

# WIAAI Case Study: Building a Network of Access and Opportunity in Registered Apprenticeship

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## Wireless Infrastructure Apprenticeship Access Initiative



National  
Urban League

**MMTC**  
Multicultural Media, Telecom  
& Internet Council

**WIA**   
Wireless  
Infrastructure  
Association



**National  
Urban League**



**WIAAI: Building a Network of Access and Opportunity in Registered Apprenticeship**

**Consortium details:** In 2016, the National Urban League (NUL), Multicultural Media, Telecom and Internet Council (MMTC), and Wireless Infrastructure Association (WIA) formed the Wireless Infrastructure Apprenticeship Access Initiative (WIAAI) to create and promote Registered Apprenticeship (RA) programs and opportunities in the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) sector.

**Aim of the Consortium:** WIAAI has two principal objectives. First, WIAAI will work with industry employers and other relevant stakeholders to create Registered Apprenticeships in vocations focused on wireless and telecommunications infrastructure. Second, WIAAI will leverage a set of regional partnerships, consisting principally of Urban League Affiliates, to recruit underrepresented populations for the resulting employment opportunities.

**Consortium Geography, Timeline:** WIAAI has established a geographic footprint that allows for engagement in each of the six U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) regions. This footprint is realized through the engagement of

seven (7) Urban League Affiliates operating as opportunity partners, located in the following communities: Rochester, New York; Hampton Roads, Virginia; Charlotte, North Carolina; Chicago, Illinois; Houston, Texas; Seattle, Washington; and, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Thirty-one (31) additional UL Affiliates are joining the Consortium in October 2017, and the network is also expanding to include ten (10) HBCUs. WIAAI envisions a minimum engagement of five years.

**History of the Consortium**

In 2016, the United States Department of Labor, in order to 1) accelerate expansion of the scope of Registered Apprenticeship programs, 2) exponentially increase the number of individuals engaging employment as Registered Apprentices, and 3) achieve diversity and inclusion of previously underrepresented populations (women, persons of color, persons with a disability, etc.) initiated a competitive procurement process to identify organizations to serve as Intermediary Partners, Equity Partners, or both. In response, the WIAAI Consortium was





formed to deliver against each of these objectives as an Equity Partner. WIAAI has a specific focus on developing apprenticeable occupations within the ICT sector, a sector in which apprenticeship is in its nascent stage of growth. Additionally, WIAAI has a focus on achieving diversity and inclusion, specifically within the ICT sector and generally across other industries, in each region in which WIAAI is active.

### The Consortium and Registered Apprenticeship

**Mission Alignment among Consortium Partners:** NUL, MMTC and WIA came together to form the Consortium to share resources, expand networks and engage other industry and community-based organizations. This collaboration between organizations with complementary experiences and skills was necessary for successful program execution.

The [National Urban League](#) is a national civil rights organization dedicated to economic empowerment in historically underserved urban communities. Leadership of, and participation in, the WIAAI Consortium is part and parcel of the NUL mission. Additionally, NUL's involvement is motivated by a desire to be ingrained in the foundation of apprenticeship in an industry that is experiencing, and is expected to continue to experience, labor market growth.

The leadership and membership of the [Wireless Infrastructure Association](#) have a strong commitment to apprenticeship and to diversity. WIA, in conjunction with employers, the U.S. Department of Labor, and the Federal

Communications Commission, founded the Telecommunications Industry Registered Apprenticeship Program (TIRAP) in 2014. In March 2017, WIA became the National Sponsor of TIRAP. In building this program, WIA was intentional in its efforts to support and build diversity from the foundation. WIA sought partnerships with expertise and depth in promoting diversity and inclusion. WIA members have prioritized diversity while working to build the wireless workforce of the future.

The [Multicultural Media, Telecom & Internet Council](#) is a non-partisan, national nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting and preserving equal opportunity and social justice in the mass media, telecom and broadband industries, and closing the digital divide. With a 30-year track record of increasing diversity in media and telecommunications access, ownership and employment, MMTC is generally recognized as the nation's leading advocate for multicultural advancement in communications. Participation in the WIAAI Consortium provides an opportunity to grow the pipeline of workers from the underrepresented communities in the telecommunications industry – an effort which is at the core of MMTC's mission. MMTC's role in the WIAAI Consortium is to develop and implement the curriculum, provide technical assistance, and develop training and marketing materials for DOL-approved occupations. MMTC also assists in program evaluation.

**Development and Benefits of Consortium:** The WIAAI Consortium came together, organically, in response to the USDOL-led competitive procurement of organizations to perform as Equity Partners to expand Registered



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*- Jonathan Adelstein, CEO, Wireless Infrastructure Association*



Apprenticeship Programs and access to said programs on the part of underrepresented populations. The National Urban League sought to partner with organizations that were committed to diversity and inclusion, have experience in promoting diversity and inclusion in the ICT Sector, have access to a broad set of employers to whom to market the opportunities associated with Registered Apprenticeship, and were ready, willing, and able to put in the hard work of birthing and nurturing Registered Apprenticeship in an industry that represents growth opportunities from a labor market perspective. Given the overlap in mission among the principal partners, there was an easily recognized synergy in coming together as partners.

**Benefits of Consortium Development:** The benefits of the WIAAI Consortium are best summed up in the words of WIA CEO Jonathan Adelstein: “We are at an historic starting point where a whole new industry is taking steps to professionalize its workforce to keep up with rapid technological and deployment growth. We have an opportunity here to introduce apprenticeship and diversity at the very heart of an industry-wide effort, led by the trade association that represents the entire industry ecosystem, and that has a long-standing and well documented commitment to diversity. It is unusual for these to come together simultaneously. It is a prime opportunity for the government to support this effort as a model for other industries and trade associations. We are also the first to pioneer a multi-employer model with small and mid-sized companies that seek to professionalize their workforce, but need the economies of scale that banding together through WIA and TIRAP enables.”

## Consortium Operations

**Consortium Activities:** The WIAAI Consortium works to pursue the following:

- Identification of occupations that are “apprenticeable”
- Creation of RTI (Related Technical Instruction) curriculum to support new occupations; vetting of curriculum among industry subject matter experts; rollout of curriculum among equity partners
- Registration of apprenticeship programs

- Collaboration with Urban League Affiliates to leverage their partnerships with local employers
- Development and dissemination of information about WIAAI’s DOL initiative to industry and affiliate networks and other channels

**Consortium Management:** Although NUL is the prime contractor and provides overall project leadership and direction, the WIAAI Consortium has developed a collaborative, team-based approach to the execution of its work. Consortium conference calls take place on a weekly basis, and have been augmented by two in-person partnership meetings. Decisions are made in a transparent manner, which is designed to facilitate full dialogue and buy-in among the partners. Bringing together a wide range of stakeholders has a number of advantages, including:

**Higher Accountability:** The WIAAI Quarterly Reports and Annual Workplan function as the principal means for holding each Consortium member accountable. Weekly working sessions ensure that workplans are reviewed and deliverables completed in a timely manner.

**Sharing Resources:** Individually, the organizations have limited capacities in terms of staff, funds, and infrastructure. Working together, Consortium members can pool resources and benefit from each other’s strengths.

**Building Knowledge & Innovation:** By learning from each other, Consortium members can build their capacity to implement effective apprenticeship programming.

## Consortium Achievements

The WIAAI Consortium, in conjunction with key stakeholders, including WIA in its capacity as the National Sponsor of TIRAP, has achieved the following:

- 743 apprenticeship agreements created
- 14 employers have Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAP) through WIA (45 employer inquiries were vetted, resulting in the 14 employer registrations)



- Engaged effort to expand NUL Affiliate network from 7 to 38 locations in 26 states with RAP activity to begin October 2017
- Developed 33 Opportunity Partnerships in Year 1 with expansion to 64 Opportunity Partnerships in Year 2
- Developed RTI and WPS (Work Process Schedule) documents for Fiber Optic Technician occupation with assistance from Industry SMEs, TIRAP, and Consortium Opportunity Partners (90% Complete)
- Developing RTI and WPS for the WiFi Installer occupation
- Developing first Pre-Apprenticeship program in the telecom/wireless sector
- All three Consortium members were recognized by DOL as LEADERS in DOL’s Leaders of Excellence in Apprenticeship Development, Education and Research campaign
- Trained 7 Urban League Affiliates to spread awareness of Registered Apprenticeship in general and to unemployed and underemployed women and people of color in particular
- Hosted “*Transform Your Wireless Workforce with Registered Apprenticeship*” webinar in collaboration with Jobs for the Future
- Hosted and live streamed “*You’re Hired: Apprenticeships, Broadband, Infrastructure, and 5G*” panel, and NUL CEO delivered keynote remarks on apprenticeship at MMTC’s Broadband and Social Justice Summit
- Hosted and live streamed “*The Key to Bridging the Wealth and Skills Gaps through Wireless Apprenticeship*” and “*Infrastructure and the Jobs of the Future*” at MMTC’s Access to Capital and Telecom Policy Conference
- Participated in “*Apprenticeship and People of Color panel*” at AAI National Grantee Meeting
- Hosted 4 live sessions at WIA’s Wireless Infrastructure Show
  - “*Advancing Apprenticeship as a Workforce Development Strategy*”
  - “*Diversity and Inclusion – A Pathway for Workforce and Business Innovation*”
  - “*TIRAP Standards of Apprenticeship Review*”
  - “*Apprenticeship Accelerator Session for Employers*”
- Participated in 2 panels at Apprenticeship Forward Conference
  - *Pre-Apprenticeship Panel*
  - *Diversity and Inclusion Panel*
- Participated in 3 sessions at Telecommunications Industry Association Connectivity Jam
- Hosted weekly teleconferences with each of the 14 employers, totaling over 100 employer teleconferences

#### **National Outreach Activities and Outcomes**

- Launched website highlighting Registered Apprenticeship, WIAAI Consortium, and NUL’s Urban Apprenticeship Jobs Program (UAJP) – [www.nulapprenticeships.org](http://www.nulapprenticeships.org)
- Outlined RAP value, opportunities, and benefits at 12+ events nationwide; 1:1 Employer onboarding; reached millions on social media.
- Promoted apprenticeship sessions in eblasts to listserv of over 15,000 subscribers
- Live tweeted apprenticeship panels on Twitter, Ustream and Facebook; published Storify blog to over 2.5 million users
- Issued press statements and media advisories to 150+ press list promoting apprenticeship sessions
- MMTC SME Dr. Rikin Thakker co-authored the WIA white paper on “***The Skills Gap in Wireless Infrastructure Training and Education: A Strategy for Improvement,***” which was featured in the U.S. DOL’s apprenticeship newsletter. The Consortium is using this paper as a resource to illustrate the need for a skilled ICT workforce

**Consortium Future State:** In year one, the WIAAI Consortium has directed most of its effort to advancing Registered Apprenticeship in the ICT Sector. Moving forward, the Consortium will continue its efforts within the ICT Sector while also aggressively promoting Registered Apprenticeship across other industries in the communities within the Consortium’s existing and growing regional network. Specifically, the Consortium:

- Has initiated a planned expansion from 7 to 38 Urban League Affiliates effective October 1, 2017



- Has developed, and is prepared to launch, its Pre-apprenticeship and Preparatory Training Curriculum
  - WIAAI Consortium has developed the very first “pre-apprenticeship” program for occupations and RAP for the Telecommunications and Wireless Industry
  - This preparatory training will be rolled out in Year 2 and is based on occupations already defined by TIRAP (via WIA as National Sponsor)
- Has developed a strategic plan to expand efforts to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)
  - Bowie State University
  - Clark Atlanta University
  - Coppin State University
  - Howard University
  - Morgan State
  - Morehouse College
  - Spelman College
  - University the of District of Columbia
  - University of Maryland Eastern Shore
  - Virginia State University

**Challenges Faced:**

- Building the type of foundation needed to launch apprenticeships into ICT industry required to provide a sustainable program takes time.
- Building on our program experience and relationships, we wanted to focus directly on building partnerships and offering the best career options and apprenticeship programs to underrepresented communities *immediately*; but infrastructure needed to be built first, and building the foundation does take time.
- Employers would like to see additional occupations beyond the six currently offered. More are in the queue at DOL.
- Building a 21st century curriculum for the wireless apprentices that has career pathways is not an easy task
- Even after the Consortium creates the curriculum for the Pre-Apprenticeship Program, all the employers must vet and approve the curriculum, and their needs must all be addressed and harmonized.

**Consortium Challenges**

As with any laudable vision, the infrastructure to achieve the vision must be put into place. As a National Equity Intermediary contractor, the WIAAI Consortium experienced some challenges with the initial buildout of the infrastructure for achieving greater diversity and inclusion in Registered Apprenticeships, but in each instance, the challenge was turned into a lesson learned and opportunity, making it well worth the effort.

**Lessons Learned and Recommendations:**

- Factor more time for curriculum development & training infrastructure
- Factor time needed for occupation approval
- Use employer incentives earlier
- Secure Pre-apprenticeship training funds
- Incorporate better training and coordination on use of Salesforce and RAPIDS
- Better define equity performance goals for diversity and inclusion beyond the wireless, telecommunications and ICT industry
- Better alignment with USDOL OA, Opportunity Partners, and Employers



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*- Kim Keenan, President and CEO, Multicultural Media, Telecom and Internet Council*



MMTC CEO Kim Keenan described the challenges best: “This effort presents a new challenge because there has never been an apprenticeship program in the telecommunications industry. While it was a big risk to seek to build an apprenticeship program that did not exist, there are extraordinary benefits to be gained by the creation of such a program. Millions of jobs will be created in a few short years and having a workforce that is teed up to fill these jobs presents an enormous opportunity.”

### Conclusion

The WIAAI Consortium has had a tremendous first year in working to nurture the development and growth of registered apprenticeship in the ICT Sector. The partner organizations have developed a collaborative working relationship that complements the strengths of each organization while minimizing the challenges that all new collaborative efforts encounter.

The Consortium has developed a robust regional partnership network that will deliver against the Consortium’s goal of developing and growing Registered

Apprenticeship in the ICT Sector and the Department of Labor’s objective of expanding diversity and inclusion efforts across all Registered Apprenticeship programs. This regional partnership network will expand from seven (7) to thirty-eight (38) Urban League Affiliates operating in 26 states. This expansion increases the number of Opportunity Partnerships from 33 to 64 in just one year of operation.

Further, the Consortium has developed a pre-apprenticeship and preparatory training curriculum to expand access to underrepresented individuals who are not quite ready for participation in Registered Apprenticeship. And, the Consortium has developed a strategic plan that will facilitate extending our partnership to Historically Black Colleges and Universities. The Consortium is positioned to apply knowledge gained from challenges encountered and lessons learned to improve our overall effectiveness.

In sum, the WIAAI Consortium is primed to participate as a viable partner to USDOL efforts to expand, exponentially, registered apprenticeships across the United States.

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