

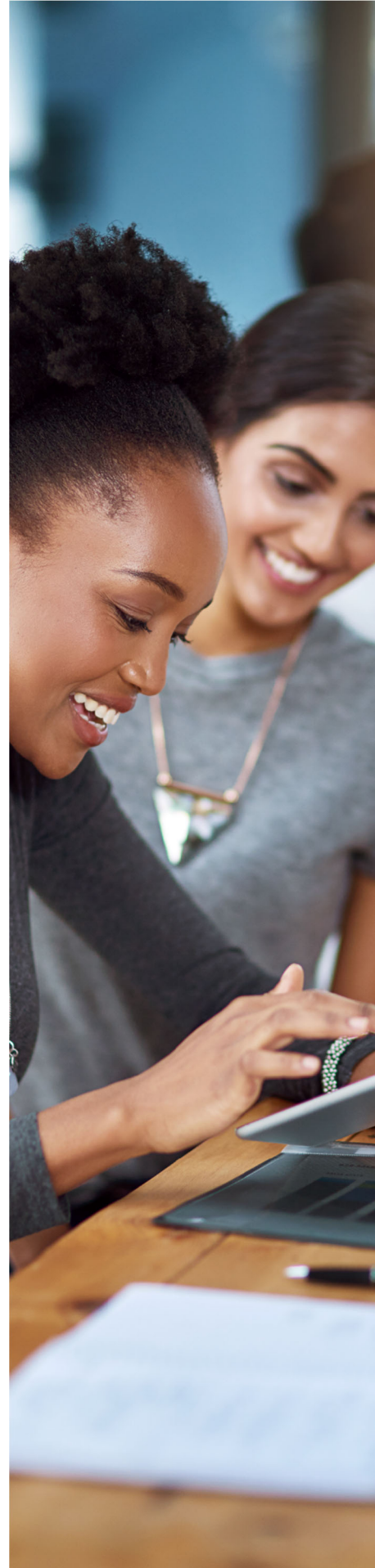
# Fostering Inclusion & Accessibility: The Vital Role of Direct Support Professionals in Registered Apprenticeship

Registered Apprenticeship (RA) is an effective strategy for boosting the American economy and training the workforce. It is also a proven method for helping employers promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility within their workplaces. Research highlighted in the Job Accommodation Network's publication *Disability and Inclusion: Your Guide to Success* [demonstrates that hiring people with disabilities offers many benefits, including increased productivity, a lower likelihood of employee turnover, and fewer safety incidents.](#)

The U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Partnership on Inclusive Apprenticeship defines an **inclusive apprenticeship** as [an apprenticeship designed to support full access and inclusion for all apprentices, including people with disabilities.](#) Inclusive apprenticeships help widen the talent pool, provide key opportunities for diverse career seekers and advance Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE). CIE, which is designated in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, is where people with disabilities are paid competitive wages and work in an environment typically found in the community and where the employee with a disability interacts with co-workers and others. Apprentices may require a variety of supports tailored to their specific disability types, such as cognitive, neurological, physical, mental health, sensory, or chronic health conditions, to ensure they can fully participate and succeed in their training programs. Across the Nation, this support is often provided by skilled professionals called **direct support professionals (DSPs)**. With adequate support, apprentices with disabilities are more likely to finish their training, forge strong connections with their employers, and become valuable members of the workforce.

## ROLE OF DSPS IN INCLUSION & ACCESSIBILITY

DSPs provide support, which differs from caregiving. While caregivers do tasks for someone (e.g., picking out groceries), DSPs help people perform tasks independently (e.g., assisting them in picking out their own groceries). DSPs teach people to carry out activities themselves and live independently. DSPs can serve as job coaches, where they specialize in helping people with disabilities learn and perform job duties accurately and acclimate to their RA Programs. DSPs may go by job titles such as: employment specialist, career coach, job developer, or employment coordinator.



DSPs find strategies and methods that help apprentices to become valued employees and integrate into the workforce. This starts with a deep understanding of both the individual and the worksite, identifying sources of support, and facilitating supports as needed. In essence, DSPs empower apprentices to thrive independently and achieve sustained success in their careers.

## DSP & RA MENTOR: HOW THEIR ROLES ARE COMPLEMENTARY

RA Programs provide each apprentice with a **mentor**. Eighty percent of the apprentice's training – and most of their learning – will be accomplished on the job. Mentoring in RA Programs is a structured pairing between a skilled worker and an apprentice trainee. The skilled worker models behaviors and skills necessary to succeed in a particular occupation. The mentor inspects and verifies the apprentice's work until the mentor can certify that the apprentice is successfully capable of performing skilled work safely on their own.

The DSP is not responsible for supervision or teaching the apprentice how to perform their job. Instead, the DSP supports the apprentice in ways that are complementary to the role of the mentor:

1. **Conducting a task analysis:** A task analysis is a structured approach that ensures that the DSP can effectively support people in mastering independence of their job duties. This is accomplished through systematic instruction, a teaching method that involves a carefully planned sequence of instruction. This approach includes breaking down complex skills into smaller, more manageable parts and building from easier to more difficult tasks, and results in job aids, such as guides or checklists, to help the apprentice learn and perform tasks in the RA Programs independently.

***The mentor and the DSP could work together in identifying how to break down the skills into smaller tasks.***

2. **Identifying and engage natural supports and cues:** This approach supports apprentices with disabilities in gradually relying less on the DSP and more on the natural supports available in their work environment. To achieve this, the DSP spends time in the workplace, observing routines and interactions. They look for natural cues, such as a bell ringing for a break or a light signaling the start of a machine. The DSP identifies informal sources of support, encourages social interactions with coworkers to build networks, and develops strategies to link tasks with these natural cues. Regular monitoring ensures the apprentice's increasing independence.

***The mentor might help the DSP and apprentice identify natural supports and can act as a resource to the apprentice.***

3. **Recommending reasonable accommodations:** Through the process of a task analysis and systematic instruction, the DSP can work with the apprentice with a disability to identify specific accommodations that would help the apprentice perform their job effectively. They can work with the apprentice to inform them about their rights under laws like the Americans with Disabilities Act (see this site for more information: [JAN - Job Accommodation Network](#)), the types of accommodations available, and gather necessary documentation to support the accommodation request. This may include supporting the individual with asking for accommodations or accompanying the apprentice to meetings to discuss and negotiate accommodations. Once in place, the DSP monitors the implementation of accommodations to ensure they are effective and adjusts as necessary.

***The mentor can collaborate with the apprentice and the DSP to develop a plan that meets the apprentice's needs while ensuring they can perform their job effectively.***

## SECURING AND FUNDING A DSP

An apprentice may already come to the RA Program with a DSP and they can play a role in helping people with disabilities in securing a RA. An apprentice may request a DSP as a reasonable accommodation. The sponsor or employer may also play a role in securing a DSP. The best place to start is by contacting the state's vocational rehabilitation agency. Here is a resource to find contact information for each state's agency: [State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies | Rehabilitation Services Administration](#).

DSPs often receive funding from a variety of sources. These funders may include state-run agencies, such as vocational rehabilitation, educational institutions like schools and colleges, workforce development programs, non-profit organizations, private payments, and various government agencies specifically dedicated to disability services. If someone requires long-term support, these organizations collaborate to provide assistance. For more detailed information, see [The Federal Resources Playbook for Registered Apprenticeship](#).

## CONCLUSION

Employers can gain substantial benefits by hiring people with disabilities, as this practice not only diversifies the workforce but also allows organizations to tap into a wider talent pool. Incorporating this inclusive approach often results in [increased revenue, greater retention rates, and the attraction of a more diverse customer base](#). Additionally, it fosters a workplace culture that values inclusivity and accessibility. DSPs play a crucial role in this process by assisting people with disabilities in developing their skills and successfully completing their apprenticeships. This partnership facilitates personal and professional growth, enhances career satisfaction, and encourages meaningful contributions to the economy.

## RESOURCES

[Partnership on Inclusive Apprenticeship: | U.S. Department of Labor \(dol.gov\)](#)

[Quick Guide: Resources for Creating Inclusive Apprenticeships & Work-Based Learning Environments | U.S. Department of Labor \(dol.gov\)](#)

[CIE Transformation Hub | U.S. Department of Labor \(dol.gov\)](#)

[National Center on Leadership for the Employment and Economic Advancement of People with Disabilities \(LEAD Center\) | U.S. Department of Labor \(dol.gov\)](#)

---

## Explore Registered Apprenticeship Today!

Want to learn more? Visit the U.S. Department of Labor's one-stop source for all things apprenticeship: [www.apprenticeship.gov](http://www.apprenticeship.gov) or email us at [apprenticeship@dol.gov](mailto:apprenticeship@dol.gov).

**APPRENTICESHIPUSA**  
\*\*\*