

Pine Technical & Community College (PTCC) 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, prepared this short report to highlight the successes PTCC 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, 111 students had enrolled in the RITA program at PTCC, representing a 50 percent increase since last fall.

## Successes



### **RITA is making major contributions to PTCC and the community.**

PTCC has developed a qualified RITA grant team, expanded all of its information technology (IT) programs, and purchased new technology equipment for labs to enhance all IT programs. RITA faculty and staff are poised to begin the recruitment phase of the grant. In addition, RITA funding has helped to increase faculty and staff capacity across PTCC in departments including admissions, student affairs, and faculty training. RITA funding also supported the installation of the Pine Innovation Testing Center, which has administered more than 50 certification tests to help build the community's workforce.



### **RITA staff are building strong partnerships with industry leaders.**

PTCC faculty and RITA grant staff created two employer advisory boards focused on Cyber Security that include representatives from large regional employers. RITA staff engage with employer partners regularly and host quarterly advisory board meetings to discuss program implementation and how best to prepare students for the workforce. . Based on employer input, RITA staff have turned the program's Cyber Security emphasis into a full Cyber Security Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree to align with workforce needs. In addition, RITA staff are working with employers to create internship and employment opportunities. For example, one employer is working with RITA to create the first IT internship offered through PTCC, and RITA grant staff are establishing a process to develop future internships. In addition, employer partners assisted PTCC to provide students with free access to an industry security program that will help to build real world cyber security skills.

## Additional highlights

- RITA Employment and Education Advisors (EEAs) have provided individualized support to students and have increased student recruitment and retention rates. EEAs attend computer club meetings and host organized mixers to build strong relationships with students.
- Through the RITA program, PTCC will be the host college for the Mobile Application development program for Android users. Other consortium colleges will utilize PTCC's curriculum and instruction to allow students to obtain that credential.
- RITA funding has helped PTCC become the consortium leader for high-quality curriculum in Cyber Security. This fall, three Central Lakes College students will enroll at PTCC through distance delivery to pursue studies in Cyber Security.
- RITA funding allowed PTCC to hire an admissions staff member who focuses on IT student recruitment and enrollment. In addition, PTCC created an admissions pathway process to guide prospective IT students from inquiry to enrollment.
- Through the RITA program, PTCC is collaborating with St. Cloud State University to develop an articulation agreement for the Computer Programming AAS degree.
- RITA EEAs have developed ongoing workshops for students on interviewing, creating resumes, and using LinkedIn. All PTCC students are welcome to attend.
- RITA staff have worked closely with an IT faculty member who is a Veteran to create links between the Veterans Center on campus and the RITA program.



# Challenges

## Student recruitment numbers lower than desired.

RITA staff shared that student recruitment remains a challenge for PTCC, particularly among target populations like incumbent workers. Respondents said they believed that the relative strength of Minnesota’s job market and low unemployment rates have made it more challenging to recruit incumbent workers. Only 35 percent of PTCC RITA students are incumbent workers, but PTCC must increase that in order to meet recruitment goals PTCC must increase that number to 50 percent.

## Attracting incumbent workers has been challenging.

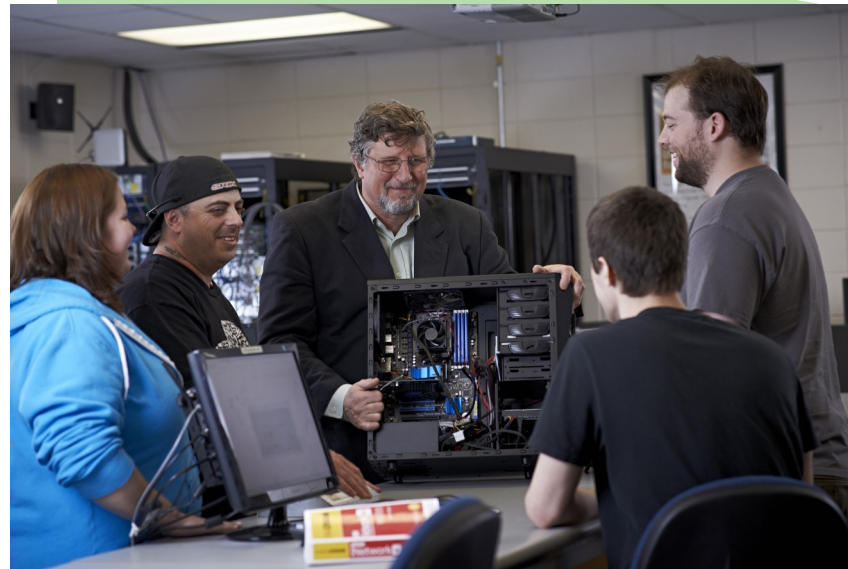
RITA staff are developing new strategies to attract incumbent workers by combining customized training with traditional degree programs. Incumbent workers are a primary target for RITA IT programs, and targeted outreach to these workers will help meet TAACCCT goals and expand the qualified IT workforce.

**Now is the time to step back and figure out what we need to do to push this forward; what are those technologies that will attract more students and provide better experiences.**

*- PTCC RITA Staff Member*

# Additional challenges

- RITA staff shared that PTCC has had limited applicant pools for open positions as salaries are lower than in the private sector and hiring processes are slower.
- RITA staff said that, while faculty are willing to help IT student recruitment, they have little experience with recruitment strategies. PTCC is in the process of increasing staff capacity in this area.
- Respondents indicated that the Integrated Statewide Records System (ISRS) is not user friendly and limits the RITA team’s access to information and ability to analyze students’ academic outcomes. As a result, PTCC staff are beginning to use Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) software to improve access to needed student information.
- RITA staff explained that EEAs have been focused on student recruitment and they have not yet had an opportunity to build relationships with employers.
- Respondents said PTCC needs additional EEA staff capacity to ensure every student has the support they need to complete their program. As a result, PTCC is planning to hire additional EEAs to provide student support.



# PTCC is developing solutions to address challenges.

## RITA staff regularly communicate with PTCC and MNSCU staff to streamline work and increase staff capacity.

RITA staff maintain consistent communication with other PTCC and MNSCU departments to move projects forward as quickly as possible. In addition, they have also used RITA funds to increase staff capacity and overall efficiency in key PTCC departments.

