

Apprenticeships: A Pipeline for an Inclusive Recovery

BY SAIGE DRAEGER

Overview

The COVID-19 pandemic upended the global economy in 2020, giving rise to levels of unemployment not seen since the Great Depression. The year brought unprecedented disruptions to normal work routines and daily activities. While some work arrangements are adapting well to telework, others, including apprenticeships, are getting creative.

Pandemic-related job losses have hit some workers harder than others. Between March and April of 2020, workers with disabilities lost nearly 1 million jobs, a 20% decline compared to the 14% decline experienced by workers without disabilities. These losses, coupled with an existing employment disparity between workers with disabilities and workers without, are prompting action. With experts warning of a years-long economic recovery, policymakers are looking to re-employment and retention strategies to stave off the economic fallout. One such strategy is upskilling through apprenticeship and other work-based learning programs.

Formalized in the U.S. in 1937, registered apprenticeships are one of the oldest forms of worker training. Apprenticeships are work-based learning programs completed under the supervision of a master or senior worker that include both a paid work and educational component. In times of economic upheaval, apprenticeship programs are particularly desirable because they provide workers with a job upfront, allowing them to immediately begin collecting wages while receiving classroom instruction. Additionally, these programs are designed to culminate in the completion of a skilled labor certification or even a four-year degree, providing workers with valuable credentials to land well-paying jobs.

Since 2013, public, private, and nonprofit partnerships created 10,800 new apprenticeship programs, increasing apprenticeship by 56%. This upward trend is likely to continue as state and federal entities expand investment in work-based learning, although, given

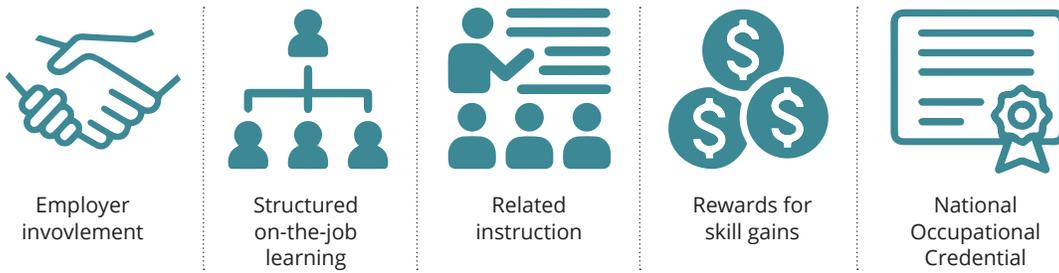


About This Series

This is the last of four reports from NCSL exploring how the COVID-19 pandemic is impacting access to employment opportunities for people with disabilities. The series addresses some of the most significant employment policy issues affecting people with disabilities as Americans adapt to the many challenges COVID-19 presents. This report examines actions taken to increase inclusivity in apprenticeship for people with disabilities, and how these programs can enhance employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

The preceding reports examine state and federal policy actions on teleworking, broadband access, workplace safety, and work accommodations.

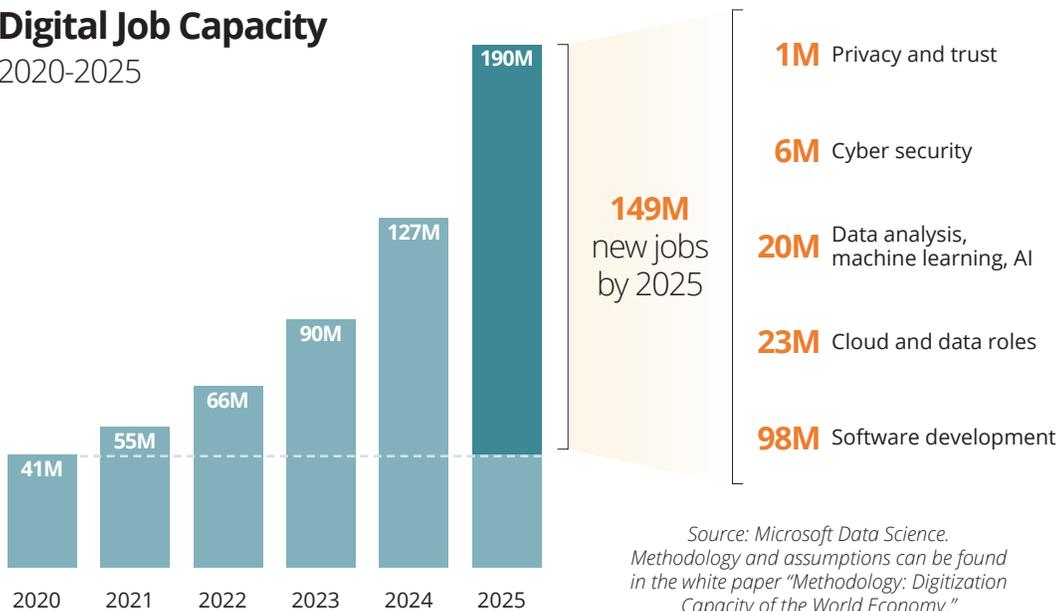
Five Core Components of Registered Apprenticeship



the challenges presented by COVID-19, the future of work-based learning and apprenticeship programs may look different. The earliest state shutdowns forced apprenticeship providers to pivot quickly to distanced alternatives. For many, this included moving formerly in-person learning online. Adjustments such as these—which seek to adapt to the needs of workers—offer an opportunity to broaden our perspective of adaptability for the sake of accessibility. This is particularly true given the changing nature of apprenticeship programs. While work-based learning is most associated with trades, [the technology sector](#) is increasingly interested in leveraging the apprenticeship model to recruit and retain new talent.

Digital Job Capacity

2020-2025



Apprenticeship programs can play a critical role in bolstering workforce inclusion by engaging underserved segments of the workforce facing unique barriers to the labor market. With more than 950 apprenticeable occupations and counting, participants can pursue a wide variety of professions with a broad range of skill levels and ability types. Inclusive apprenticeship programs benefit all workers, including people with disabilities.

Recent efforts by state and federal policymakers aim to incorporate inclusive apprenticeship best practices into existing apprenticeship programs while ensuring that new programs are designed with accessibility and disability supports from the start.

State Action

Interest in apprentices and apprenticeship programs has proliferated among legislatures in recent years. In 2020 alone, state lawmakers enacted at least 494 pieces of legislation relating to apprentices and apprenticeship programs. While most enacted bills include appropriations and tax incentives for apprenticeship programs, lawmakers also focused on making apprenticeship programs more inclusive.

New Jersey led the way in state inclusive apprenticeship efforts, enacting a suite of bills aimed at increasing workforce development opportunities for people with disabilities. [SB 3064](#) establishes a task force within the State Employment and Training Commission to develop industry-specific recommendations for diversifying apprenticeship programs in the state. The bill stipulates that diversity efforts must be based on state demographics and data on historically underrepresented populations, including people with disabilities. Separately, the state also sought to eliminate barriers to apprenticeship programs for certain participants who disproportionately experience them by creating the Apprentice Assistance and Support Services Pilot Program. [SB 3067](#) offers stipends to offset transportation and childcare costs for apprentices. The bill grants stipend priority to workers who are underrepresented in apprenticeship programs, including people with disabilities.

California took similar steps to address apprenticeship inclusion in 2019. California's existing Interagency Advisory Committee on Apprenticeship advises the state's Administrator of Apprenticeship and Chief of the Division of Apprenticeship Standards on major aspects of apprenticeship programs in nonbuilding trades industries. This includes standards, agreements, pre-apprenticeship, certification, and on-the-job training and retraining programs. The passage of [AB 1019](#) modifies committee membership to include both the state's Director of Rehabilitation and executive director of the State Council on Developmental Disabilities. The legislation also tasks the existing committee with creating a separate subcommittee to address apprenticeship opportunities for people with disabilities, and strategies for encouraging greater participation in apprenticeship programs for traditionally underrepresented segments of the labor force.

Federal Action

Federal efforts also support the creation and expansion of apprenticeship programs. In 2014, Congress passed the [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act \(WIOA\)](#), helping workers access employment, education, training, and support services for success in the labor market. WIOA increases coordination between state and federal workforce development agencies and offers funding to states for workforce development activities including support for registered apprenticeships.

WIOA also outlines population specific goals for workers facing unique barriers to employment, including low-income workers, veterans, racial minorities, and people with disabilities. For these workers, WIOA increases access to quality workforce services, preparing them for [competitive integrated employment](#). Under WIOA:

- American Job Centers provide physical and programmatic accessibility to employment and training services for individuals with disabilities.
- State Vocational Rehabilitation agencies set aside at least 15% of their federal award to provide pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities.
- Students with disabilities receive preemployment transition services to successfully obtain competitive integrated employment.
- A committee advises the Secretary of Labor on strategies to increase competitive integrated employment for individuals with disabilities.
- All state workforce development agencies engage employers to improve participant employment outcomes.

To further inclusion efforts, in 2018, the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) launched the [Apprenticeship Inclusion Model \(AIM\) initiative](#). A two-year, joint effort supported by ODEP, Social Policy Research Associates (SPR), Wheelhouse Group (Wheelhouse), and Jobs for the Fu-

ture (JFF), the AIM initiative worked with four selected sites to enhance practices and innovative supports, and expand pathways for people with disabilities into high-demand, well-paying careers. Amazon, Microsoft, the Healthcare Career Advancement Program (H-CAP), and the Industrial Manufacturing Technician Apprenticeship Program (IMT) participated in the initiative, running four apprenticeship pilot programs across 16 localities. Final findings from the AIM initiative include:

- IMT: Served 24 manufacturing pre-apprentices, ranging from 19 to 58 years old. One participant identified as having a disability while another was a veteran. Wage rates ranged from \$15-25.95 per hour.
- H-CAP: Served 39 participants between H-CAP's Philadelphia and New York training fund sites. Disability status and wages not reported.
- Apprenti: Amazon and Microsoft hosted a total of 448 apprentices at the AIM pilot sites. Just over 70% of participants were veterans, and approximately 12% self-identified as people with a disability. Of those who completed the program, 96% secured careers in the technology sector with an average post-program salary of \$66,000.

In 2021, ODEP launched a new initiative, the [Partnership on Inclusive Apprenticeship \(PIA\)](#). In collaboration with employers and apprenticeship intermediary organizations (AIOs), PIA designs inclusive apprenticeship programs that match employer needs while providing people with disabilities valuable credentials for success in high growth industries. PIA employer assistance includes:

- Providing resources, knowledge, and experience to support apprentices with disabilities.
- Working with [AIOs](#) to source diverse candidates.
- Understanding the accessibility needs of apprentices with disabilities.
- Purchasing accessible technology to support the success of all apprentices and employees, including those with disabilities.

Looking Ahead: Opportunities for People with Disabilities

States can continue existing efforts to increase apprenticeship accessibility and pioneer new programs and practices to ensure inclusion for all. The AIM initiative partners offer the following guidance:

- Although not all economic sectors can support remote work, the information technology sector can readily transition to remote training and work processes that support inclusion and accessibility for people with disabilities.
- While many sectors of the American economy prepare to reopen, we can plan for an inclusive restart to move forward when the time is right.
- Amid ongoing discussions on how people work and interact in the workplace, we can also work to ensure that the “new normal” supports more inclusive practices.

While administrators negotiate apprenticeship training in the time of social distancing and pandemic restrictions, the consensus on the efficacy of these programs remains strong. For job seekers, especially those with disabilities, apprenticeships are an invaluable entry point into the workforce.

Additional Resources

- [Apprenticeship](#), U.S. Office of Disability Employment Policy
- [Preparing for Work](#), National Conference of State Legislatures
- [Apprenticeship Works for Business](#), U.S. Office of Disability Employment Policy

Iris Hentze contributed to this report.

*The **State Exchange on Employment & Disability (SEED)**, an initiative funded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), assists states in developing effective and inclusive workforce policies that promote disability employment. Recognizing that every state is unique, SEED offers policy options and resources states can tailor to meet their needs and goals. To this end, SEED partners with leading intermediary organizations that serve as trusted sources of information to state and local policymakers.*

NCSL Contact:

Saige Draeger

Research Analyst II, Employment, Labor and Retirement Program

303-856-1512

saige.draeger@ncsl.org



Tim Storey, Executive Director

7700 East First Place, Denver, Colorado 80230, 303-364-7700 | 444 North Capitol Street, N.W., Suite 515, Washington, D.C. 20001, 202-624-5400

ncsl.org

© 2021 by the National Conference of State Legislatures. All rights reserved.