers are skeptical of the efficacy and value of RA. Many see it more as an entry-level training strategy for younger adults and less as a retention and diversity strategy for their existing workforce. IT employers often don’t recognize that many of the activities they are already doing are key parts of a successful RA model.
Employer Expectations. Some employers are expecting degree holders to come out of TechHire and are surprised to learn they are receiving bootcamp graduates. They want to hire people with experience but don’t recognize that internships and RA are viable strategies for providing these individuals with the experience they seek.

PROMISING PRACTICE: CONNECT IT EMPLOYERS TO RA THROUGH INDUSTRY-LED CONVENINGS

Eric Seleznow shared that, nationally, IT apprenticeships are gaining momentum, albeit slowly. This slow growth presents an opportunity for grantees to learn valuable lessons about what has been shown to work and what hasn’t in certain regions of the country. Convening the IT industry within a region enables employers to learn from and support one another rather than reinforcing a competitive, contentious labor market. It’s an opportunity for companies and community partners to collaborate on identifying regional needs, strengths, and gaps, and also better understand how the RA model is being applied to the IT industry across the nation.

Milwaukee Tech Hub is a great example of a regional effort already underway in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The Tech Hub is comprised of corporations, entrepreneurs, innovators, and community organizations working together to strengthen the tech industry in and around Milwaukee. With a mission to connect, transform, and build the tech sector across the region, the Tech Hub utilizes work groups, open discussion forums, community calendars, and social media to act as a central hub of events, information, opportunities, and innovations related to the tech industry across southeast Wisconsin.¹ Recent Tech Hub meetings have focused on dispelling myths related to RA and strategies for engaging HR.

PROMISING PRACTICE: ELEVATE RELATIONSHIPS WITH EMPLOYERS WHO “GET IT”

When trying to connect with employers around the value of RA, it is important to acknowledge and fully understand companies’ unique “pain points.” This includes learning about their needs around retention, recruitment, and talent, and how RA can potentially fill these gaps. It is also important to simultaneously build and elevate relationships with employers who clearly understand the value of building one’s own workforce through a well-designed RA model, and who can serve as advocates or champions in helping to get other companies on board. These companies can help show others that many of the requirements of RA are activities they are already doing on a daily basis. RA can be a way to strategically organize, monitor, and evaluate the effectiveness of these efforts while also receiving financial support. Keep in mind that smaller companies are sometimes easier to work with in this regard, but some larger companies, such as IBM and Accenture, have strong models that could serve as an example to smaller companies. When building relationships with employers on RA, it’s important to determine if there’s an employer that can be elevated and recognized for the great work they are doing in the region. If so, finding opportunities to get them in the room with other employers is a great starting point.

PROMISING PRACTICE: INCREASE DIVERSITY AND RETENTION THROUGH RA

While many employers recognize the value of RA as a strategy for entry-level workers, it can also provide companies with access to a diverse population of “nontraditional” jobseekers who can lend cultural and experiential knowledge, broadening a company’s perspective and ability to meet consumer demand. These individuals may not end up with a four-year degree, but their on-the-job learning through RA gives them exposure to contextualized, real-world scenarios and challenges that make them productive workers throughout the learning process. Eric Seleznow offered that IT apprenticeships have shown some success in helping IT companies increase the number of female tech workers they employ.

While some employers still remain skeptical about hiring those without the traditional bachelor’s degree, others realize the value of apprenticeships in growing their workforce through customized training that meets their unique needs and skill demands. Investing in incumbent worker training through RA can help demonstrate to employees that the company values their talents and experiences enough to support them through more advanced on-the-job training and classroom instruction. A recent report from the National Skills Coalition on RA indicated that businesses that use apprenticeship models can customize training with the skills they need to reflect the evolving and changing workforce. According to the NSC, this approach has been shown to “reinforce employee engagement, leading to better morale, higher retention, and lower turnover.”

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Techtonic Apprenticeship Program
This apprenticeship program combines technical know-how, professional growth, and hands-on-real-world coding to give clients creative solutions while also cultivating the next generation of developers. Techtonic trains developers who contribute to client work immediately, while simultaneously supplying small businesses and enterprises with the diversity of talent, backgrounds, and skills that are needed to take charge of the next wave of disruption and innovation.

IBM Apprenticeships
Learn about IBM’s RA program, which gives students practical experience combined with the reputation of working with IBM.

Engaging Employers to Support Work-Based Learning as a Strategy to Diversify the Talent Pipeline
This webinar from 2018 provides an opportunity to better understand how to secure employer partners’ support for work-based learning activities. The discussion explores topics such as specific work-based learning models and strategies for effectively engaging employers in these models. Additional resources related to apprenticeships and expanding diversity can also be found on the left-hand column of the webpage.

Broadening the Apprenticeship Pipeline
A recent brief from the National Skills Coalition shows how apprenticeship and other forms of work-based learning are important tools for helping workers acquire the skills that employers need.