

# **Creating Equitable Systems for African American Women to Succeed in Registered Apprenticeship Programs Leading to High-Wage Career Pathways in Louisiana**

*Real-World Project Submitted by Kayla Brossett, Principal Consultant*

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## Introduction

This white paper aims to explore strategies and recommendations for creating equitable systems that support the success of African American women in registered apprenticeship programs (RAPs) in Louisiana. RAPs offer hands-on, paid training opportunities, virtually zero student debt, and the potential to advance in a career faster. It is essential to ensure that these programs are accessible and economically equitable for underrepresented groups such as African American women.

Representing 17% of Louisiana's population, Black women hold the highest voter turnout rates, account for higher percentages of associate and bachelor's degrees, are most likely to be the breadwinners in their families, and are the fastest growing group of entrepreneurs in the United States (DuMonthier, 2017).

Despite these gains, this segment of the population still faces significant inequities: uneven wage earnings, higher rates of poverty, increased contact with the criminal justice system, and an overall lower quality of life. This is because Black women, due to their race and gender, face double marginalization in our current society. Although race is a social construct, not a scientific one, it has had major implications for the health and prosperity of women of color and the households they lead (Larino, 2017).

The paper addresses the challenges African American women face in gaining awareness of, accessing, and advancing through education programs that lead to high-paying career paths. It also seeks to highlight the importance of addressing intersectional barriers based on the specific needs of this demographic.

Insights from existing literature about evidence-based practices, recent and relevant statistics, and demographic-specific snapshot reports inform the strategies for creating ecosystems consisting of government agencies, employers, community colleges, nonprofits, and intermediaries. The project survey (explained in greater detail in the Project Purpose section) integrates those insights into feedback from African American women in Northwest Louisiana.

## Project Purpose

The purpose of the real-world project is to recommend a strategy and processes for the state of Louisiana to increase new registered apprenticeship participation and completion in sectors leading to in-demand and high-wage careers by directly listening to the needs of African American women, along with other current and historical data. The survey coupled with evidence-based research, national and state statistics, and other literature will inform stakeholders about how to move forward in building equitable solutions through a step-by-step action plan.

Apprenticeships are instrumental in rebuilding our economy, advancing racial and gender equity, building a pipeline to good-quality jobs, and supporting underserved communities, according to [ApprenticeshipUSA](#).

According to ApprenticeshipUSA, 336 apprentices who self-identify as African American women entered a RAP in Louisiana between 2014 and 2023. There were 187 completers for a total completion rate of 55%. In that same 10-year timeframe there were 12,269 total new apprentices and 4,141 completers for a total completion rate of 34% in Louisiana. Those data suggest that African American women are already completing RAPs at a higher rate.

By implementing targeted strategies, such as conducting statewide awareness programs, giving tax incentives to employers, and using grants to offer financial support directly to the apprentice, African American female enrollment and completion of RAPs can see sustainable growth over the next 5 years. This growth would lead to a more robust and diverse talent pipeline for employers and more opportunities for the group with the highest poverty rate in the state (Larino, 2017) and it would have a direct impact on the local economy.

There was no shortage of statistics or literature available regarding successful strategies for African American *or* female outcomes in RAPs. Less research was conducted on successful strategies for African American *and* female outcomes in RAPs. There was no research that included surveys or focus groups of African American women around the subject of RAPs.

Quantitative research can be useful in informing decisions around programs aimed at encouraging success for a group of individuals. However, qualitative research can give deeper insight into building sustainable programs with the end user in mind. The end user, in this case, is the potential African American female apprentice.

## Background

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) awarded \$100 million in State Apprenticeship Expansion (SAE) grants to 36 states and one territory from 2016 to 2018. The key goals of the grants were to expand apprenticeship, including apprenticeship in nontraditional industries, and increase the diversity of the apprentice population. The Louisiana Workforce Commission (LWC) received \$2,821,654.00 ("U.S. Department of Labor," n.d.).

Apprenticeship is an earn-and-learn model that combines classroom learning (often called related technical instruction or RTI) with on-the-job training and confers a credential when the apprenticeship is finished. Registered apprenticeships are apprenticeships that are registered with either the federal Office of Apprenticeship at DOL or a state apprenticeship agency. Although the SAE grants were extended and are scheduled to end in October 2020, states received Apprenticeship State Expansion grants in 2019, which will continue their work beyond the SAE grants. The LWC received \$1,098,738.00 in 2019 ("U.S. Department of Labor," n.d.).

African American women are underrepresented in RAPs and face significant barriers to their participation and success. According to data from ApprenticeshipUSA, they make up only 3% of participants in registered apprenticeships in Louisiana, with a completion rate of 55%. This disparity highlights the need for targeted efforts to address the systemic biases and structural barriers that hinder their access and progression in apprenticeship programs.

As a training program that leads to high-quality and high-paying jobs, registered apprenticeships have the potential to serve as a solution to achieving greater racial and gender equity. According to the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, the United States is facing a shortage of 5 million workers equipped with technical certificates and credentials.

Existing literature and reports have identified several challenges faced by African American women in RAPs. Limited access to information and resources, lack of mentorship and support networks, and systemic biases have been identified as significant barriers. Intersectional barriers, considering race, gender, and socioeconomic background, further compound these challenges.

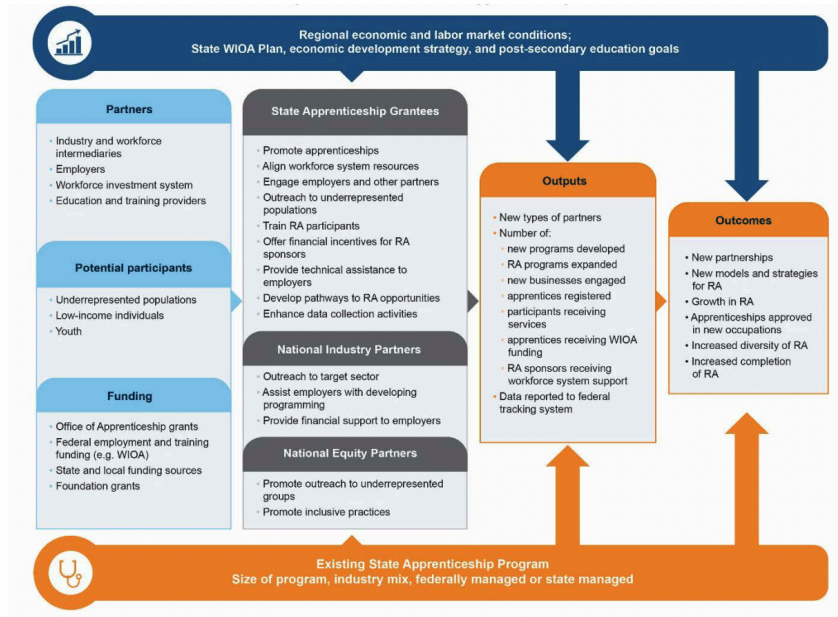
Implementing strategies that address these challenges is essential to create equitable systems for African American women to succeed in RAPs in Louisiana. Outreach and education programs can provide information about apprenticeship opportunities to African American women.

Creating an employer board of companies with frequent, open positions in high-wage career paths would be more realistic if those employers were given tax incentives to participate. Software as a service (SaaS) is available to alleviate the administrative burden to all parties. Mentorship programs can offer guidance and support, connecting African American women with experienced professionals who look like them in their chosen field. Bias awareness and training can help challenge implicit biases and create an inclusive environment for all. Additionally, financial support in the form of scholarships or stipends can alleviate financial barriers.

By implementing these strategies, we can create an equitable system in Louisiana, similar to the Colo that supports the success of African American women in RAPs, promoting diversity, inclusion, and equal opportunities to higher paying career pathways that lead to economic mobility.

### [Evaluation of Methods](#)

**Figure 1.2. Conceptual framework for the State Apprenticeship Expansion study**



RA = Registered Apprenticeship; WIOA = Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

Retrieved from: [https://wdr.doleta.gov/research/FullText\\_Documents/ETAOP2021-26 ETA\\_SAE\\_Final\\_Report\\_2020.pdf](https://wdr.doleta.gov/research/FullText_Documents/ETAOP2021-26 ETA_SAE_Final_Report_2020.pdf)

For this white paper on creating equitable systems for African American women to succeed in RAPs leading to high-wage career pathways in Louisiana, the study used three primary data sources:

- 1. [Apprenticeship Data and Statistics.](#)** This page provides key statistics on apprentices by fiscal year (October through September). It includes all program types published on our legacy data and statistics page. Currently, the tool includes data through June 16, 2023. It includes state and national program data entered or uploaded into the Registered Apprenticeship Partners Information Database System (RAPIDS). State and national averages were derived over a 10-year period ranging from 2014 to 2023. It does not include data from states that do not report in that system, including Washington, D.C.
- 2. [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook Data.](#)** This resource includes data from the 20 occupations with the highest projected percentage change in employment between 2022 and 2032. Highest paying occupations, most new jobs (projected), and field of degree were also used to inform recommendations. This information was last updated September 6, 2023.
- 3. [Brown Skilled Girl Survey.](#)** Twenty-three responses from African American women residing in Northwest Louisiana parishes were collected. Questions were asked to explore current awareness around RAPs, preferred learning modalities, and interest in on-the-job training as a means to continuing education. The survey also asked in detail about accommodations needed to complete a RAP.

A comprehensive and integrated approach to incorporate data for the paper was used. Both quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques were used.

### Summary of Findings

1. **African American women require more outreach and awareness about the value of RAPs.** Sixty-five percent of survey respondents said that they were unfamiliar with (had never heard of) an RAP. This finding is indicative of the low enrollment and completion rates for African American women in apprenticeship programs across the state of Louisiana and the nation. According to Apprenticeship Data and Statistics, the percentage of African American women completing apprenticeships has seen a 57% year over year decline in Louisiana. Within the past 10 years, 201 African American women have completed the program. In that timeframe, 471 new apprentices identifying as African American women started the program, making African American women 3% of total new apprentices in Louisiana over 10 years.
2. **African American women require an average salary of \$25/hour to enroll in and complete a RAP.** A little more than half of the women surveyed said that they need around \$25/hour to replace their current income and complete an RAP with no change to child care. Multiple reports have shown that funding is put in place to help with child care to help this population. The survey reveals that similar or higher pay would be a more enticing draw for an RAP. African American women are used to finding child care but would like to get paid at a fair rate like their male counterparts, who on average make 30% more during and after RAPs according to the Center for American Progress. Getting paid a higher rate would offset the cost of child care.
3. **African American women require health care coverage to enroll in and complete a RAP.** About half of respondents indicated that health care coverage would be the top accommodation needed to complete an RAP. Health care should be a requirement for all private and public companies hosting an RAP.
4. **African American women prefer to work in the health care industry.** Despite efforts to push African American women into high paying cybersecurity and tech careers, most respondents indicated that health care is their chosen sector. Fewer than half of the respondents had an associate degree or higher.

Lower paying allied health careers tend to be the programs African American women have been recruited into due to the lower costs of these programs, lower barriers to entry, and

less time to complete a program. These programs, which have an average pay of \$14.72/hour in Louisiana according to ZipRecruiter, are the following:

- medical assistant
- certified nursing assistant
- dental assistant
- patient care technician
- phlebotomist
- medical biller

Allied health careers with salaries higher than \$45,000.00 (identified as a family-sustaining wage for a family consisting of two children) requiring an associate degree or certification with 2 years or less completion time are the following:

- cardiovascular technician
- diagnostic medical sonographer
- dental hygienist
- neurodiagnostic technologist
- endoscopy technician
- medical coder
- massage therapist
- licensed practical nurse

## Recommendations

1. **Develop a higher tax incentive for health care employers who start an RAP and commit to filling 20% of open roles that pay more than \$25 an hour with qualified African American female candidates.** As of 2021, 160 hospitals in Louisiana had a fairly even representation of for-profit, nonprofit, and government ownership (Statista, 2023). Hundreds of job roles are open each year that human resources could actively fill with qualified African American female candidates.

In February 2023, the re-creation of the Apprenticeship Tax Credit Program was announced by the Louisiana Department of Revenue to explain the requirements to claim the credit on income and franchise tax returns. An employer is eligible for nonrefundable income or franchise tax credit equal to \$1.25 for each hour of employment of an eligible apprentice not to exceed 1,000 hours per apprentice in Louisiana each year.

We recommend \$2 for each hour of employment of an eligible African American female apprentice, not to exceed 2,000 hours per apprentice in Louisiana each year over a 5-year timeframe.



2. **Allocate funds to support a \$25/hour apprentice salary (in conjunction with the employer) for African American women to enter and complete an RAP.** Allied health careers are in demand as a workforce need and the top industry of interest for African American women. Allocating funds to support a family-sustaining wage for participants in RAPs would be a step in building equity for African American women, who have typically made less than 60 cents on the dollar compared to their White male counterparts according to the Center for American Progress.

Registered apprenticeship is currently aligned with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) through initiatives of the SAE grant awarded to the LWC by DOL. One of these initiatives includes a supportive services pilot for apprentices similar to those offered at the local comprehensive career centers. SAE supportive services have provided tools, child care assistance, and gas reimbursement for apprentices with financial need, supplementing funds for WIOA participants who need additional support and providing resources for those who are not eligible for WIOA but still require such assistance. The SAE grant ended in October 2020.

The average cost spent on an apprentice who completes the program is \$8,702 (Lerman, 2022). We recommend \$15,000 (an increase of \$6,298) to spend on individual costs for new African American female apprentices over a 5-year timeframe.

3. **Require the LWC Apprenticeship Division to work directly with an intermediary consultant whose sole purpose is to attract, retain, and advance African American women in RAPs.** The Apprenticeship Division falls under the Office of Workforce Development in LWC. The director of apprenticeship oversees the division and is supported by an apprentice training supervisor, four apprenticeship navigators, and an administrative assistant. More support is needed to narrow in on the specific needs of African American women. Key performance indicators and measurable deliverables agreed upon by all parties would define a strategy for increasing African American female completion in RAPs.
4. **Set an equity target to reach parity in apprenticeship participation in Louisiana over the next 5 years.** We recommend a request for proposals process to identify a partner with the ability to deliver 1000 new apprentices with an 80% completion rate over a 5-year timeframe.

**In conclusion,** this white paper sheds light on the unique challenges African American women face in accessing RAPs in Louisiana. The findings underscore the critical need for targeted strategies to enhance their participation and success in these programs. To bridge the existing gaps, we recommend implementing a series of initiatives.

First, providing higher tax incentives to health care employers that commit to hiring qualified African American female candidates can lead to a more inclusive and equitable workforce. Furthermore, allocating funds to support a \$25 hourly wage for apprentices, coupled with employer contributions, will empower African American women to enter and complete RAPs

without financial barriers. Health care coverage should also be a prerequisite for all companies offering RAPs to ensure that health care needs are met.

Lastly, close collaboration with an intermediary dedicated to the advancement of African American women in RAPs, guided by measurable performance indicators, will help create a pipeline of apprentices.

This work is necessary for the continued growth of the Louisiana economy and to be proactive in the expected surge in health care careers over the next decade.

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- [BIPOC Women and Apprenticeship: An Equitable Workforce Solution](#)
- [Seven Ways Intermediaries Help Develop Apprenticeship Programs | Jobs for the Future \(JFF\)](#)
- [Louisiana Workforce Commission partners with Southern for teacher apprenticeship program](#)
- [Apprenticeships Help Tear Down Barriers for Women in the Workplace](#)
- [Benefits and Challenges of Apprenticeships for Employers](#)
- [Number of Hospitals in Louisiana by Ownership Type](#)
- [Louisiana WIOA plans for ASE](#)
- [Louisiana Department of Revenue](#)