

# 4 Strategies for

## Incorporating Equity and Diversity in Your Apprenticeship Program



**CENTER FOR APPRENTICESHIP  
& WORK-BASED LEARNING**

Since President Barack Obama’s 2014 State of the Union call to “double and diversify” apprenticeships, the U.S. government has made historic bipartisan investments of almost \$800 million in the nation’s apprenticeship system and the country has added more than 200,000 new apprenticeships, the largest increase in decades. Interest in apprenticeship programs has continued in the Trump administration.

During this period, apprenticeships have undergone a major transformation in the United States. Once regarded primarily as a means of training for people pursuing blue collar, union jobs in the trades, the apprenticeship model is now more widely accepted as an innovative approach to training for all kinds of jobs. Apprenticeships are beginning to be offered in a variety of industries for many types of occupations, and work-based learning in general is more widely recognized as a talent development strategy that enables employers to develop a skilled workforce while providing people with the expertise they need to advance in their careers.

Despite the recent evolution of apprenticeship programs, there have been concerns that not all Americans have equal access to apprenticeship opportunities, and many workforce development specialists have recognized the need to find ways to get women, people of color, and people with disabilities more engaged in this proven pathway to middle class jobs and wages. In 2017, only 7.3 percent of the people who completed Registered Apprenticeships were women.<sup>1</sup> What’s more, in 2017, men earned a median wage of \$27.25 an hour when they completed apprenticeship programs, but the median wage for women was just \$11.49 an hour at the end of their apprenticeships. Similarly, white workers who had completed apprenticeship programs earn a median wage of \$26.14 an hour in 2017, while black people who completed apprenticeships earned a median wage of \$14.35 an hour that year.

To understand how providers of apprenticeship programs can better support women, people of color, and others who have encountered barriers

preventing them from accessing or completing work-based training programs, JFF interviewed more than two-dozen business representatives and industry leaders. The results are inspiring: Companies are invested in learning and applying what works.

These companies realize that a skilled, diverse workforce matters. Apprenticeship offers a way to provide real-time, on-the-job learning combined with the theory of classroom instruction, opening the doors to new candidates from a variety of backgrounds and skillsets.

These past few years have demonstrated apprenticeship’s adaptability for a wide range of skill needs and industries. Today, apprenticeship is primed to become a core component of workforce strategies for now and the future, providing opportunities to even more Americans.



Eric Seleznow  
Senior Advisor, JFF



# 4 Strategies

for Incorporating Equity and Diversity in Your Apprenticeship Program

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# “Talent is everything.”

Through paid youth apprenticeship, we’re providing young people the opportunity to develop critical skills in occupations that they choose. This gives business the talent they need to compete globally.”



**Noel Ginsburg**

*Founder and CEO, CareerWise Colorado*

*Denver, Colorado*

# Adjust Your Recruitment and Selection Processes

With apprenticeship, businesses have an opportunity to find and train talented, local workers who are different than the candidates they may find in their typical hiring process.

To take advantage of this opportunity, businesses are looking beyond the traditional requirements they often use in job descriptions. The apprenticeship structure allows hiring managers to select candidates based on aptitude and potential rather than on four-year degrees or a high level of relevant job experience.

Businesses then identify and intentionally recruit specific populations—such as people of color, women, youth, people with disabilities, low-income workers, veterans, or others—to inform and encourage them to apply for their apprenticeship programs.



## Businesses implement by:

Partnering with local organizations (such as community colleges, non-profits, workforce boards, or community-based organizations) that have experience engaging with and supporting targeted populations.

Being purposeful about representing diversity in recruitment materials and company webpages to help show diverse candidates that they belong.

Using an apprenticeship selection strategy that focuses on competencies and aptitude when assessing candidates.

Helping young people see the value of apprenticeship and understand the opportunities available to them by engaging with local high schools and community-based organizations.

Presenting apprenticeship opportunities to students at City Colleges of Chicago has helped professional services firm **Aon** hire apprenticeship cohorts that are 75% African American or Latino.<sup>2</sup>

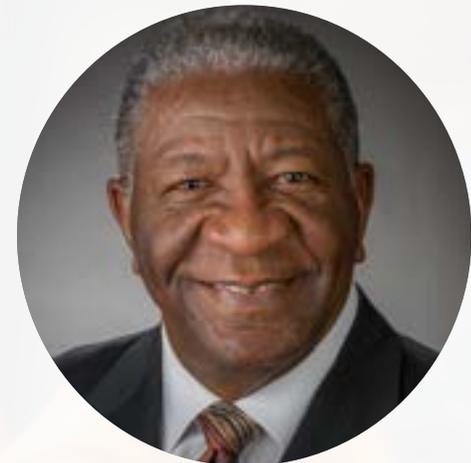
“The lack of diverse representation across the industry makes it challenging for prospective workers from different backgrounds to envision themselves in the field. To address this,

**we make a concerted effort to show the range of successful workers we have.”**

**Lonnie Coleman**

*President, Coleman Spohn Corporation*

*Cleveland, Ohio*



# Prepare Your Candidates for Entry into an Apprenticeship

As businesses recruit from new talent pools, they often find that some candidates would benefit from introductory training to work norms and to the industry.

Pre-apprenticeship programs, also known as apprenticeship readiness programs, can be an effective way for businesses to ensure the success of their apprenticeship program for both the business and the cohort.

# Businesses implement by:

Creating online coursework to prepare candidates before their apprenticeship.

Introducing candidates to workplace culture and expectations by developing or partnering with pre-apprenticeship programs.

Engaging with local partners to provide support structures—such as free technology or transportation—for candidates from disadvantaged populations.

Technology company **Treehouse** has teamed up with Comcast to provide laptops and internet connections for candidates completing a 6-month pre-apprenticeship course.<sup>3</sup>

“Simply connecting individuals with opportunities wasn’t enough to achieve our goal. The new members of the community that we had brought on board through our outreach efforts were often people who had experienced barriers to employment or education and

## needed personalized support

in order to succeed in our apprenticeship program.”



**Shana Welch**

*Executive Director of Talent Acquisition,  
Mercy Health + Saint Joseph Mercy Health System  
Michigan*

# Plan Flexible and Responsive Training

Apprenticeships provide businesses with high-quality employees. But these programs can often be demanding for participants, and not all will complete.

To help boost apprentice success and reduce attrition, businesses provide apprentices with on-the-job support and mentoring, with an eye towards designing a program to meet the apprentice's needs. This includes maintaining flexibility in timing and curriculum content.



## Businesses implement by:

Providing wraparound support services to apprentices, such as child care and transportation options or language and financial training.

Creating or adapting a role within the business to ensure responsibility for apprenticeship or workforce development.

Carefully selecting apprenticeship mentors and supervisors, and training them in key competencies such as relationship building.

Manufacturer **Lippert Components** made its apprenticeship program more inclusive to the approximately one-third of its workers who are Latinx by offering a bilingual version of the related instruction to incumbent workers whose first language is Spanish. Lippert also provides free online English language classes.<sup>4</sup>

STRATEGY 3

“In order to draw out the best from our people and ensure they have the skills we need,



# we have to take responsibility

for equipping them with the supports, training, and environment they need to feel prepared for and excited about their work.”

**Julio Cruz**

*Personal Development Coach, Lippert Components, Inc.*

*Goshen, Indiana*

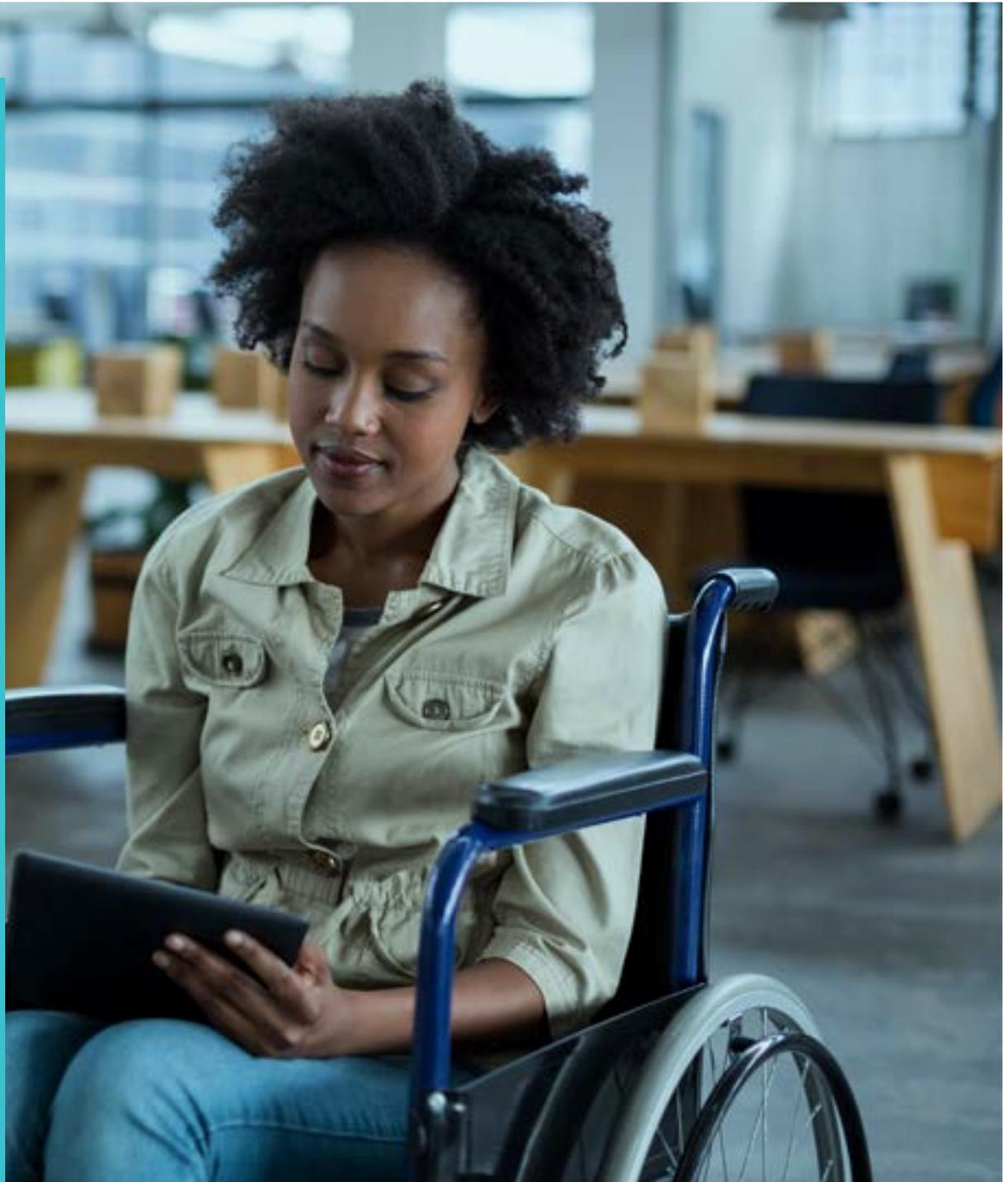
STRATEGY 3

## Design Supports for Post-Apprenticeship Success

Businesses can support apprentices both during the apprenticeship, to help with successful completion, and also after completion, when these workers may need additional support to advance upward.

At the end of the apprenticeship, businesses benefit from the addition of skilled workers who become integrated into the main workforce. As part of this transition, completers often lose the built-in support structures and mentorship that may have helped them succeed in the apprenticeship program, setting them up for challenges as they make the shift out of the program.

To support these workers, businesses are intentional about designing onboarding, training, mentoring, and supports for those who have completed their apprenticeship program to help them grow, advance, and stay with the organization.



## Businesses implement by:

Designing collaborative workplace structures to help journey-level workers integrate with coworkers.

Maintaining mentorship opportunities after apprenticeship completion.

Making career advancement opportunities clear and showing how the apprenticeship has set workers up for continued career success.

Creating internal reporting metrics to measure the growth, advancement, and retention of journey-level workers as compared to other hires.

Sourcing, curating, and supporting diverse apprentices has helped software development firm **Catalyte** boost their Baltimore program participants to 14% African American.

“Everyone hired at CVS Health through an apprenticeship has the CVS Health apprenticeship sponsor’s contact number for the state, providing direct access to others to help support their career advancement.



We want to send the message that

**we want you to succeed.”**

**Yani Hurst**

*Workforce Initiatives Advisor, CVS Health*

*Dallas/Forth Worth, Texas*

# “This is not charity. This is a bottom-line decision.”

We need to attract new candidates to our industry and break down barriers that keep underrepresented populations out. I predict that apprenticeship will become the primary talent path into companies.”



**Ryan Carson**

*CEO and Founder, Treehouse*

*Portland, Oregon*

Find more about these strategies and the companies that implement them on JFF's Center for Apprenticeship & Work-Based Learning.

[Center4apprenticeship.jff.org/apprenticeshipequity](https://center4apprenticeship.jff.org/apprenticeshipequity)

<sup>1</sup> Angela Hanks, Annie McGrew, and Daniella Zessoules, "The Apprenticeship Wage and Participation Gap," Center for American Progress, July 11, 2018, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/economy/reports/2018/07/11/453321/apprenticeship-wage-participation-gap/>.

<sup>2</sup> Bridget Gainer, "Oral Testimony on behalf of Aon," The Committee on Education and Labor, March 27, 2019, <https://edlabor.house.gov/imo/media/doc/GainerTestimony032719.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Gretchen Cheney, *Growing Equity and Diversity through Apprenticeship: Business Perspectives* (JFF, 2019), <https://center4apprenticeship.jff.org/apprenticeshipequity>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

# Thank you to those who participated in JFF's March 2019 roundtable or phone interviews:

Ali Bokhari, Managing Director,  
Delivery Network, Accenture Federal  
Services

Christi Branch, Training  
Coordinator, Hershey

Daniel Bustillo, Executive Director,  
H-CAP

Donna Carroll, Director-Global  
Engineering Services, Eli Lilly and  
Company

Ryan Carson, Founder and CEO,  
Treehouse

Nancy Chan, Director of Product  
Partnerships and Social Impact,  
Catalyte.io

Lonnie Coleman, President, Coleman  
Spohn Corporation

Lucy Corker, Director of Professional  
Development, SPIN Inc.

Al Crook, Head of HR Business  
Partners, Zurich Insurance (North  
America)

Julio Cruz Reyes, Personal  
Development Coach, Lippert  
Components, Inc.

Sarah Currier, Vice President,  
Workforce Strategy,  
Dartmouth-Hitchcock

Noel Ginsburg, CEO, CareerWise  
Colorado

Jodi Greenspan, Assistant Vice  
President, Claims Chief of Staff, The  
Hartford

Debby Hopkins, Chief Workforce  
Officer and Program Director,  
Shenandoah Valley Workforce  
Development Board

Missy Hopson Sparks, Vice President,  
Talent Management-

Workforce Development, Ochsner  
Health System

Bob Hottman, Partner, Plante  
Moran

Yani Hurst, Workforce Initiatives  
Advisor, CVS Health

Kelli Jordan, Director, IBM Career and  
Skills, IBM

Shannon Joseph, Director, Workforce  
Development, Ochsner Health System

Thomas Kriger, Director of Research,  
North America's Building Trades  
Unions

Mark Melnick, Executive Director  
Workforce Strategic Partnerships, Ivy  
Tech Community College

Vicki O'Leary, General Organizer,  
Ironworkers International

Londa Quisling, Chief Product Officer,  
Treehouse

Lisa Schumacher, Director, Education  
Strategies, McDonald's Corporation

Daniel Serota, Manager of Public  
Affairs, AON

John Shortt, Director, Program  
Development, National Restaurant  
Association Education Foundation

Michael Smith, Director of Technical  
Training, Lippert Components, Inc.

Heather Terenzio, CEO, Techtonic

Karen Van Curen, Senior Manager of  
Human Resources, Hershey

Jillian Walsh, Employee Experience &  
Culture Consultant, Zurich Insurance  
(North America)

Shelly Weir, Senior Vice President of  
Career Development, American Hotel  
& Lodging Association

Shana Welch, Executive Director of  
Talent Acquisition, Mercy Health +  
Saint Joseph Mercy Health System

Kelly Wilczak, Workforce Program  
Specialist, Mercy Health + Saint  
Joseph Mercy Health System

This paper is funded through the generous support of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. We are grateful to Gretchen Cheney for the interviews, insights, and writing that informed this work.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



## About JFF's Center for Apprenticeship & Work-Based Learning

JFF is a national nonprofit that works to accelerate the alignment and transformation of the American workforce and education systems to ensure access to economic advancement for all. Apprenticeship and work-based learning are proven methods connecting people to good careers while providing businesses with skilled workers. JFF's Center for Apprenticeship & Work-Based Learning consolidates JFF's broad skills and expertise on these approaches into a unique offering. We partner with employers, government, educators, industry associations, and others to build and scale effective, high-quality programs. Visit [center4apprenticeship.jff.org](https://center4apprenticeship.jff.org).

For more information on how JFF partners with businesses to build and improve their workforce, visit [jff.org/what-we-do/impact-stories/corporate-leadership/](https://jff.org/what-we-do/impact-stories/corporate-leadership/).

