

GETTING STARTED WITH PRE- APPRENTICESHIP: PARTNERSHIPS



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Pre-apprenticeship provides supports tailored to the needs of specific groups to prepare them to enter and succeed in an apprenticeship program. Originally designed to assist in the integration of the construction industry in the 1970s, where fewer than 3 percent of workers were women, and few were people of color, pre-apprenticeships are now being used to expand access to apprenticeship and diversify the talent pipeline of skilled workers. And like apprenticeship, which has expanded beyond the construction industry,

pre-apprenticeships are being developed in a variety of other industries that need skilled workers in entry-level jobs: health care, information technology, manufacturing, hospitality, retail, and others.

Pre-apprenticeships are designed to give women, people of color, and other underrepresented populations the skills, confidence, and connections they need to be successful. They provide academic knowledge and skills training tailored to specific jobs and industries for participants who have barriers to employment. These programs also provide work-readiness skills and a range of supports—from transportation and driver's license recovery assistance to referrals for child care—participants need to persist in the program and progress into an apprenticeship.

For employers, pre-apprenticeships provide screened, trained employees who are ready to work, saving time and money in recruiting and training, and reducing turnover rates. This approach to job training addresses the considerable challenges employers face in filling their apprenticeship positions and developing a talent pipeline to fill middle-skill jobs.

Apprentices earn \$300,000 more over the course of their career than other workers. Pre-apprenticeships serve as a bridge to this impressive career pathway. Through these programs, a diverse range of workers access jobs with good starting wages and the prospect of wage and career growth.

Elements of Pre-Apprenticeship

Pre-apprenticeship programs are designed to prepare individuals to enter and succeed in apprenticeships. While pre-apprenticeship programs are not federally vetted, the [U.S. Department of Labor Office of Apprenticeship](#) has defined quality pre-apprenticeship programs as those that incorporate the following elements:

- Connection to existing apprenticeship programs
- Approved training and curriculum
- Opportunity to earn an industry-recognized credential
- Hands-on learning with a career focus
- Access to support services and career counseling

Pre-Apprenticeship 101 provides an overview of the steps required to develop a pre-apprenticeship program that leads to an apprenticeship. This primer is divided into three sections: Partnerships, Program Development, and Funding.

Partnerships

Pre-apprenticeships are a comprehensive training and support program and, to be successful, they have to connect with a variety of partners. In most pre-apprenticeships, building relationships with partners is the director's primary responsibility (along with fundraising).

As a starting point, consider who you want to involve in your pre-apprenticeship program. Is there a local community or technical college you can partner with? A strong industry association or employer group? A hospital or other nonprofit employer that hires large numbers of entry-level workers? A community-based organization with a long history of providing job-training services? Any and all of these are potential partners. Cast a wide net, and think in broad terms about how to build a program that taps into existing resources and strengths within your community.

When considering potential partners, also think about how the assets of these potential partners can complement your strengths. What type of organization do you represent? Which of these roles do you already provide? Do you have any existing relationships with any of these potential partners?

Employers and Other Apprenticeship Sponsors

Just as they are central to the design and delivery of apprenticeships, employers are fundamental to pre-apprenticeship programs. Employers, and other apprenticeship sponsors such as industry associations and intermediaries, are the only partner singled out as critical in the U.S. Department of Labor's quality pre-apprenticeship framework. Employers bring additional value to pre-apprenticeships because of their insight into the broader workforce needs of their industry.

Employers and other sponsors help shape program content, provide training support and facilities, hire graduates, and champion pre-apprenticeship to other employers. Industry associations and intermediaries also aggregate business demand, and can serve as a bridge to job or apprenticeship opportunities across multiple employers. Involve these partners at every step of program design to ensure that pre-apprentices are successful in the workplace.

Pre-apprenticeships are designed primarily to assist women, people of color, and other underrepresented populations enter into and succeed in apprenticeship, and employer interest in these programs is primarily driven by their need for successful candidates in their industry. Women and people of color are 66 percent of the U.S. population, and pre-apprenticeship programs can help elevate employers' understanding of the changing workforce and how to ensure that they're successful in hiring and retaining these workers. Creating a work environment that supports these workers and helps them succeed is a sound business investment.

Pre-apprenticeships are a tool to strengthen and diversify the talent pool available to fill entry-level positions. Many employers report considerable difficulty recruiting for these positions and high levels of turnover. Employees who arrive without prior screening and training often have little understanding of the work they will be expected to perform, are unprepared—either academically or physically—to do the work, and frequently quit within weeks, days, or even hours of being hired. In contrast, pre-apprentices have much greater success in apprenticeship programs than other participants.

What is Apprenticeship?

Apprenticeship is a model of workforce training that allows employees to earn while they learn. These programs generally last from one to six years and include a combination of on-the-job training and formal classroom instruction. Registered apprentices earn progressively increasing wages and an industry-recognized credential. Apprenticeships can be overseen either by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Apprenticeship or by a State Apprenticeship Agency, while employers and other sponsors administer individual apprenticeship programs.

Visit the [U.S. Department of Labor](#) and read [Training and Employment Guidance Letter 13-16](#) to learn more about apprenticeship.

Employer Roles in Pre-Apprenticeship Programs

Employers play a number of central roles in pre-apprenticeships: they are the primary partner for program development, since the program content must match employers' needs; employers are also essential for providing access for pre-apprentices to the workplace during training and in creating a supportive environment once they are hired. Sponsors' critical role is hiring pre-apprentices as apprentices, creating a smooth pathway as they learn.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

- Create advisory committees to clarify expectations for pre-apprentices. These expectations span not only academic and technical knowledge, but also guidance on the norms of workplace behavior in an industry.
- Contribute to curriculum development. Employer input in the curriculum both ensures that pre-apprentices are ready for the next step in their career and creates greater buy-in among employers.
- Provide instructors, whether for a specific module or the full duration of occupational training. This is particularly important in high-demand industries for which full-time instructors are hard to find.
- Provide mentoring opportunities. As a trusted source of advice, mentors are particularly important to pre-apprentices who do not already have friends and family working in an industry.
- Provide materials and tools for pre-apprentices to use during training. These costs can be a significant barrier to individuals finding initial employment, particularly in industries such as the construction trades and auto repair, in which workers are expected to provide their own tools.
- Participate in funding the program.

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT

Employers can help prepare pre-apprentices for employment in a variety of ways:

- Provide opportunities for pre-apprentices to visit worksites and see the types of jobs they might fill and the skills those jobs require.
- Conduct mock interviews.
- Champion pre-apprenticeship to other employers, both directly and via industry or trade associations.
- Hire pre-apprentices.

In the case of employers that sponsor apprenticeship programs, this support can create a smooth bridge from pre-apprenticeship to apprenticeship:

- **Articulate eligibility requirements and qualifications.** No partner is in a better position to ensure that pre-apprentices are strong apprentice candidates than the apprenticeship sponsor. They can provide details on the skills, competencies, and certifications needed to qualify for the program.
- **Preferential consideration for program graduates.** The gold standard of a pre-apprenticeship to apprenticeship relationship is the direct entry of successful program graduates into the apprenticeship. This puts pre-apprentices at the front of the line for new apprenticeship openings. While direct entry is not common, apprenticeship programs can provide other application benefits such as guaranteeing an interview, or moving graduates up a waitlist within a point system.
- **Advanced Placement agreements.** Apprenticeship programs can also formally acknowledge any overlap in curriculum by awarding pre-apprenticeship graduates advanced standing in their program. By starting partway into an apprenticeship, these graduates can access higher wages and finish their apprenticeship in less time.

SUPPORTIVE WORKPLACE

Providing a supportive workplace is important to the success of pre-apprentices both in their initial job placements and in their transition into an apprenticeship. To create a supportive workplace, employers can:

- Provide reasonably continuous employment.
- Recognize the value and preparedness of the pre-apprenticeship graduate: witness their growth and envision them as future employees.
- Create an educational environment in the workplace.
- Train existing staff to support new, diverse staff.

Employer Engagement and Outreach

Outreach should begin by meeting with employers to learn about their recruiting challenges. How successful are they at recruiting entry-level workers? Do they struggle with high turnover rates? What are their recruiting costs?

Engage employers in a number of ways: invite them to join advisory committees, share information about the business benefits of pre-apprenticeship, and make it easy for them to participate in the pre-apprenticeship program.

ADVISORY COMMITTEES

Engage employers by finding out what they need and recruiting them to join community college advisory committees or the pre-apprenticeship program's board of advisors, where they can help design the program so it meets their changing needs.

Make sure that such committees are a worthwhile investment of employers' time:

- Recruit employers who want to be early champions, and who will be engaged in the success of the program.
- Take employers' opinions seriously and respect the information they bring to the table.
- Never stop recruiting, to ensure that the advisory committee reflects the full range of employers in the community.
- Recruit a mix of enthusiastic champions and subject matter experts.

MARKETING PRE-APPRENTICESHIP TO EMPLOYERS

Pre-apprenticeship programs provide pre-screened, ready-to-work employees who have been trained in the specific skills employers need. Pre-apprenticeship can save employers valuable time and money on recruiting and training new employees and reduce turnover, because employees arrive with an understanding of the job, the tasks they will be expected to perform, and the pre-employment screening they need to pass. Pre-apprentices also arrive with a grounding in safety and other basic training that prepares them to receive additional on-the-job training specific to the employer's needs.

To create effective employer engagement strategies and materials:

- Develop a common message from the apprenticeship/pre-apprenticeship community.

- Enlist employers who support pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs to sell the idea to other employers.
- Focus on return on investment:
 - Facing a wave of retirements of skilled workers, [Georgia Power](#) launched a line-worker pre-apprenticeship program, paired with their Registered Apprenticeship, which lowered hiring costs by over 50 percent and increased new hire retention by 18 percent.
 - Reductions in turnover rates that are associated with pre-employment training programs can be as high as [50 percent](#).
 - High-quality pre-apprenticeships in construction have seen apprenticeship retention and completion rates as [high as 80 percent, about 25 percent higher](#) than the national apprenticeship retention rate in the industry.
 - A [Gallup survey](#) in two large companies found that more gender-diverse business units in retail generated 14 percent greater revenues; gender-diverse hospitality business units showed 19 percent higher profits.
 - [Research conducted by McKinsey & Company](#) shows that companies in the top quartile for gender or racial and ethnic diversity are at least 15 percent more likely to have financial returns above the national industry medians.

SUPPORT EMPLOYERS

Make participation easy. The pre-apprenticeship program should have a single point of contact between the program and the employer. That person builds a relationship with the employer, trains the apprentices, facilitates job placements, and handles all logistics related to the employer's participation in the program.

Essential tips for making participation easy for employers:

- Don't confuse the employer with multiple points of contact or conflicting information.
- Communicate clearly, but don't burden the employer with needless information.
- Take care of the employer—pay attention to the relationship.
- Address challenges that arise promptly and follow up with the employer to ensure that the challenge has been overcome.

Community and Technical Colleges

Community and technical colleges are natural partners for pre-apprenticeship programs. Colleges can bring a wide range of resources to the partnership, and many are committed to workforce training and education for their students and the economic development of their regions.

Many successful pre-apprentices are closely connected with a community college, and programs are often housed at community colleges. Colleges can help with finances, infrastructure, and training instructors, among many other things.

Community College Roles

- Work with employers to develop curricula.
- Provide instructors, and train subject matter experts to become instructors.
- Provide facilities.
- Support recruitment.
- Grant credentials and/or college credit.
- Provide academic counseling and other support services.

Assessing a College for Partnership

When considering a partnership with a community or technical college, explore the following:

- Is the community college geographically close enough for your students to be able to access the campus? Does it have facilities that would be useful for your program?
- Does the college have connections with any apprenticeship programs? Have they ever sponsored a pre-apprenticeship program before?
- Is the college willing to work with you on developing a curriculum if necessary? Is it open to connecting, via advisory board, with employers that do the work you're training for?
- Is the college willing to consider granting college credits for the pre-apprenticeship?
- Is the college willing to provide academic support for the pre-apprentices such as GED or English as a Second Language classes, math tutoring, or connection with other relevant classes?

Benefits for Community Colleges

Colleges can benefit significantly from partnership with a pre-apprenticeship program, but they may not immediately recognize the potential benefits, which include:

- **Recognition for diversity support.** Many colleges do not have diverse populations in some of their traditionally male-dominated trainings, and participating in pre-apprenticeship can help the college advance its diversity commitments.
- **Supporting enrollment.** Pre-apprentices add to the college's full-time equivalency count, and some may choose to continue their education before seeking employment.
- **Maximizing facility use.** Often, facilities at the college are not used full time; using them for pre-apprenticeship training could be cost effective.
- **Networking.** Through the pre-apprenticeship's relationships, the college can build better connections with employers and potential future students.
- **Community impact.** Involvement in a pre-apprenticeship allows the college to serve more levels of the community by increasing access to better-paying jobs.
- **Funding.** Grants to support pre-apprenticeship can also provide support for the college.

Potential Challenges

Since pre-apprenticeship programs include a blend of job training, education, and social-emotional supports and involve partnering with multiple organizations outside the college, some challenges are inevitable. Anticipating these challenges can help smooth the process of identifying potential college partners and developing effective partnerships:

- Some community colleges do not identify with trades training, but see themselves exclusively as a ramp to four-year degrees. These schools may not be interested in partnering with a pre-apprenticeship.
- The coordinated work necessary between the college and partners to create and maintain the pre-apprenticeship may be challenging. It requires good communication and clear expectations for who will be providing which services and program elements.
- Unstable funding for pre-apprenticeship programs means that the college may invest time and effort to initiate a program that may not be sustained over time.

Unions and Labor-management Organizations

Unions have been central partners in apprenticeship since the federal government established the Registered Apprenticeship system 80 years ago. Although more than three-quarters of the over 10,000 Registered Apprenticeship programs are non-union, as are almost all new apprenticeship programs, unions continue play a significant role in the apprenticeship system. Approximately two-thirds of apprentices are registered in union-affiliated programs. Partnerships with unions can be helpful in creating opportunities for pre-apprentices to gain preferred entry into these thriving apprenticeship programs.

In parallel to their long history of apprenticeship training, unions have played a central role in developing and expanding pre-apprenticeships. One of the oldest pre-apprenticeship programs in the United States—[ANew](#)—was started by unions in order to recruit women 40 years ago. Similarly, WRTP/BIG STEP was founded in the 1970s and developed as a labor-management organization entwined with trade unions to increase pathways for people of color and women. More recently, the National Building Trades unions piloted a multitrade pre-apprenticeship program in 2007. In the past 10 years, they have expanded these efforts to over 75 “apprenticeship readiness” programs. They, and many other unions, continue to champion pre-apprenticeship as an essential tool for increasing access to and success in apprenticeship for workers from historically underrepresented groups.

Unions are a critical stop for unionized employers when they seek to expand and skill up their workforce. In the construction trades, the unions serve as hiring halls for all new employees. Across industries, they provide training to new workers and those interested in advancing their careers. As talent development partners for employers, unions are natural partners for developing programs designed to attract diverse workers into occupations where they have historically been underrepresented.

Union Roles

- Join the board or the advisory council.
- Host students at training sites to see if they can pass entry-level tests.
- Representatives can come to the program site to speak to students about successful applications and completion in apprenticeship programs, including:
 - The basic characteristics of the successful new employee/apprentices.
 - Descriptions of union-sponsored training programs and how they work.
 - When apprenticeships will be open to new students and how to apply. Such training opportunities are often available on a very limited basis—e.g., for just one week a year—so having the union share information can be critical to pre-apprentices’ success.

Benefits for Unions

Unions add a lot of value to pre-apprenticeship programs, but they have a lot to gain as well. Pre-apprenticeships provide:

- A steady supply of talent—and new union members—to replace retiring union members.
- An iterative referral strategy. Unions can refer apprenticeship candidates who are strong overall but have education or training gaps to pre-apprenticeships for additional preparation.
- Graduates that understand the industry they are entering, leading to greater retention rates.
- Community support that can translate into broader support for the union movement.

Community-Based Organizations and Intermediaries

Community-based organizations and other intermediaries that focus on improving the economic security of their clients benefit from a pre-apprenticeship strategy that opens new doors to strong jobs and career advancement. Some pre-apprenticeships programs are run by nonprofit organizations, and partnerships with intermediaries and nonprofits are crucial for all successful programs. These organizations provide the wide range of services and expertise that no single organization has. Most communities include a variety of community-based organizations, and pre-apprenticeship programs can tap into these resources to meet the program's and the apprentices' needs.

Community-based organizations can provide these services and expertise, among others:

- Job placement organizations can act as recruitment sites for pre-apprenticeship programs and often have strong ties to local employers.

- Goodwill, United Way, and other organizations that support low-income workers help apprentices purchase work clothes, necessary tools and books; pay for class fees or transportation costs; and provide support services ranging from child care to addiction recovery services. These organizations can also help apprentices navigate social services and apply for government benefits, and many are set up to offer educational programs and can partner with pre-apprenticeships to deliver classes.
- Local banks teach apprentices how to create a budget and manage their money.
- Intermediaries can aggregate supply side and demand side information, and share that information with employers.

State and Local Government

While state and local governments have not typically played a large role in pre-apprenticeship programs, they are increasingly involved in both pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs. They can partner in a variety of ways—government agencies are employers, funders, policymakers, conveners, and intermediaries all in one.

Different agencies have different connections to apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship. Get to know your local and state government to explore their possible partnership roles. They can:

- Serve as program sponsors for apprenticeship. Some state and local governments that sponsor apprenticeships also create pre-apprenticeship programs to help diversify their apprenticeships.
- Recognize the pre-apprenticeship. State apprenticeship agencies working to strengthen apprenticeships in their state increasingly see pre-apprenticeships as an effective equity strategy. State apprenticeship agencies in Massachusetts, Montana, North Carolina, Oregon, Washington, and Wisconsin even formally recognize pre-apprenticeship programs if they meet their state's criteria.
- Share expertise in navigating public funding. Workforce development entities can provide targeted assistance in accessing resources from the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, other federal programs, or in working with other governmental agencies.
- Serve as intermediary. Many state and local agencies have partnerships with a wide range of employers and can connect them to high-quality pre-apprenticeship programs.

Learn More

VISIT the U.S. Department of Labor’s website to identify partners including [leading apprenticeship sponsors](#), or [Registered Apprenticeship College Consortium](#) members near you.

READ about successful pre-apprenticeship partnerships with employers in Philadelphia and New Orleans, a

[pre-apprenticeship program](#) housed at a college, and a pre-apprenticeship program run by a [union association](#).

EXPLORE strategies to build partnerships with employers in JFF’s [employer engagement toolkit](#), as well as diversity talking points for outreach to potential employer sponsors.

WATCH video about pre-apprenticeship [partnerships](#)

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About Equity Partners in Apprenticeship

Under a contract awarded by the U.S. Department of Labor, JFF is serving as an equity partner in Registered Apprenticeship and working to connect women, people of color, and opportunity youth to Registered Apprenticeship programs. JFF has convened a national partnership that includes CVS Health, Hilton, The Hartford, National Association of Workforce Boards, Community College

Workforce Consortium, Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund, Upwardly Global, and FASTPORT, as well as regional partners in Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles/Long Beach, and Philadelphia. These employers, community colleges, workforce boards, and community-based organizations, with technical assistance from JFF, seek to advance equity in Registered Apprenticeship by creating stronger referral systems into Registered Apprenticeship programs; creating new pre-apprenticeships or aligning existing job training programs to Registered Apprenticeship; and enhancing services that increase the retention and success of apprentices.



JFF is a national nonprofit that builds educational and economic opportunity for underserved populations in the United States. JFF develops innovative programs and public policies that increase college readiness and career success, and build a more highly skilled, competitive workforce. With over 30 years of experience, JFF is a recognized national leader in bridging education and work to increase economic mobility and strengthen our economy.



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