



3



Youth with Disabilities Entering the Workplace through Apprenticeship Increasing the Participation of Young Adults with Disabilities in Apprenticeship Programs



An Overview:

Apprenticeship programs offer young adults, including those with disabilities, a career pathway that provides employment as the individual learns on the job. Individuals who successfully complete an apprenticeship program become journey level workers and receive a widely recognized credential of skills attainment. Although the availability of apprenticeship openings varies by community, many different industries and occupations are represented in apprenticeship programs. Considering all the benefits of apprenticeship, more focused attention should be given to learning about available apprenticeship openings, developing relationships with apprenticeship employers, and increasing the participation of individuals with disabilities in apprenticeship programs.

What You Need to Know:

There are many myths and misperceptions that surround apprenticeship. Here are some important facts to know when considering apprenticeship as an employment option for young adults.

First and foremost, apprenticeship is a job, making it a highly desirable post-secondary option for young adults, including those with disabilities.

As apprentices progress they are guaranteed wage increases, as outlined in the apprenticeship program standards.

While apprenticeship originated from and remains prominent in the building and construction trades, many other occupations also have apprenticeship programs. In fact, over 950 occupations have been recognized by the Department of Labor (DOL) for apprenticeship programs.

Registered apprenticeship is a voluntary, industry-driven training program. The program can be a partnership of business and organized labor or implemented by employers or employer associations. Employers generally bear the costs of the program. Government plays a supporting role, providing technical assistance and support, registering programs and apprentices, and issuing credentials to those individuals who successfully complete the program.

Apprentices may begin a registered apprenticeship at 16 years of age, but the minimum age for most programs is 18. Other basic qualifications for apprenticeship programs are set by the employer or partnership that sponsors the program.

It is important to learn about the apprenticeship programs that are operating in your community, the minimum qualifications for applicants, and announcements of openings for new applicants.





There are several ways to learn about the registered apprenticeship programs that are active in the community. The government agencies that register and support apprenticeship programs have a list of program sponsors (the term for apprenticeship programs) in the state. In 25 states plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, there is a state agency that administers apprenticeship. In the remaining states, that function is performed by the federal Office of Apprenticeship. In addition, DOL's Office of Apprenticeship maintains a listing of all its program sponsors by state, and this is available through its Web site. The resource section below provides links for the directories of state and federal apprenticeship program officials and the listing of program sponsors.

At the local level, One-Stop Career Centers and community colleges are good sources of information about apprenticeship programs and apprenticeship applicant openings. All One-Stop Career Centers are part of an electronic job bank that is available to the community and may include apprenticeship job openings. Community colleges typically offer employment services to the community, and are one of the primary sources of apprenticeship-related training.

Many apprenticeship programs are suitable for individuals with a broad range of abilities. For example, career lattice apprenticeships found within the culinary, nursing, retail pharmacy, and security officer occupations, offer individuals, including those with disabilities, the opportunity to receive an interim credential called a "Certificate of Training." This credential recognizes achievement of a specific set of skills. Such career lattice apprenticeships allow individuals, both with and without disabilities, to move laterally or upward within an industry.

It is important that the prospective applicants for apprenticeship have the skills, aptitudes and interests needed to succeed. The Career Voyager Web site, sponsored by DOL, is a good source of information for individuals to learn about careers, emerging occupations and job requirements, including apprenticeship. A vocational assessment may be necessary to determine whether an individual is suited to the available apprenticeship programs. The assessment should include the following areas:

- Academic performance or achievement
- Physical and cognitive abilities
- Vocational interests and aptitudes
- Occupational skill competencies

There are myriad tools and resources within communities to help with the vocational assessment. Most agencies and organizations that work with individuals with disabilities have this capability. Vocational Rehabilitation Services and its network of community resource providers are a particularly good source for obtaining assessments for qualified clients. If assistance is needed, local One-Stop Career Centers and community colleges are also good places to find help.

Some individuals may need additional training before they can qualify for an apprenticeship program. Typically, the training falls into two categories: basic skills needed to qualify for the occupation; and general work-readiness skills that provide an individual with the “soft skills” employers look for in job applicants. Pre-apprenticeship programs provide these types of opportunities, although they mainly exist within the building and construction trades. One-Stop Career Centers and community colleges are good sources for both basic skill and work-readiness training.

Another recommended approach is to develop partnerships with existing program sponsors. These partnerships could include opportunities for individuals to “try out” the jobs without cost to the employer through internships or on-the-job training programs sponsored by the referring agency. Such partnerships also facilitate learning about apprenticeship openings that become available.

Often people with disabilities are involved with more than one system or service provider. For example, a Job Corps student might also be a Vocational Rehabilitation client. Services need to be coordinated to avoid duplication and to insure that only one agency or organization is working directly with an employer on an individual’s behalf.

Helping to defray some of the costs associated with providing apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship training can make an applicant more attractive when competing for apprenticeship openings. Some of the costs that could be supported include those for the related training (normally classroom instruction) that is required in all apprenticeship programs. Additionally, employers usually incur expenses for tools, uniforms, equipment, as well as costs associated with providing reasonable accommodations for an individual with disabilities. Vocational Rehabilitation funds can be used to offset training, support services, tools and equipment, and accommodation costs for qualified clients. Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funds may also be used for tools, equipment and training, and support services. Continuing to support individuals once they are placed in apprenticeship programs, including the costs of a job coach for individuals with more significant disabilities, is also an important strategy for increasing apprenticeship opportunities.

Where to Go For More Information:

General information on registered apprenticeship may be obtained from the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Apprenticeship: www.doleta.gov/OA/eta_default.cfm. Additionally, staff directories are available for:

The National Office: www.doleta.gov/OA/national.cfm.

Apprenticeship Officials by State: www.doleta.gov/OA/stateoffices.cfm.

You can search for program sponsors in your state through the Office of Apprenticeship at: <http://oa.doleta.gov/bat.cfm>.

For a directory of **One-Stop Career Centers** across the U.S., visit: www.careeronestop.org/findos/default.aspx.

DOL sponsors a Web site called **Career Voyages** that discusses a young person's post-secondary options, including apprenticeship: www.careervoyages.gov/apprenticeship-main.cfm.

Visit the community colleges in your area to find more information about possible apprenticeship programs, pre-apprenticeship programs, and related training. For a directory of community colleges and access to individual community college Web sites, visit the **American Association of Community Colleges** at: <http://www.aacc.nche.edu>.

You can search for the local **Vocational Rehabilitation** office closest to you on America's Service Locator: www.servicelocator.org.

Learn More

1. Understanding Apprenticeship Basics
2. Preparing Youth and Young Adults for Apprenticeship Programs
3. Increasing Participation of Young Adults with Disabilities In Apprenticeship Programs
4. Establishing New Apprenticeship Programs
5. What Apprenticeship Employers Need to Know About Working with Young Adults with Disabilities
6. Looking to Future Opportunities in Apprenticeship



Office of Disability
Employment Policy

U.S. Department of Labor
200 Constitution Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20210

Voice
1-866-ODEP-DOL (633-7365)

TTY
1-877-889-5627

www.dol.gov/odep