

# APPRENTICESHIP BASICS

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## **What is Registered Apprenticeship?**

Registered Apprenticeship is a proven approach for preparing workers for jobs while meeting the needs of business for a highly-skilled workforce. It is an employer-driven, “learn while you earn” model that combines on-the-job training, provided by the employer that hires the apprentice, with job-related instruction in curricula tied to the attainment of national skills standards. The model also involves progressive increases in an apprentice’s skills and wages.

Apprenticeship is a flexible training strategy that can be customized to meet the needs of any business. Apprentices can be new hires, or businesses can select current employees who need skill upgrades to join the apprenticeship program.

The apprenticeship model is leading the way in preparing American workers to compete in today’s economy. Apprenticeship programs keep pace with advancing technologies and innovations in training and human resource development through the complete involvement of employers in the educational process. While it is used in traditional industries such as construction and manufacturing, apprenticeship is also instrumental for training and development in growing industries, such as health care, information technology, transportation and logistics, and energy.

## **What are the basic program components of Registered Apprenticeship?**

**There are five components to typical apprenticeship programs. These include:**

- **Business Involvement**  
Employers are the foundation of every apprenticeship program. They play an active role in building the program and remain involved every step of the way. Employers frequently work together through apprenticeship councils, industry associations, or other partnerships to share the administrative tasks involved in maintaining apprenticeship programs.
- **Structured On-the-Job Training**  
Apprenticeships always include an on-the-job training (OJT) component. Apprentices receive hands-on training from an experienced mentor at the job site. OJT focuses on the skills and knowledge an apprentice must learn during the program to be fully proficient on the job. This training is based on national industry standards, customized to the needs of the particular employer.

- **Related Instruction**

One of the unique aspects of apprenticeships is that they combine on-the-job learning with related instruction on the technical and academic competencies that apply to the job. Education partners collaborate with business to develop the curriculum, which often incorporates established national-level skill standards. The related instruction may be provided by community colleges, technical schools, or apprenticeship training schools – or by the business itself. It can be delivered at a school, online, or at the job site.

- **Rewards for Skill Gains**

Apprentices receive wages when they begin work, and receive pay increases as they meet benchmarks for skill attainment. This helps reward and motivate apprentices as they advance through their training.

- **Nationally-recognized Credential**

Every graduate of a Registered Apprenticeship program receives a nationally-recognized credential. This is a portable credential that signifies to employers that apprentices are fully qualified for the job.

For more information on apprenticeship program components, please visit the [Learn section of the ApprenticeshipUSA Toolkit](#).

Is an apprenticeship a job?

Yes. Apprentices start working when they enter an apprenticeship, with steady wage increases as they become more proficient. The average starting wage for an apprentice is \$15.00 per hour.

### **How does apprenticeship fit into career pathways?**

Apprenticeship programs are a key asset for state and local workforce systems' career pathway strategies. Apprenticeship can be a partner in the K-12 educational system and an integral part of career and technical programs in high schools. School or community-sponsored pre-apprenticeship programs can be valuable training approaches and serve as the start of a career pathway, which leads to Registered Apprenticeship opportunities for youth or low-skilled adult workers.

Apprenticeship programs pave the way for career-building, and life-long learning through the attainment of stackable credentials. The foundation of the apprenticeship model is the continual building of skills and the ability for workers to obtain higher levels of employment in an occupation or industry. As a result, use of the apprenticeship model can provide communities with a competitive advantage by establishing a continual pipeline of qualified workers for local employers.

### **How is apprenticeship different from other types of work-based training?**

First, apprentices are hired by employers and receive a paycheck from the first day of work. Wages increase over time as apprentices advance in their knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Apprenticeships last from one to six years – depending on the occupation and model – and connect education and work simultaneously. Apprentices take classes while they are working, combining theoretical and hands-on learning. At the end of the apprenticeship, apprentices earn industry-recognized credentials and in many cases can receive college credits that may lead to an associate or bachelor’s degree.

### **What is Pre-Apprenticeship?**

Pre-apprenticeship is designed to prepare individuals to enter and succeed in a Registered Apprenticeship program. These programs promote a diverse and skilled workforce and prepare participants to meet the basic qualifications for entry into apprenticeship, through:

- An approved training curriculum based on industry standards,
- Educational and pre-vocational services,
- Hands-on training in a simulated lab experience or through volunteer opportunities, and
- Assistance in applying to Registered Apprenticeship programs.

Pre-apprenticeship programs involve formal partnerships with at least one Registered Apprenticeship program sponsor. For more information on pre-apprenticeship programs, please refer to [Training and Employment Notice 13-12](#).

### **Where can I find Registered Apprenticeship programs?**

Visit the [Department of Labor's ApprenticeshipUSA website](#) to find current apprenticeship programs in your area.

## **BENEFITS OF APPRENTICESHIP**

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### **How does a Registered Apprenticeship program benefit employers?**

First and foremost, apprenticeship helps businesses develop highly-skilled employees. Apprenticeship programs also reduce turnover rates, increase productivity and lower the cost of recruitment.

Additional benefits include:

- **Customized training** that meets industry standards, tailored to the specific needs of businesses, resulting in highly-skilled employees.
- **Increased knowledge** transfer through on-the-job learning from an experienced mentor, combined with education courses to support work-based learning.

- **Enhanced employee retention:** 91% of apprentices that complete an apprenticeship are still employed nine months later.
- **A safer workplace** that may reduce worker compensation costs, due to the program's emphasis on safety training.
- **A stable and reliable pipeline** of qualified workers.
- **A systematic approach to training** that ensures employees are trained and certified to produce at the highest skill levels required for the occupation.

Finally, businesses may qualify for **state-based tax credits** available for apprenticeship program sponsors. Workforce systems and other community partners may also choose to contribute funding for training, supplies or other aspects of apprenticeship programs. These benefits reduce an employer's investment in apprenticeship training costs.

### **How does a Registered Apprenticeship program benefit workers?**

From their first day of work, apprentices receive a paycheck that is guaranteed to increase as their training progresses. Apprentices also complete a combination of job-related instruction and hands-on training at the job site leading to a nationally-recognized, portable credential.

Other specific benefits include:

- **Hands-on career training:** Apprentices receive practical on-the-job training in a wide variety of occupations and industries, such as health care, construction, information technology, transportation, energy, and advanced manufacturing.
- **An education:** Apprentices receive hands-on training resulting in improved skills and competencies as well as the potential to earn college credit toward an associate's or bachelor's degree.
- **A career:** Once the apprenticeship is complete, workers are on their way to a successful long-term career with a competitive salary and little or no educational debt.
- **National credential:** When an apprentice graduates from a career training program, he or she earns a certified portable credential accepted by industries and employers across the U.S.

### **How does Registered Apprenticeship benefit the workforce system?**

Connecting Registered Apprenticeship with your state and local workforce systems is a win-win partnership. The strategy helps businesses thrive by building a highly-skilled, highly-productive workforce, and it helps job seekers access and maintain stable careers with good wages.

By using apprenticeship as a work-based learning strategy, the workforce system can increase worker skills, meet employer needs, and enhance performance outcomes. Additionally, apprenticeship is a successful job-driven training strategy that can be an effective tool under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. For more information, please review the **Workforce System and Apprenticeship Partnerships Fact Sheet**.

### **How does Registered Apprenticeship benefit the workforce system?**

Registered Apprenticeship contributes to positive outcomes in each of the workforce system's performance measures:

- **Employment:** Registered Apprenticeship is a job. All apprentices enter employment when they begin an apprenticeship program.
- **Retention:** Registered Apprenticeship programs have high retention rates; 91% of apprentices retain employment after the program ends.
- **Earnings:** The average starting wage for apprentices is \$15.00 an hour, with wage increases as apprentices advance in skills and knowledge.
- **Credential Attainment:** All apprenticeship completers earn a national, industry-recognized credential.

### **How much money can an apprentice earn?**

Apprentices earn competitive wages, a paycheck from the first day of employment and incremental raises as skill levels increase. The average wage for a fully-proficient worker who completes an apprenticeship is \$50,000 annually. Apprentices who complete their program earn approximately \$300,000 more during their career than non-apprenticeship workers.

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## **APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM COMPONENTS AND MODELS**

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### **Who operates Registered Apprenticeship programs?**

Every Registered Apprenticeship program has a “sponsor”. The sponsor is responsible for the overall operation of the program. Sponsors can be a single business or a consortium of businesses. They can also be a range of workforce intermediaries, including an industry association or a joint labor-management organization. Community colleges and community-based organizations can also serve as sponsors for Registered Apprenticeship programs. Regardless of who serves as the sponsor, apprenticeships are always employer-driven and employers are involved throughout the process.

Over 150,000 businesses have adopted Registered Apprenticeship, including UPS, Ford Motor Company, the United States Military, Werner Enterprises, CVS/Caremark Pharmacy – and many others. For a list of Registered Apprenticeship programs and their sponsors, please visit the [Registered Apprenticeship Program Sponsors Database](#).

### **Can Registered Apprenticeship programs be used in both non-union and union workplaces?**

Yes. Registered Apprenticeship is used widely across all industries. Sponsors of apprenticeship programs can include employers, labor organizations, and joint labor-management organizations.

### **What are the basic qualifications for workers to begin a Registered Apprenticeship program?**

Each Registered Apprenticeship program sponsor identifies the minimum qualifications to apply for a program. The eligible starting age can be no less than 16 years of age; however, most programs require individuals to be at least 18 years of age.

Program sponsors also identify additional minimum qualifications, such as education and ability to physically perform the essential functions of the job. All applicants are required to meet the minimum qualifications. Based on the selection method used by the sponsor, additional qualification standards – such as aptitude tests, interviews, school grades, or previous work experience – may be included for qualification.

### **Do apprentices earn college credit while participating in a Registered Apprenticeship program?**

Registered Apprenticeship opportunities combine on-the-job training and job-related instruction, provided by apprenticeship training centers, technical schools, community colleges, and other educational institutions. Registered Apprenticeship sponsors often work directly with two- and four-year colleges to structure the program so apprentices earn college credits.

### **Is there one apprenticeship model that must be followed?**

Apprenticeship is a flexible training strategy that can be customized to meet the needs of every business. For example, there are many options for how, when, and where related instruction is provided to apprentices. It can take place during or after work hours, or be delivered one day a week while the apprentice works on the job the other four days. The instructional component can be arranged in different ways to suits both businesses and apprentices.

In developing apprenticeship programs, there is also flexibility in choosing the type of training model and program design. For more information, please visit the [Learn section of the ApprenticeshipUSA Toolkit](#).

### **How long are Registered Apprenticeship programs?**

The length of an apprenticeship program depends on the complexity of the occupation and the type of program model the sponsor chooses. Apprenticeship programs range in length from one to six years. Many occupations have one- and two-year apprenticeships, such as Home Health Aide, Biller Coder, and Emergency Medical Technician.

### **What does an apprentice receive upon completion of a Registered Apprenticeship program?**

After completion of an apprenticeship program, the apprentice earns a nationally-recognized credential from the U.S. Department of Labor that is portable and stackable. This means that other employers in that industry will recognize its value and that the apprentice can build on its foundation to further his or her knowledge and education.

### **What are the advantages of registering an apprenticeship program with the U.S. Department of Labor?**

Registration of an apprenticeship program provides:

- **Technical Assistance and Support.** The program joins the Registered Apprenticeship system, which provides access to a nationwide network of expertise, customer service, and support at no charge for program sponsors.
- **National Credential.** Graduates of Registered Apprenticeship programs receive a national, industry-recognized credential.
- **Quality Standards.** Registration means the program has met national and independent standards for quality and rigor. Registration tells prospective employees, customers and suppliers that the business invests in its workforce and believes employees are its most important asset.
- **Tax Credits.** In many states, businesses can qualify for state-based tax credits related to apprenticeship programs. In addition, employers may be able to claim some expenses for training as a federal tax credit.
- **Federal Resources.** Businesses and apprentices can access funding and other resources from many federal programs to help support their Registered Apprenticeship programs.

### **Are there other federal resources that can help support apprenticeship programs?**

A variety of federal resources can help to fund apprenticeship training. Some of these include Pell Grants, Federal Work Study Funds, the GI Bill for veteran customers, and others. Review the [Federal Resources Playbook](#) for details and additional sources.

## **BUSINESS AND PARTNERS**

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### **What is an employer's role in Registered Apprenticeship?**

Employers play an indispensable role in any Registered Apprenticeship program. There cannot be an apprenticeship without an employer. Employers drive the design of an apprenticeship program.

An individual business or a consortium of businesses often serve as the sponsor of a Registered Apprenticeship. Sponsors make significant investments to design and execute Registered Apprenticeship programs, provide jobs to apprentices, oversee training development, and provide hands-on learning and technical instruction for apprentices.

### **What is the role of government in Registered Apprenticeships?**

The Office of Apprenticeship (OA) in the U.S. Department of Labor works with State Apprenticeship Agencies (SAAs) to administer the program nationally. These registration agencies are responsible for:

- Registering apprenticeship programs that meet federal and state standards
- Protecting the safety and welfare of apprentices
- Issuing nationally-recognized and portable credentials to apprentices

- Promoting the development of new programs through marketing and technical assistance
  - Assuring that all programs provide high quality training
  - Assuring that all programs produce skilled, competent workers
- To find the OA or SAA representative in your state, please visit the [Directory of State Apprenticeship Offices](#).

### **Who are typical Registered Apprenticeship partners?**

Through a proven system of public-private partnerships, Registered Apprenticeship involves a wide range of organizations, including (but not limited to):

- Businesses, consortia of employers, and industry associations
- Labor and joint labor-management organizations
- State and local public workforce systems
- Two- and four-year colleges that offer associate and bachelor's degrees
- Community-based organizations
- Economic development organizations

For additional information on partner roles, and for assistance in identifying partners in your area, please visit the [Build section of the ApprenticeshipUSA Toolkit](#).

### **How can the workforce system use apprenticeship as a training strategy?**

The workforce system can incorporate apprenticeship programs in many ways, including:

- Assisting employers to recruit and screen apprentices
- Providing basic skills training or partner in pre-apprenticeship efforts
- Providing training funds for related instruction through Individual Training Accounts
- Developing customized and on-the-job training contracts with employers with apprenticeship programs
- Contributing supportive services, such as tools, books, and other supplies