

REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP: A GUIDE FOR BUSINESS SERVICES REPRESENTATIVES

Business Services Representatives (BSRs) in one-stop centers are the front-line professionals from the local workforce system who bring information about Registered Apprenticeship to employers in their region.

The primary focus of this Guide is to provide information on apprenticeship to BSRs and their supervisors to help them expand work-based training options for job seekers and meet the demands of business for a highly-skilled workforce.

”

For any company or industry to remain competitive in the local or even the global market, it must produce a better product or at least a product as good as its competitors. The key to this goal has always and will always be a well trained workforce.

Bill Marsh, Greater Kansas City Laborers'

Registered Apprenticeship is proven to be a successful way to help workers begin a new career and acquire the knowledge and skills needed to become an expert in that field. Through the apprenticeship model, industry and employers hire the apprentice and provide on-the-job training and skill development, identifying what is to be taught and how long it will take to learn. Apprenticeship offers employers the opportunity to build a workforce trained to meet their specific skill needs.

Apprenticeship can be a key strategy in the local workforce system's toolkit for employer relations. This Guide helps BSRs understand apprenticeship and how it can be effectively integrated into the workforce system's business engagement strategies.

UNDERSTANDING THE APPRENTICESHIP MODEL

The Registered Apprenticeship model combines on-the-job training with job-related classroom instruction and progressively increases the skill levels and wages of apprentices as they advance through the program.

Apprenticeship has been a proven employment and training strategy of the public workforce system for many years and a leader among the broader category of “work-based” learning that includes internships, work experience, and on-the-job and customized training. Work-based learning is experiential and focuses on the way learners develop skills through hands-on training, in addition to any formal learning in which they might participate. Employers are closely engaged in all forms of work-based learning.

The basic components of an apprenticeship program are the same regardless of industry or whether the program is run by an individual employer or a group of employers acting as a partnership. The apprenticeship program components are:

- ***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 sometimes work together through industry associations, apprenticeship councils, labor-management unions, or other consortia to develop and maintain apprenticeship programs.

- ***Structured On-the-Job Training***

Employers develop an on-the-job training plan for apprentices using the identified skill sets for the occupation as a guide. On-the-job training is provided through an experienced mentor.

- ***Related Instruction***

Apprenticeship programs include related instruction that supplements on-the-job learning and provides the technical and academic competencies that apply to the job. This instruction can be delivered by an education and training provider – or by the business itself.

- ***Rewards for Skills Gains***

Apprentices earn competitive wages – a paycheck from day one and incremental raises as skill levels increase.

- ***National Occupational Credential***

Every graduate of a Registered Apprenticeship program receives a nationally-recognized credential that certifies that the worker is fully qualified for that occupation.



EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR APPRENTICESHIP

While the formal apprenticeship system began in America over 75 years ago, apprenticeships have evolved over time to reflect the changing economy and respond to the needs of business for a skilled workforce. For example, while apprenticeship originally began in manufacturing, construction and other skilled trades, today there are apprenticeships in over 1,000 occupations in diverse industries from healthcare to information technology.

Similarly, apprenticeship has evolved from a single employer training apprentices through a traditional model to flexible options for operating apprenticeship programs. Recent trends in apprenticeship and modernized flexible strategies for structuring programs have created expanded opportunities for employers to benefit from this proven model.



- ***Apprenticeship Partnerships***

Groups of employers often collaborate to develop industry partnerships or local apprenticeship consortia as a way to mitigate the time and cost involved in developing a skilled workforce. These business consortia also partner with workforce, education, and community organizations to leverage support and resources for apprenticeship programs.

While this collaboration can take many forms, an example of an apprenticeship partnership is:

- **Individual employers** hire the apprentices, provide the on-the-job training, and pay for related instruction;
- **A community college or other training provider** provides the related instruction to apprentices; and
- **A one-stop center or other workforce intermediary** recruits apprentices and provides basic skills training or related activities.

- ***Program Flexibility***

Apprenticeship is a flexible training strategy that can be customized to meet the needs of any business. It can be integrated into an employer's existing training and human resource development strategies. Businesses can implement "competency-based" programs that allow apprentices to progress at their own pace, using skill assessments to determine advancement. This model joins "time-based" programs that require apprentices to complete a specific number of hours in on-the-job training and related instruction. Employers can use these models, or a hybrid of the two, to customize their apprenticeship programs.

- ***Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)***

WIOA emphasizes work-based learning strategies, deeper business engagement, and industry sector strategies. With business at the center of the model, apprenticeship offers a key strategy for states and local areas to implement this vision for the workforce system under WIOA.



EXPANDING BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT WITH APPRENTICESHIP

Engagement with employers about apprenticeship can be incorporated into the ongoing business engagement efforts of the local workforce system. Apprenticeship can be a value-added strategy for businesses, supplementing traditional tools used by BSRs such as career fairs and recruitment support. A one-stop center may also already use on-the-job training, internships, and/or skills-based training as part of the array of services offered to businesses. BSRs can build on the trust they have developed with employers through these services to engage in a dialogue about apprenticeship.

- **Assessment**

Many local workforce systems involve employers in various levels of their service delivery to job seekers. For example, the assessment and workforce readiness programs offered to job seekers can serve as a foundation for skill-based training, pre-apprenticeship programs, and internships of all varieties. Involving employers in these services can open up conversations that lead to the establishment of apprenticeship programs.

- **Work-based Learning**

BSRs can help employers see the value of apprenticeship by presenting it as an effective work-based learning strategy. They can also offer support from the one-stop center for the apprenticeship program, such as recruiting apprentices, screening and referring quality candidates to employers, and supporting the program through training funds.

- **Incumbent Worker Training**

A focus on incumbent workers is another strategy for engaging employers around apprenticeship. There are many advantages to advancing incumbent workers through career pathways that exist within companies and the apprenticeship model can be an effective strategy to grow highly-skilled, loyal employees for business customers.

STATE APPRENTICESHIP OFFICES ARE VALUABLE PARTNERS TO INCLUDE IN YOUR BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES. BSRs CAN:

- Reach out to state apprenticeship staff, build relationships with them, and learn more about the apprenticeship business.
- Include state apprenticeship staff in meetings with employers to help explain the apprenticeship model and why it is a good fit for their business.

To find apprenticeship contacts in your state, visit <http://www.doleta.gov/oa/contactlist.cfm>.



PROMOTING APPRENTICESHIP TO EMPLOYERS

A BSR can use an array of benefits to promote employer use of apprenticeship as a workforce strategy.

Apprenticeship:

- Allows companies to be proactive in addressing their present and future skill needs...growing their own when the local pool of skilled workers is small.
- Provides employers with additional tools that complement their existing processes of recruitment and advancement to develop highly-trained workers in the midst of a challenging workforce environment.
- Can be used with both current (incumbent) employees and new workers.
- Allows companies to customize both the on-the-job training component and the related instruction to their specific needs.
- Provides a structured and sustainable way to create career pathways in the occupational areas that businesses will need in the future.

APPRENTICESHIP MYTHS

While engaging business sounds straight forward, there are a number of myths about apprenticeship that may have caused employers to overlook this strategy in the past. BSRs may come across these misconceptions when working with employers on apprenticeship and can easily address them with the facts.

- **Myth: All Apprenticeships are Union Jobs**

Since apprenticeship has been traditionally closely associated with the building and manufacturing trades, many employers have a misconception that apprenticeship can only be used in unionized workplaces. Further, non-union companies may see apprenticeship as a context for organizing activity and be resistant for that reason.

Response: Apprenticeship has been widely used in both union and non-union businesses with positive results. If an employer is looking for a workforce solution that is skill-based, can be supported with experiential learning on the job, and will not take years to reap the benefits of a highly-skilled, well-trained workforce, then apprenticeship is the answer.

Action Item: Share apprenticeship success stories that are similar to your current employer's needs. This will highlight success and show them what can be achieved through the use of apprenticeship programs. Read apprenticeship success stories at <http://www.dol.gov/apprenticeship/>.

- **Myth: Apprenticeship is Only for Construction**

A common misunderstanding about Registered Apprenticeship is that it can only be used for construction jobs or other skilled trades – and is not a workforce strategy that will work for in-demand and emerging industries in the economy.

Response: Apprenticeship is a model that can work for any business. Today, there are apprenticeship programs in over 1,000 occupations, including careers in healthcare, information technology, advanced manufacturing, transportation and logistics, and energy.

Action Item: Review the list of apprenticeship occupations from the U.S. Department of Labor at <http://www.doleta.gov/OA/occupations.cfm>.

APPRENTICESHIP MYTHS

- **Myth: One Size Fits All**

Employers tend to think that there is only one way to run an apprenticeship and that it will not fit with their needs. They may not understand the flexibility that exists in the apprenticeship model.

Response: Registered Apprenticeship can be customized to meet the needs of nearly every type of business. Apprenticeship program design is flexible and allows for customization for training and education delivery, and the length of the program, among other key areas. For example, the on-the-job training component of the apprenticeship is tailored to the specific skill requirements of the company, grounding the training in the real work of the business.

Action Item: Spend time listening to the employer's needs. BSRs may be able to link the employer with an educational institution to provide the training they need and identify nationally-recognized credentials and certifications that could benefit the business and its employees.

- **Myth: Apprenticeship Costs**

Many employers resist the idea of starting an apprenticeship program due to the costs involved. Businesses hire workers (or select current workers) to be apprentices and pay their wages. There may be other costs to employers, such as contributing to related instruction. Many of the benefits of the apprenticeship model appear to go to apprentices who will eventually have a credential and the bridge to further continuing education.

Response: The money employers spend on apprenticeship should be seen as an investment. They probably don't consider the benefit of the loyalty of employees that finish the program – approximately 91% of workers that complete apprenticeship programs remain employed. This investment also leads to higher productivity, lower turnover, and less recruitment costs.

Further, an employer does not have to bear all the costs of an apprenticeship program alone. Collaborating with other employers in the same industry can reduce the costs for apprenticeship. The public workforce system, educational institutions, and community organizations can aid in reducing education and training costs and other services for apprentices.

APPRENTICESHIP MYTHS

Action Item: Become familiar with federal resources that can be leveraged to support apprenticeship programs, such as the GI Bill and Federal Student Aid, by reviewing the Federal Resources Playbook for Registered Apprenticeship at <http://www.doleta.gov/oa/federalresources/playbook.pdf>. Some states also provide tax credits and other incentives for businesses for apprenticeships – see if any tax benefits are available in your state at <http://www.doleta.gov/oa/taxcredits.cfm>.

- **Myth: “I’m from the government and I’m here to help”**

Some employers may look at apprenticeship as a “government-sponsored” program – rather than a business-driven model. Further, BSRs who approach employers with a message that “I’m from the government and I’m here to help” are frequently rebuffed by employers who equate government programs with more control, more cost, and certainly more paper work.

Response: Approaching employers about apprenticeship is much easier if BSRs have built a relationship with them that proves that government can actually help. Filling job orders, screening new hires, assessing job seeker skills, offering training to potential employees to meet the employer’s needs, and delivering qualified candidates for open positions, all go a long way in helping employers feel more confident about what the local workforce system has to offer.

Action Item: Embed your business engagement program for apprenticeships in ongoing business engagement strategies for the local workforce system. Build a relationship that employers trust over time.

- **Myth: Temporary Jobs are a Sustainable Workforce Solution**

One of the major barriers to companies using apprenticeship involves the exponential growth of temporary jobs in this country. The paradox of employers complaining about not having skilled people and, at the same time, hiring fewer full-time workers and more temporary workers creates a challenging situation.

Response: BSRs can stress how companies can increase productivity and enhance competitiveness in the global marketplace using apprenticeship. Many companies use staffing services because they are not aware of other options. Underscore the advantages of working with the workforce system and its partners to promote success for employers.

APPRENTICESHIP MYTHS

Action Item: If temporary jobs are prominent in the area, explore the value in establishing relationships with staffing agencies. They could possibly function in a pre-apprenticeship role that would directly connect temporary employees to apprenticeships. Employers that have good relationships with staffing agencies are a good resource to discuss how to make this connection. Remember that the staffing agencies work for the employers and therefore have an incentive to partner to meet their workforce needs.

- **Myth: Poaching Employees**

Many employers are afraid to partner with other companies on apprenticeship because they fear poaching of skilled workers. Employers may think that once they have trained apprentices and the apprentices have a credential in that occupation, they will leave for another company in the partnership.

Response: It's important for employers to look realistically at the risks. The risk of doing nothing is far greater than the risk involved in collaborating with other employers to build a larger pool of skilled workers so that all can benefit. While there is a small possibility that a business may lose an employee, that risk exists in any talent development strategy that builds the skills of a company's workforce.

Action Item: Work with employers to try a new training approach (such as incumbent worker training, on-the-job training, or coordinating apprenticeships with other companies), and they will start to see the common sense value of apprenticeship and be willing to try this approach. Start small, get employers to try it...and be sure that they have a good experience.



DON'T FORGET...

Engaging with companies to participate in apprenticeships is just like the day-in and day-out promotional activities you currently use with employers.

- **Develop a relationship.** You are more likely to succeed in promoting apprenticeship if you have an existing relationship with the employer. If you don't have the relationship, you may need to start with other employer services and smaller-scale training approaches to build employer trust.
- **Know your product.** Many BSRs are not familiar with apprenticeship and will need to increase their knowledge before engaging with employers. There are plenty of online resources available to further your understanding of apprenticeship (see Apprenticeship Resources below). Every state has an apprenticeship office that you can contact with questions.
- **Be persistent.** As with any business engagement effort, getting a positive outcome will likely not happen on the first call, particularly with new employer customers. You may need to find a reason to go back, time and time again. Keep in mind that you may not “sell” the company on apprenticeship immediately, but there is no harm in trying to sell what they are ready to buy... job orders, participation in training, and placements are all good... and maybe in the future... you will have a new apprenticeship partner.

Apprenticeship Resources

- To learn more about Registered Apprenticeship and how the workforce system can use apprenticeship as a workforce strategy for businesses and job seekers, visit the ApprenticeshipUSA Toolkit at www.dol.gov/apprenticeship/toolkit/index.htm.
- For information that can help employers start apprenticeship programs, check out the Quick-Start Toolkit: Building Registered Apprenticeship Programs at http://www.doleta.gov/oa/employers/apprenticeship_toolkit.pdf.
- For questions about Registered Apprenticeship, find the contact for the apprenticeship office in your state at <http://www.doleta.gov/oa/contactlist.cfm>.

