

Expanding Apprenticeships through AIM, Part 2

Follow-up responses from our guest speakers, Mark Genua ('MG') at JFF, previously at Philadelphia Works, and Ralph Roach ('RR'), with the Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation.

Question	Answer
<p><i>More and more often we hear the concept of "nothing about us without us" - including the customer in the design and development of services. Both of you spoke to how important it is to really listen to the voice of individuals with disabilities who are or who hope to be apprentices. How do you set up those opportunities to listen and learn from your clients?</i></p>	<p>RR: At Pennsylvania's Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (PA OVR) this starts with the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor discussion about the client's Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) and career plans and using a registered apprenticeship (RA) 'earn while you learn' approach.</p> <p>It can also be part of the pre-employment transition services group instruction for secondary ed. students with disabilities led by both VR staff, local educational authorities staff (e.g., transition staff, special ed. teachers, work coop coordinators, etc.), or by VR-contracted community rehabilitation providers and supported employment venders.</p> <p>The value of apprenticeship pathways should be presented and explored by the VR program State Rehabilitation Council, Client Assistance Program (CAP), Protection and Advocacy of Individual Rights (PAIR) ED, and State Developmental Disabilities (DD) Council. This should focus on basic descriptions of pre-apprenticeship's and RA's. This should also be part of the VR state proposed and approved sections of combined workforce plans under WIOA. In this regard, all stakeholders can be informed of the benefits of pre-and RA opportunities. Buy-in by all these stakeholders to the benefits of pre-apprentices, RA, current sponsors and documentation of job retention, RA careers, median wages, etc. will help people with disabilities and students with disabilities in their choices to consider this pathway into high demand careers.</p> <p><i>How regularly should those check-ins happen? How do you sustain that feedback loop over time?</i></p> <p>RR: Periodic and routine check-ins with all stakeholders is ideal. At PA OVR this responsibility is shared among business services staff in our combined agency bureau, executive director, and leadership staff.</p>
<p>Do you find more employers are becoming more proactive vs reactive to accommodations, and welcoming a more universally designed approach to work and learning?</p>	<p>RR: In Pennsylvania, yes. PA OVR has promoted the Walgreens Distribution Center model bringing together one of our local workforce boards, a community rehabilitation provider, our state Department of Labor Apprenticeship Training Office, a local community college, and a leading international supply chain company. Soft skills and warehousing curriculum use a variety of accommodations including verbal relay of information and test taking, visual</p>

	<p>representation of workstation tasks, accessible ramps to the facility, and coordination of public transportation to match key shift of pre-apprenticeship hours.</p> <p>MG: Yes, employers are also becoming more proactive in requesting to work with varying populations and reaching out to organizations that serve such populations. Especially in apprenticeships, employers are providing different opportunities to learn the same skills and work at their own pace. Employers are becoming more attuned to mental health issues compared to past years—we're seeing employers create supports and treat mental health needs as equal to physical health. Employers are increasingly providing resources around mental health, such as access to therapy and mental health days, too.</p> <p><i>How can we get more people to be thinking proactively?</i></p> <p>RR: Continued outreach to RA sponsors and employers about the largely untapped students with disabilities population, and the people with disabilities labor force that is available, and how with universal design and accommodations this talent pipeline can provide a reliable and qualified pool of job candidates. They also need to know how VR can provide both onboarding support and retention services that results in employee retention and enhanced worker productivity.</p> <p>MG: Partners can help to highlight ways people with disabilities are successful in apprenticeships. Apprenticeship design is less about barriers, and more about the currently limited opportunities. People with disabilities can provide so much to their workplace, as well as help inform the way the workplace is designed. Employers are finding that accommodations as expressed by workers with disabilities can benefit their whole employee base. One employer put in all these additional supports, and they had so much success they extended their supports to benefit everyone.</p>
<p>Will you be able to continue your programs despite today's Stay at Home and social distancing environment?</p>	<p>RR: Yes, for those employers utilizing RA hires who are in PA Life Essential Businesses that remain open. Upon the anticipated resumption of full economic activity, RA's will represent a significant way to bring qualified, skilled workers into almost any occupation sector and will become more relevant to employers in high demand occupations.</p> <p><i>If not, will you be providing an update on the adjustments you have made which are seeming to be successful?</i></p> <p>RR: We will gladly share how PA OVR in coordination with our Apprenticeship Training Office, local workforce development</p>

	<p>boards, and RA sponsors adjust to the labor market in a post COVID 19 economy.</p> <p>MG: Some programs did halt because their whole workforce system was halted—this is not unique to Philadelphia. In other cases, they’ve continued, but without the on-the-job learning component and made modifications for distance learning.</p> <p>For programs with occupations that are deemed essential, such as health care roles, people have implemented ways to keep workers safe, including additional use of disinfects, etc.</p> <p>Intermediaries are still active in connecting partners to funding and other resources, as well as to other partners that can support the current changes in program needs.</p>
<p>In what logistics occupations did VR clients secure apprentices?</p>	<p>RR: We are working with Syncreon in South Central Pennsylvania, with expansion opportunities for other logistic and supply chain employers.</p> <p><i>And how did you leverage WIOA dollars to support pre-and registered apprenticeships?</i></p> <p>RR: We developed a strategic plan to obtain an employment training provider list (ETPL) and local workforce board approved training list status for the training. This also involved Apprenticeship Training Office approval for an established warehousing apprenticeship pathway with a community college and a community rehabilitation provider (the on-site trainer).</p>
<p>Who is paying the RA wages?</p>	<p>RR: For VR participants, PA OVR pays the wages using our flexible on-the-job training wage reimbursement. OVR also pays the training fee. For people with disabilities not served by OVR but served by a local workforce development board/American Job Center, they use Title I and III WIOA funds since the training is on the eligible training provider and approved training lists.</p>
<p>Given that you did subsidize wages, do you have good data about retention post apprenticeship? (immediate context notwithstanding)</p>	<p>RR: Through 6 cohorts and approximately 24 OVR graduates, there are approximately 20 retentions. Starting wages at \$15 hour with benefits. Graduates of the first cohort (5 persons) in Aug. 2018 will be approaching a two-year anniversary in Aug. 2020.</p>
<p>How would you suggest folks approach their WDBs to explore collaborating around</p>	<p>RR: Go in as a team with your state Apprenticeship Training Office, potential sponsors and talk about how VR funding can be used for the VR talent that participate.</p>

apprenticeships for persons with disabilities?

MG: Yes, go in with the backing from the state level. If you have employers on board, show that there's buy-in from them. Bringing VR reps as well can show that you're not coming with empty hands and asking for money--you're coming with people that have apprenticeship as a priority. I would also bring workforce development boards on early in the process, so they can stay informed, and you can begin discussing their priorities and find some alignment. You'll want to have something to prep with them for the next fiscal year, so you can get in their planning process for future fiscal years.