

Expanding Apprenticeships as a Career Pathway for Youth and Young Adults with Disabilities

By Sydney Blodgett, MPA | March 2022

Summary

In 1937, Congress passed the [National Apprenticeship Act](#) (also known as the Fitzgerald Act), which authorizes the establishment of labor standards for registered apprenticeship programs.¹ Registered and non-registered apprenticeships come in many shapes and are adaptable to traditional and non-traditional industries and occupations. Traditional apprenticeship occupations have been mainly in skilled trades such as carpentry, electrical, and plumbing. Today, apprenticeships span across non-traditional industries such as information technology (IT), health care, and green energy. This brief highlights the benefits of apprenticeships, including pre-apprenticeship, registered and non-registered apprenticeship programs as a viable career pathway for career seekers with disabilities.

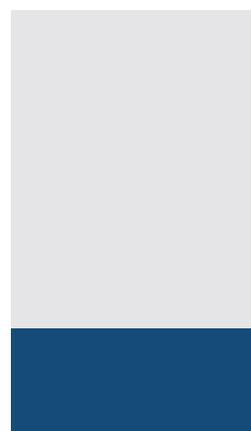
Apprenticeships have seen substantial growth since 2009 in terms of participant numbers and types of industries; in [2020](#), there were 636,515 active apprentices.² In the past decade, the total active apprentices increased by 78%. However, apprenticeship programs remain an underutilized career pathway especially for underrepresented populations, including youth and young adults with disabilities (Y&YAD). Results from youth

apprenticeship programs show that they can [“produce strong employment and earnings outcomes for participants and ease the school-to-work transition.”](#)³

Y&YADs have lower labor force participation rates than their peers without disabilities.⁴

Youth Workforce Participation

Ages 16 - 19



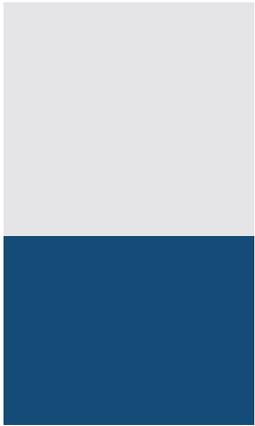
23.6% of youth with disabilities ages 16-19 participate in the labor force



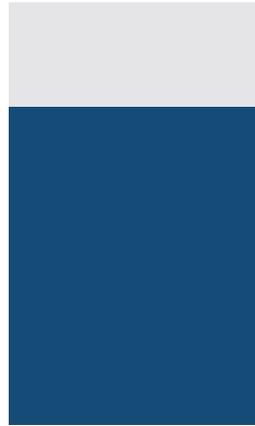
35% of youth without disabilities ages 16-19 participate in the labor force

Youth Workforce Participation

Ages 20 - 24



44.2% of youth with disabilities ages 20-24 participate in the labor force



75.4% of youth without disabilities ages 20-24 participate in the labor force

Apprenticeships are a proven strategy for increasing labor force participation rates and lowering unemployment rates for Y&YADs. By creating and fostering accessible and inclusive apprenticeships, states can increase opportunities for Y&YADs and encourage economic growth. Inclusive

apprenticeships can upskill the workforce and engage new talent in the labor force.

State policymakers have an essential role to play in promoting and expanding inclusive apprenticeships. State strategies for fostering inclusive apprenticeships include:

- ▶ Utilizing incentives to encourage pre-apprenticeship programs and apprenticeship sponsors to foster and instill inclusivity;
- ▶ Encouraging collaboration among state agencies, industry, and apprenticeship intermediaries in developing inclusive apprenticeships and recruiting individuals with disabilities to take part;
- ▶ Evaluating Y&YAD participation in apprenticeship programs to use data-based decision making to improve enrollment and retention;
- ▶ Providing wraparound services and support for apprentices and apprenticeship programs; and
- ▶ Facilitating state agencies to act as model employers for Y&YAD apprentices.



Introduction

An [apprenticeship program](#) is an employer-driven program providing individuals with a combination of on-the-job training and virtual or in-person related instruction that supports on-the-job learning.⁵ Training and instruction are focused on helping the apprentice master skills needed to succeed in a specific occupation. Apprentices are paid while they learn and gain credentials to support their long-term success in the workplace. Historically, apprenticeship programs were in trades such as electrical or construction industries; however, there is growing interest in apprenticeships within non-traditional fields such as health care, energy, and information technology (IT). Apprenticeships are a viable career pathway leading to high-paying jobs and providing a portable credential upon completion.⁶

[Research](#) indicates apprenticeship is a promising model leading to positive employment outcomes for Y&YADs.⁸ States can utilize apprenticeships to build a more diverse and skilled workforce, meet specific labor market needs, increase the tax base, and grow state economies. Moreover, states can benefit greatly from promoting apprenticeships that are inclusive and accessible. [Inclusive apprenticeship](#) programs are designed to be accessible to and inclusive of all participants, including people with disabilities. By promoting apprenticeships that are inclusive of any underserved population including Y&YADs, state workforce systems can make apprenticeship programs and opportunities accessible to the over 1.3 million young people with a disability between the ages of 16 and 24 who might otherwise

The average starting salary after an apprentice completes an apprenticeship program is

\$72,000



Apprentice graduates earn over

\$300,000

more over their lifetimes compared to peers who do not participate in apprenticeships.⁷

92%

of apprentices retain employment after apprenticeship completion



Source: apprenticeship.gov

struggle to find a pathway to employment. Inclusive apprenticeship programs widen the talent pool and provide opportunities for people with disabilities (including individuals with cognitive, neurological, physical, mental health, and sensory disabilities) to gain credentials and skills to succeed in their desired careers.⁹

The U.S. Department of Labor [Equal Employment Opportunity \(EEO\)](#) regulations for registered apprenticeship programs include provisions

that support equity, inclusion, and access for all populations, including Y&YAD.¹⁰ These regulations prohibit discrimination based on disability status, require registered apprenticeship program sponsors to allow opportunities for apprentices to self-identify as a person with a disability, and require sponsors to inform apprentices about their ability to file a discrimination complaint.¹¹ Accommodations may include flexible work schedules, modified tools or equipment, or ensuring physical accessibility of facilities.

Universal Outreach Tool

A valuable resource for apprenticeship program sponsors, the Universal Outreach Tool provides an online mechanism for finding diverse candidates for apprenticeship. This tool can help sponsors comply with the universal outreach and recruitment requirements of the registered apprenticeship EEO regulations. These requirements, which apply to all sponsors, include developing, and annually updating, a list of recruitment sources that will generate referrals from all demographic groups within their recruitment area; identifying contacts at each of these sources; and providing these sources with advance notice of all apprenticeship openings.

Definitions

Pre-Apprenticeship programs incorporate a curriculum based on industry standards; hands-on training or volunteer opportunities; agreements with the sponsors of registered apprenticeship programs to provide an interview or facilitate entry of program participants; and support services like childcare and transportation to facilitate the success of apprentices. Pre-apprenticeship programs also provide opportunities to recruit and prepare individuals from underrepresented populations, such as minority youth or youth with disabilities, in registered apprenticeship programs.¹²

Apprenticeship Intermediary Organizations (AIOs) connect apprentices and employers to help launch, grow, and maintain apprenticeship programs. AIOs often are run by industry associations, chambers of commerce, community and technical colleges, community-based organizations, labor management partnerships, and workforce development boards.¹³



25 federally administered states and **18** federally recognized State Apprenticeship Agencies (SAAs) use the Employment and Training Administration's Registered

Apprenticeship Partners Information Database System (RAPIDS) to provide individual apprentice and sponsor data.

RAPIDS data from September 2021 shows that there were **385,965** actively registered apprentices in registered apprenticeships. Of those 385,965, **2,300** self-identified as having a disability, which is about **0.6%**.¹⁴

Policy Considerations

1. Utilize incentives to encourage pre-apprenticeship programs and apprenticeship sponsors to foster and instill inclusivity.

States can utilize a variety of funding mechanisms to encourage apprenticeship program sponsors to reach a larger and more diverse pool of apprentices, including underrepresented youth, including Y&YADs. Options include:

- Allocating funding for:
 - Training and tuition costs;
 - Additional recruiting, placement, and support services; and
 - upskilling incumbent workers;
- Providing tax incentives to employers to hire underrepresented youth as apprentices; and
- Allocating funding to provide simple and streamlined grants through economic development efforts for employers and apprenticeship programs engaging in inclusive apprenticeships.

It is critical for states to consider the ease of access and use of these incentives and funding mechanisms, so employers and apprenticeship sponsors view them as a viable option.

State Examples



New Jersey's [Youth Transition to Work \(YTTW\) Program](#) provides multiple financial incentives for employers hiring youth apprentices,

emphasizing targeted industries such as health care, information technology (IT), and public service. These financial incentives include reimbursements for apprenticeship training expenses, 50% wage reimbursements for all participating apprentices, and a tuition reimbursement of up to \$200 per apprenticeship credit hour. Registered apprenticeship programs that conduct outreach and serve targeted populations (including youth with disabilities) receive priority funding.



New York's [Empire State Apprenticeship Tax Credit](#) provides a tax credit to all employers participating in registered

apprenticeship programs. However, employers hiring disadvantaged youth receive a higher tax credit. Disadvantaged youth include, among other groups, individuals with disabilities referred by a New York rehabilitation agency or an employment network under the [Ticket to Work Program](#).

States are utilizing American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars for apprenticeship expansion.



Vermont House Bill 439 allocated \$2 million of ARPA funds for the expansion of registered apprenticeship enrollment in current or new programs.

2. Encourage collaboration among state agencies, industry, and apprenticeship intermediaries in developing inclusive apprenticeships and recruiting individuals with disabilities to take part.

To ensure program access, it is important to be intentional about accessibility from the beginning. This places a focus on correcting certain systematic exclusions. An apprenticeship intermediary staff [shared](#), “it is always easier to build in inclusive design from the start rather than adapt an existing apprenticeship program, because then the goal of inclusivity can be infused in all parts of the apprenticeship.”¹⁵ This is known as Universal Design.

[Universal Design \(UD\)](#) is a research-based strategy for making products, environments, operational systems, and services welcoming and usable to the most diverse range of people possible. When applied to the learning environment, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) considers the broad range of abilities, ages, reading levels, learning preferences, languages, and cultures within a workforce base. UDL is a foundational building block of inclusive apprenticeships.

In order to achieve universal design goals, it is critical for states to foster collaboration across state agencies, employers, community and technical colleges, and apprenticeship intermediaries. Increased collaboration will aid in the development of inclusive apprenticeships and recruitment of people with disabilities. Potential action steps include implementing UD principles and assembling multi-stakeholder task forces.

According to the [Apprenticeship Inclusion Model \(AIM\)](#), the following options are promising methods of utilizing UD in apprenticeship program development:

- Co-designing programs, tools, and materials alongside the learners and trainers who will use them;
- Translating and applying classroom-tested UDL practices to the apprenticeship setting, such as using cooperative learning activities to minimize distractions and delivering information through multiple formats; and
- Incorporating and/or developing tools and technologies tested with individuals with diverse experiences, characteristics, skills, and learning preferences that promotes success.¹⁶

State Examples



California law established the Interagency Advisory Committee on Apprenticeship within the Division of Apprenticeship Standards. In July 2019, [Assembly Bill 1019](#) added the Director of Rehabilitation and the Executive Director of the State Council on Developmental Disabilities as ex officio members of the Committee. The law requires the Committee to create a subcommittee to address apprenticeships for individuals with disabilities. It emphasizes that the intent of the legislature is for the Department to encourage greater apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship participation from individuals with disabilities.





Louisiana Postsecondary Apprenticeship Pilot for Youth ([PAY-Check](#)) is a three-to-five semester program that enables transition-

age youth with disabilities to take classes at Delgado Community College related to specific apprenticeship areas, participate in career development activities, learn community and work skills, and gain employment experience through an apprenticeship program at the University Medical Center. PAY-Check is a collaboration among the Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center-Human Development Center, Louisiana Rehabilitation Services, public school systems and employers in the New Orleans metropolitan area. PAY-Check uses a braided funding approach by utilizing a state-to-federal match via Federal Financial Participation in State Expenditure (FMAP) funding, which is available to all states.



San Diego, California's Able-Disabled Advocacy (A-DA) is a YouthBuild program that prioritizes service delivery to youth with disabilities,

most of whom are youth offenders. YouthBuild is a community-based pre-apprenticeship program that provides job training and educational opportunities for at-risk youth ages 16-24 who have previously dropped out of high school. They partner with local organizations, which include but are not limited to: Next Step, their worksite provider that offers transitional housing for the homeless, offenders, and for those in recovery from substance abuse, their Local Workforce Board, and North America's Trades Unions. In collaboration with their strategic employment partners, A-DA provides internships, employment, and Registered Apprenticeship opportunities to youth in Construction, ICT, and Business Services.

3. Evaluate Y&YAD participation in apprenticeship programs to use data-based decision making to improve enrollment and retention.

States can collect and utilize data to evaluate the enrollment and retention of Y&YADs and other underrepresented groups in apprenticeship programs. By developing a strong data collection and analysis strategy, states can discover gaps in services and programming. For example, states may realize their apprenticeship outreach efforts are not reaching Y&YADs; therefore, they may partner with state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies to raise awareness of apprenticeship programming.

States may face challenges with gathering disability data due to a lack of self-identification by participants. The Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN) provides numerous **Disability Disclosure & Self-Identification** resources. States may share these resources with employers or with Y&YADs to improve understanding of disability disclosure and self-identification.

States can utilize what they learn from their analyses to strategize and plan for how to improve enrollment, participation, retention, and completion in apprenticeship programs for Y&YADs.

State Examples



[Delaware's PIPELine to Career Success for Students with Disabilities](#) project is

a collaboration among three Delaware state agencies (Departments of Education, Labor and Health, and Social Services) and the National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity. The project is analyzing the level of participation of students with disabilities in work-based learning opportunities, including pre-apprenticeships and registered apprenticeships. Three Delaware school districts participated in a first-year pilot in which educators, VR counselors and other stakeholders sought to align strategies and implement solutions around increasing the number of students with disabilities in work-based learning and career pathways.



[Oregon's Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act \(WIOA\)](#) Plan specifically identifies issues and outlines how agencies can strategize

to make apprenticeships more inclusive and useful in the state. The WIOA Plan states, "Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and the Oregon Commission for the Blind [OCB] are reviewing strategies to utilize services that will impact apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs. Historically, apprenticeships in Oregon do not align with VR timeframes and often have challenges around accessibility, but this is being evaluated programmatically due to new expectations. VR/OCB program services may very well have the most impact when it comes to providing pre-apprenticeship work for youth with disabilities so that this group has the opportunity to prepare for future apprenticeship opportunities should the individual choose to do so."

4. Provide wraparound services and supports for apprentices.

Y&YADs [benefit](#) from a variety of wraparound services and supports that aid their ability to find and maintain work.¹⁷ By removing barriers to workforce entry, such as access to transportation or childcare, more Y&YADs can see apprenticeships as a viable career pathway. States also can provide

flexible and personalized services to prepare Y&YADs to effectively participate in apprenticeships, leading to successful employment. These services include:

- **Job shadowing** as an opportunity for a youth to accompany an employee during their work to learn more about an occupation;
- **Employability training** helps Y&YAD develop [employability skills](#), including personal and interpersonal skills such as critical thinking, communication, resource management, etc.;
- **Mentorship/Peer support** so youth can gain advice and guidance from a mentor or peer with lived experience; and
- **Social Security Insurance and benefits counseling** for Y&YAD as they navigate public and private benefits programs and barriers that make it more difficult to obtain or advance in employment.

Supportive services are a program element for the WIOA youth program. These services enable an individual to participate in WIOA activities (such as, but not limited to, assistance with transportation, childcare, housing, health care, educational testing, and work-related tools).¹⁸



State Examples



The **Michigan** legislature proposed [House Bill 4579](#) which would “Establish a peer-to-peer mentoring program for women, minorities, and persons with disabilities...The program must analyze which groups of people are underrepresented in industries and form employee resource groups for apprentices involved in those industries.”



The **New Jersey** legislature introduced Senate Bill 688 and passed Senate Bill 3067 in 2020 related to inclusive apprenticeships. [Senate Bill 688](#) focused on pre-apprenticeships for women, minority groups, and individuals with disabilities and would mandate programs include counseling, recruitment, transportation assistance, childcare, and training in life skills, math, literacy, and meeting employer expectations. [Senate Bill 3067](#) establishes a five-year Apprentice Assistance and Support Services Pilot Program, which provides a transportation mileage cost reimbursement and a childcare subsidy through the “revenue in the Workforce Development Partnership Fund, which is currently reserved for employment and training purposes.”

5. Act as model employer for Y&YAD apprentices.

States can act as a [model employer](#) for Y&YADs by establishing apprenticeship programs for employment within state government.¹⁹ In doing so, state agencies can demonstrate to the private sector the benefits of investing in this often-untapped pool of talent. Additionally, apprenticeships in the public sector can bridge government workforce needs and employment gaps. States also can provide trainings for apprenticeship programs and employers on how to be more inclusive and accommodating to Y&YADs. States can act as a model employer for Y&YAD apprentices by:

- Creating inclusive apprenticeships within state agencies;

- Providing disability inclusion training for apprenticeship program sponsors;
- Hiring a diversity, equity, and inclusion specialist in state apprenticeship offices; and
- Offering assistive technology.

State Examples



The **Colorado** [Manage Your Apprenticeship Program](#) encourages disability inclusivity among apprenticeships by offering registered apprenticeship programs disability awareness training through the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. They also strongly recommend registered apprenticeships preemptively secure complementary adaptive technology to reduce barriers to employment for youth apprentices with disabilities. Colorado is currently hiring a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Specialist who will work directly with apprenticeship sponsors.



The **Ohio** [Vocational Apprentice Program](#) enables students and adults with disabilities who are eligible for services from Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD)—Ohio’s Vocational Rehabilitation agency—to gain valuable work experience and exposure and access to state government employment through paid apprenticeships within state agencies. OOD partners with Ohio agencies—including the Office of Budget and Management, Department of Health and the Department of Agriculture—to identify their workforce needs and develop apprenticeship opportunities that align with the employment and educational goals of OOD-eligible participants. Apprentices have been hired into permanent employment with state or county agencies with an average starting wage of \$20/hour. Positions include Capital Finance Analyst, Information Technologist, Customer Service Assistant, Graphic Designer, Mail Room, Food Service Worker and Office Professional.



Conclusion

Y&YADs are [unemployed](#) and [underemployed](#) at higher levels than their peers without disabilities.²⁰
²¹ Apprenticeships can help bridge this gap and strengthen state workforces by closing skill gaps. State policymakers can take several approaches to promote and expand inclusive apprenticeships, including utilizing incentives, increasing

collaboration, evaluating Y&YAD participation in apprenticeships, providing wraparound supports and services, and facilitating state agencies to act as a model employer for Y&YAD apprentices. To learn more about inclusive apprenticeships for Y&YADs, visit capeyouth.org/apprenticeships, inclusiveapprenticeships.org, and apprenticeship.gov.

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Endnotes

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