



Closing the Gap: Tips to Engage Tribal Youth in Registered Apprenticeship Programs

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.





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Introduction

Registered apprenticeship programs (RAPs) are industry-driven, high-quality career pathways that not only allow employers to build a future-focused workforce but also provide high-paying, high-quality job opportunities for individual career seekers. Given that four-year education and secondary education systems are not attractive or feasible to everyone, RAPs provide a dynamic alternate solution for youth to gain skills and experience in fields of interest while earning a progressive wage and receiving on-the-job training. For young people that decide to pursue higher education later, they may be able to receive college credits for their apprenticeship experience toward a degree in their desired field.

The American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) population is—and has historically been—underrepresented in RAPs across all age groups and occupations. Of the 547,922 active apprentices in FY2021, only 6,523 individuals identified as AI/AN.¹ Racial prejudice, historical trauma, and lack of resources and cultural awareness have played roles in this underrepresentation. Taking these factors into consideration when working with AI/AN youth will support their success.

The expansion of equity and non-traditional career pathways, such as RAPs, is overdue. Mitigating the underrepresentation of tribal youth starts with acknowledgement that they have been missed.

From 2010-2019, tribal representation in apprenticeships dropped by 46.3 percent (3.4 to 1.8 percent).² To increase tribal youth representation in RAPs, RAP sponsors should ensure programs are culturally responsive to the needs of tribal youth.

The Cybersecurity Youth Apprenticeship Initiative (CYAI) is funded by the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Employment and Training Administration (ETA) Office of Apprenticeship (OA). CYAI promotes the sustainable development of cybersecurity registered apprenticeship programs for youth ages 16- 21, with a goal of creating at least 900 new cybersecurity youth apprenticeships by 2024 through partnerships and technical assistance.³ CYAI focuses efforts on reaching underrepresented and marginalized populations to improve their access to sustainable career pathways.

The purpose of this white paper is to equip RAP sponsors in cybersecurity occupations with culturally relevant tips and best practices to better recruit and employ AI/AN youth. AI/AN youth will be referred

¹ *FY 2021 Data and Statistics*. DOL. (n.d.). <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/apprenticeship/about/statistics/2021>

² Jones, J., Hertel-Fernandez, A., & DeCarlo, C. (n.d.). *Equity snapshot: Apprenticeships in America*. DOL Blog. <https://blog.dol.gov/2021/11/03/equity-snapshot-apprenticeships-in-america>

³ Cybersecurity Youth Apprenticeship Initiative. 2022. www.cyai2024.org



to as “tribal youth” throughout this document. In addition to recruiting and engaging tribal youth, this white paper aims to lend insight on best practices for RAPs to increase program completion.

ICF had the privilege of interviewing multiple representatives from tribal organizations that work directly with tribal youth. These representatives shared best practices and strategies to engage with tribal youth that focus on respect, trust, and sustainability.

Tips to Engage Tribal Youth

Tip 1: Recruit Patiently

Tribal Diversity and Identities

Recruitment efforts for tribal youth must recognize the diversity among the tribal community. Cultural customs, language, and food often vary among tribes, spiritual belief systems may range from traditional to Christian, and how one identifies is based on preference. Tribal land might be a reservation or a rancheria. Tribal communities might be governed by a Tribal Council or a General Committee. Although there may be commonalities, ultimately **each sovereign nation is distinct from the next.**⁴

How AI/AN youth identify may differ based on location and generation. Tribal youth may prefer being called *Native American, Native, Indigenous, or Tribal*. There is an ongoing effort to reinforce the roots of tribal ancestry as a whole across tribes, so many youth are threading this

“Understanding that EVERY tribal community – even neighbors – are very different. Every tribe is not the same. I have even learned this between villages. Approaching and knowing that there are differences. Don’t be afraid to ask questions. We are still learning ourselves – everyone doesn’t know everything. No bad or wrong questions.”

-Tribal TANF Administrator

connection and identifying as “Tribal.” Never assume how tribal youth prefer to identify. Ask the individual, tribe, or tribal organization how people prefer to be identified. Similarly, due to federal policies and historical relocation practices, many tribes (on- and off-reservation) may be comprised of multiple bands or communities.⁵ For this reason, it is imperative that RAP sponsors never assume customs and traditions are intertribal, but rather ask and seek knowledge from tribal liaisons and/or tribal youth about how to be culturally sensitive to the customs and practices of each individual tribe.⁶

Building Bridges Between RAPs and Tribal youth

- Take the time to build rapport and trust.
- Build partnerships with community organizations working with tribal youth.
- Partner with a tribal liaison to connect with the community.
- Tailor recruitment materials for Tribal youth.
- Feature tribal youth in educational materials and digital success stories.

⁴ Evans, E., & Werkheiser, M. (2020, August 5). *Top Ten considerations when engaging with American Indian tribes*. Cultural Heritage Partners. <https://www.culturalheritagepartners.com/top-ten-considerations-engaging-american-indian-tribes/#:~:text=Ask%20them%20what%20their%20thoughts,first%20interactions%20with%20tribal%20members>.

⁵ *Cultural considerations*. Cultural Considerations | Youth.gov. (n.d.). <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/american-indian-alaska-native-youth/cultural-considerations#:~:text=The%20right%20to%20one%E2%80%99s%20own%20culture%20and%20religion,protective%20factors%2C%20including%20access%20to%20services%20and%20supports>.

⁶ *Trauma and healing informed training*. Tribal Youth Resource Center. (2021, November 30). <https://www.tribalyouth.org/what-we-do/trauma-and-healing-informed-training/>

Time and Consistency

Building relationships with tribes and tribal groups in advance of targeted youth recruitment efforts is essential.⁷ Identify a tribal liaison that can connect RAP sponsors to tribal government (if suggested), tribal education departments, tribal schools and/or other relevant tribal programs. Use connections made through a tribal liaison to attain support and buy-in from tribal youth in the community by connecting to youth programs (i.e., tribal youth council) and foster that relationship to spread the word about your RAP to potentially interested youth. Youth serve as great messengers if they are excited and invested in an opportunity. They will encourage involvement and educate others in the community.⁸

“Offer in person presentations by collaborating with youth departments or TANF departments or other Tribal departments.”





-Tribal TANF Administrator

Keep in mind that tribes are sovereign nations. Distrust and skepticism of external organizations can hinder recruitment. **Time and consistency are key!** Tribal youth are most receptive to consistency. Show up regularly, be understanding and open, and share concrete examples of how a RAP could 1) benefit the tribe or tribal organization; and/or, 2) benefit the individual as a potential apprentice.

Do not request time, attention, and information from a tribal community without showing a tangible return on investment for the individual or program. Far too often, tribes are left out of the decision-making process for how to use the information they share. This has led to further hesitance and protectiveness of their communities. Be aware of how information is used and be very clear and open about how and when it will benefit the community.

On-Reservation (Rural) vs Off-Reservation (Urban) Settings



RAP recruitment efforts should be customized to the target location and audience (i.e., employer or individual). There are subtle and significant distinctions between rural and urban tribal youth and how best to engage with them respectively. As with most information, there is no one-size fits all tactic to recruiting and engaging tribal youth. A few reminders to consider:

On-Reservation (rural)		Off-Reservation (urban)	
	Due to distrust of outsiders, youth may be more reserved or hesitant to participate. Take time to build rapport and gain their trust.		Youth may be more trusting of new ideas due to exposure to diversity in their community.
	Youth may have stronger connection to their culture.		Youth may be less connected to their culture (if at all).

⁷ Top ten ways to recruit the Native American job candidate. Diversity Officer Magazine. (2018, March 2).

<https://diversityofficermagazine.com/diversity-inclusion/top-ten-ways-to-recruit-the-native-american-job-candidate/>

⁸ NICWA. (n.d.). <https://www.nicwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Youth-Engagement-for-Tribal-Leaders.pdf>

	<p>Youth may require different resources than urban youth to engage and participate in RAPs.</p>		<p>Youth may be more willing to participate in new activities.</p>
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Explaining RAPs to tribal youth and their parents/guardians requires the same attention as explaining to any other population. Regardless of location, RAP sponsors should prepare answers to the following questions and prompts:

<p>What is a Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP)? Provide examples of the specific jobs.</p>	<p>What incentives will tribal youth receive for participation (i.e. there is no cost to them, all training materials provided, including uniforms), if any?</p>
<p>What is cybersecurity/IT? Provide examples of the specific jobs.</p>	<p>What other support services might be available to tribal youth (i.e. transportation vouchers or gas reimbursement, food, etc.), if any?</p>
<p>How much does it cost tribal youth to participate (if anything)?</p>	<p>Share some relatable success stories from other tribal youth that have completed the programs.</p>
<p>What industries can tribal youth work in upon completion of a RAP in cybersecurity/IT?</p>	<p>Who can relate to them? When possible, have individuals of a similar background go into the community to do the recruiting – ideally someone who is tribal.</p>
<p>Other questions to consider: Is there qualifying testing? What does the curriculum entail? What supports exist for tribal youth with learning disabilities or other needs?</p>	

Adapting recruiting strategies based on location is important to the RAP and CYAI effort. Here are a few suggested locations for potential recruitment of tribal youth:

On-Reservation (rural)	Off-Reservation (urban)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reservation High Schools • Tribal Community Colleges • Pow Wows • Tribal TANF programs • Tribal Government • Tribal Education Departments • Native Youth Conferences – Dream the Impossible (DTI), UNITY Leadership Conference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public, Private, Tribal Colleges • Public, Private, Tribal High Schools • Community based organizations • Pow Wows • Tribal TANF programs • Tribal Centers • Native Youth Conferences – Dream the Impossible (DTI), UNITY Leadership Conference

Strengthening Protective Factors

Protective factors⁹ are conditions that protect *against undesirable outcomes* and *promote desirable outcomes* within an individual's environment. Recruiting tribal youth should focus on strengthening protective factors such as establishing life goals, family, and community support ("family" is not always the nuclear family, but may include non-blood relatives such as neighbors and friends), trauma-informed care, and social environmental norms (e.g., sober community). RAP sponsors should emphasize the effect that protective factors have on academic and career success.

Tribal youth living on reservations may convey more distrust than urban tribal youth. Tribal youth living on rural reservations may have more fear and skepticism about leaving the reservation. As one interviewee said *"keep in mind those from rural areas are likely to be more reserved/hesitant to jump in. Tribal youth in urban areas are used to being more open/trying things. Kids on reservation may have more cultural pride and bring that lens but need more push to engage with services/activities. Urban kids will tend to be more disconnected culturally but more willing to jump in."*

Examples of Protective Factors:

- Current and/or future aspirations
- Positive self-image
- Personal wellness
- Cultural connectedness
- Positive opportunities
- Positive social norms
- Strong social supports and connectedness (family and non-family)

Tip 2: Engage Respectfully

Once recruited, engaging tribal youth with cultural awareness and sensitivity will support the development of rapport and trust. Time and consistency are two key factors to developing trust with tribal youth. These factors should remain a priority when engaging with tribal youth for the duration of their participation in RAPs.

Cultural awareness requires honest communication about knowledge gaps and seeking clarification and guidance from the individual when needed. It demonstrates humility and authenticity in the desire to engage.

Everyone has biases and draws conclusions based on their knowledge and experience. Acknowledging this reality and being open to new information and ideas is essential. Do not be afraid to ask and have a conversation about cultural differences. Understand that historical and intergenerational trauma continues to impact tribal communities today. Distrust, hesitance, and a lack of cultural connection create barriers in engaging tribal youth in RAPs. There are a variety of trainings¹⁰ available for individuals

"The biggest thing is being understanding and consistent. Whatever you are doing they want to see you are going to consistently be there."

-Tribal Consultant

⁹ Henson, M., Sabo, S., Trujillo, A., & Toufel-Shone, N. (n.d.). *Identifying protective factors to promote health in American Indian and Alaska native adolescents: A literature review*. The journal of primary prevention. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27826690/#:~:text=Protective%20factors%20spanned%20multiple%20domains%20of%20the%20socio-ecological,improving%20the%20health%20and%20wellbeing%20of%20AIAN%20adolescents.>

¹⁰ Events. Native Wellness Institute. (n.d.). <https://www.nativewellness.com/events.html>

and organizations to take to increase their cultural competency around AI/AN historical trauma and its impact.

That said, not all tribal youth have been exposed to their tribal culture. Many tribal youth are of mixed race/ethnicity. Do not assume that all tribal youth identify similarly or have knowledge to share about their culture and traditions. Connect with everyone individually to understand how to best engage respectfully.

Tip 3: Provide Ongoing Support

“... historical and intergenerational trauma is real; trauma we have experienced in our life are often barriers to realizing our full potential; employers should be more educated on this and develop partnerships for access/availability referral resources not under employment support”.

-Tribal Consultant

Retaining apprentices once registered is critical for RAP sponsors that want to grow their workforce.¹¹ Ensuring tribal youth have the social and environmental support they need to complete the apprenticeship is vital to their success and performance at work. These supports may be different than those needed by non-tribal youth. Partner with tribal youth-serving organizations to identify what is needed and provide opportunities for the apprentices to seek out support. Attrition rates among tribal youth are oftentimes a result of a lack of ongoing support for the youth. If individuals' needs are not being met, tribal youth will slip between the cracks. RAP sponsors may consider implementing a case management program so gaps and barriers are identified and addressed in real-time. One interviewee mentioned the importance of everyone working together to equip programs with tools to support youth and the support staff serving

youth (i.e. curriculum training), without which the dropout rate is higher.

Staff working directly with tribal youth should be trained and versed in historical and intergenerational trauma. Understanding this trauma will provide better insight into certain behaviors or inhibitions that tribal youth might exhibit. This knowledge allows staff to be more sensitive to some of the unique challenges experienced by tribal youth.

Meeting each milestone on the path to completing a RAP and gaining full-time employment should be celebrated and documented as a success. Highlighting qualitative successes during each tribal apprentice's journey is also important. These successes will vary by individual. Some individuals will benefit from documenting and highlighting the seemingly simple act of completing the registration process. This may be their first time following through with committing to a

Understanding Historical Trauma and Workplace Accommodations

Historical and intergenerational trauma is real. Traumatic experiences may affect tribal youth in many ways they do not even know. Trauma can create barriers to tribal youth realizing their full potential. RAP sponsors should:

- Develop partnerships for access/availability to mental health referral resources.
- Learn to recognize signs of trauma. Many traumatized youth will not admit to their struggles.
- Provide a connection to trained recovery coaches/peer support programs.

¹¹ *Top ten ways to recruit the Native American job candidate.* Diversity Officer Magazine. (2018, March 2). <https://diversityofficermagazine.com/diversity-inclusion/top-ten-ways-to-recruit-the-native-american-job-candidate/>

career pathway program. Others may be motivated by longer term successes such as their first wage increase. Monitoring and highlighting successes goes hand in hand with a format that regards regular and consistent contact and follow-up as a key factor of engaging and maintaining rapport with tribal youth.

Providing internal support services and/or a robust external referral system is another component RAPs should consider when working with tribal youth. Support services may not be needed by all tribal youth, and may include:

- Childcare
- Reliable Transportation
- Internet services (if applicable)
- Software/devices to adequately perform the job

Consideration and implementation of these additional services may be the difference in mitigating tribal youth falling through the cracks. RAPs and CYAI have the opportunity to build their capacity to engage in meaningful ways and play a role in empowering tribal youth to advance their futures in the ever-growing and evolving field of cybersecurity and IT.

“Provide equipment, tools, things needed to perform job or apprenticeship and support success. Transportation, especially for 16-21, always an issue. Some are lucky to have parental transportation. Otherwise, reliant on support staff from other programs”.

-Tribal Consultant

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Cultural “Pocket Guide”

A general guide to enhancing cultural competency while providing services to tribal youth.¹²

<p>Recruit Patiently</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General respect goes a long way • Build a bridge between RAPs and tribal youth through networking and partnering with tribal liaisons • Do not assume all tribal youth are the same or come from similar backgrounds and cultures • Be consistent and patient • Acknowledge what you do <i>not</i> know • Ask questions • Learn together • Be transparent about all stages of the process
<p>Engage Respectfully</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware of implicit biases that may affect engagement • Do not assume all tribal youth are the same or come from similar backgrounds or cultures • Be consistent and build rapport • Be patient • Be authentic and open • Be educated and aware of signs of historical and intergenerational trauma that may impact a youths learning and participation
<p>Maintain Intentionally</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow-up and check-in regularly • Highlight successes and strengths along the way • Provide resources and referrals to support services such as mental health, transportation, and internet services • Build rapport with each individual. Understand their personal circumstances, challenges, strengths, and communication style. • Be authentic and open • Stay educated and aware of signs of historical and intergenerational trauma that may impact a youths learning and participation
<p>Etiquette</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity: Be respectful and do not assume all tribal youth are the same or come from similar backgrounds or cultures • Eye contact: Not all tribal youth will make eye contact. Do not be offended. Take it as an opportunity to ask questions and build rapport. • Respect personal boundaries: Many tribal youth do not like to shake hands or be touched. This is not a sign of disrespect. • Hair: An individual’s hair is sacred. Do not touch a person’s hair without permission. • Appearance: Do not assume someone is not tribal based solely on their appearance or skin tone. Many tribal youth come from mixed families. Do not let implicit bias falsely profile someone based on their appearance. • Ask: To build rapport it is important to not assume but to ask. Be respectful in how the questions are asked, but do not be afraid. • Authenticity: Be your most authentic self. Youth can read your intention and energy. Be kind and genuine.

¹² *Publications and Digital Products*. American Indian and Alaska Native Culture Card | SAMHSA Publications and Digital Products. (n.d.). <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/American-Indian-and-Alaska-Native-Culture-Card/sma08-4354>