



RITA Highlights 2013-2015

North Central Texas College (NCTC) and its Rural Information Technology Alliance (RITA) consortium partners have reached the mid-point of the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) grant period. The third party evaluator, The Improve Group, has prepared this short report to highlight the successes NCTC has achieved in implementing the grant and the challenges it continues to face. The information in this summary aims to assist in decision-making for program improvements. As of August 11, 2015, 315 students had enrolled in the RITA program at NCTC.

Successes

NCTC used Texas Community College Purchasing Network to efficiently purchase needed resources.

RITA staff have been able to implement programs and purchase needed technology equipment quickly and efficiency by using the Texas Community College Purchasing Network. This system allows all Texas colleges to access the best rates for technology and purchase equipment quickly. NCTC used this system to acquire resources at excellent prices and within a tight timeframe.

RITA staff are using professional development to build capacity.

NCTC is using RITA funding to make key investments in the professional development of faculty and Education and Employment Coaches (EECs). For example, faculty attended the National eLearning Conference to learn best practices for developing and designing of hybridized curricula. EEC's are enrolled in InsideTrack training, which equips them with the skills needed to recruit and retain students and keep them on track toward certification and graduation. NCTC leaders believe that investing in professional development will help to create a highly successful RITA program and ensure it has staff who are prepared to sustain it beyond the grant period.



RITA staff are leveraging NCTC's strong student-focused culture.

RITA staff have partnered with departments throughout NCTC to ensure students receive the support they need. For example, when the RITA program launched, NCTC faculty welcomed RITA staff into their classrooms, allowing them to recruit over 100 students in only 4 days. Faculty also circulated information about the benefits of the RITA to attract build interest among current NCTC students. Other NCTC departments, including Financial Aid, Admissions, and Student Services, have been quick to collaborate with RITA staff on how to best meet student needs and recruit new students.

All of the departments on campus have been very supportive, we couldn't do this without their support.

- NCTC RITA Staff Member

Additional highlights

- RITA staff worked with NCTC's internal marketing department to create high-quality marketing materials in a short period of time.
- RITA staff worked with Anne Arundel Community College in Maryland to obtain marketing materials Anne Arundel staff saved from the beginning of their TAACCCT grant. These materials provided NCTC RITA staff with valuable ideas for developing their own marketing materials.
- The RITA team hopes to connect with a variety of potential students, including those in workforce solutions programs, veterans, and adults who are currently registered in high school.

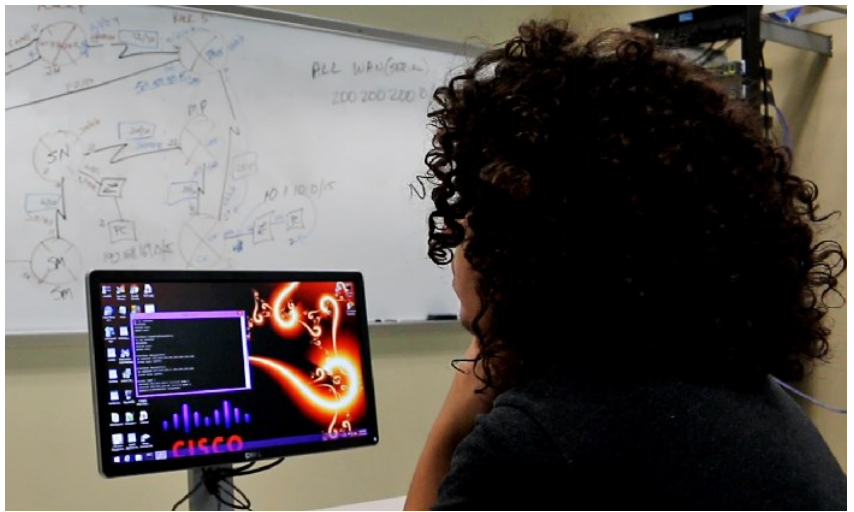
Challenges

Offering competitive salaries to qualified faculty.

According to respondents, NCTC cannot offer salaries on par with those offered to IT experts in the private sector. RITA staff shared that this makes it difficult to recruit experienced faculty members. NCTC's current salary ranges are comparable for other community colleges, but lower than what the private practitioner community can offer. In addition, the RITA grant will only cover the cost of faculty salaries for the three-year duration of the grant, which conflicts with NCTC's broader goal to create positions that are long-term and sustainable.

Student interest in certifications is lacking.

RITA staff shared that student interest in IT certification programs is lower than was initially expected. Some respondents suggested that students are not yet convinced of the benefits of certifications and therefore reluctant to complete additional coursework required.



We do not want to add someone unless that position is sustainable... but we need the instructors to make sure the program gets developed. - NCTC RITA Staff Member

Additional challenges

- RITA staff are still working to encourage students to use NCTC's job placement assistance services, which include coaching on resume writing, interview preparation, and researching job openings.
- RITA staff are concerned about meeting the RITA grant goal of 1,100 students across all consortium colleges before the grant period ends.
- RITA stakeholders believe that the NCTC program has been a success due to the motivation and dedication of employees. To ensure success in the second half of the grant period, RITA staff say they must now increase momentum and boost student interest.

NCTC has already developed innovative solutions to some of their challenges.

RITA staff are building relationships with employers to meet student demand for jobs and internships.

RITA staff report that, as program participants increase, more students are seeking internship and employment opportunities through local employers. RITA staff are working with their colleagues to establish an employer advisory council to gather insights on program improvements and how best to prepare students for workplace success. In addition, RITA staff are exploring the benefits of using Business and Industry Leadership Teams (BILTS), a model that aims to increase employer engagement and student access to internships and job placement opportunities.

RITA staff are using new marketing and outreach strategies to reach prospective students.

RITA staff are designing new and creative methods to reach potential program participants. In addition to conducting targeted outreach in places like workforce centers, RITA staff have also tried distributing fliers about NCTC's cyber security programs at the premiers of movies about cyber security risks to attract interested students.