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Youth with Disabilities Entering the Workplace through Apprenticeship

Understanding Apprenticeship Basics



An Overview:

Apprenticeship is one of the oldest forms of training. It involves learning on the job under the direction of a master or senior worker. In the U.S., registered apprenticeship has a defined meaning and a long, rich history. The registered apprenticeship system dates back to 1937 with the passage of the Fitzgerald Act—national legislation that lays the foundation for the federal-state system that exists today.

The registered apprenticeship system dates back to 1937

What You Need to Know:

The Fitzgerald Act, also known as the National Apprenticeship Act, officially authorized and established the national apprenticeship system. This Act gave the U.S. Secretary of Labor authority over apprenticeship programs, established an office of apprenticeship within the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), and provided for the recognition of state agencies to register and administer apprenticeship programs. Twenty-five states plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico have recognized state apprenticeship operations. In the remaining states, DOL administers apprenticeship. DOL also recognizes apprenticeship occupations and maintains records on all apprenticeship programs and registered apprentices.

Apprenticeship is a highly desirable form of training for workers because it is first and foremost a job. It allows for: learning job skills while earning an income; wage progression; and a widely recognized and portable certificate of completion and proficiency.



Apprenticeship is limited to skilled occupations and trades that meet basic criteria. Apprenticeable occupations are: 1) customarily learned in a practical way through a structured, systematic program of on-the-job supervised training supplemented by related technical instruction; 2) clearly identified and commonly recognized throughout an industry; and 3) involve the acquisition of manual or technical skills and knowledge. There are currently over 950 occupations that have been recognized as apprenticeable, and occupations are continually being added to the list.



Apprenticeship training programs in apprenticeship occupations must meet basic standards to be registered by a federal or state apprenticeship agency. There are currently 23 different standards for recognition of apprenticeship programs. These standards relate to:

- The type of occupations and the duration of training;
- The methods of training and the contents of the training agreement between the apprentice and program sponsor;
- Employment and supervision of apprentices, including requirements for wage progression;
- Registration, record maintenance, reporting and certification; and
- Compliance with equal employment opportunity requirements.

Related instruction is commonly provided in the classroom, but other types of instruction, such as on-line learning and individualized instruction are also permitted. Federal rules recommend that apprentices complete at least 144 hours of related instruction per year, which many apprenticeship programs choose to require. In many apprenticeship programs, the related instruction can also lead to a college degree, thereby providing the individual with an opportunity to earn both academic and occupational credentials simultaneously.

Apprenticeship programs are operated by both the public and private sectors. Employers, employer associations and labor-management committees sponsor and operate apprenticeship programs. Apprenticeship sponsors typically pay the training costs, although some financial incentives and assistance may be available.

There are currently approximately 28,000 registered apprenticeship programs and more than 450,000 active apprentices. In 2007 alone, over 3,000 new programs were added and over 200,000 individuals entered apprenticeship programs. Registered apprenticeship programs and apprentices are found in nearly all industries. The largest number of apprentices are within the building and construction trades—the historical base of apprenticeship. Other occupations that have a significant number of registered apprentices include truck drivers, correction officers, cooks and child care development specialists.

On October 29, 2008, for the first time in 30 years, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) published new regulations to modernize the National Apprenticeship System in the Federal Register. These regulations provide for more flexibility in how Related Technical Instruction (RTI) can be delivered, and provide registration agencies with the option of issuing interim credentials to offer active apprentices official recognition of their accomplishments and equip them with a portfolio of skills and incentives to complete their programs and continue their career preparation. Finally, these regulations allow program sponsors to offer three different ways for apprentices to complete a registered apprenticeship program:

1. The traditional, time-based approach, which requires the apprentice to complete a specific number of on-the-job (OJT) and RTI hours;
2. A competency-based approach, which requires the apprentice to demonstrate competency in the defined subject areas and requires OJT and RTI; and
3. A hybrid approach, which requires the apprentice to complete a minimum number of OJT and RTI hours and demonstrate competency in the defined subject areas.

The Web site for DOL's Office of Apprenticeship, referenced next, contains the new regulations as well as related information.

Where to Go For More Information:

The U.S. Department of Labor maintains a Web site for apprenticeship (www.doleta.gov/OA). Information on state apprenticeship agencies may be accessed through this site or through the National Association of State and Territorial Apprenticeship Directors Web site (www.nastad.us).

DOL also sponsors a Web site called Career Voyages that includes a section on apprenticeship (www.careervoyages.gov/apprenticeship-main.cfm).

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