



by | **Nicholas Wyman**

In recent years, the Obama administration has launched several initiatives to promote jobs-driven training, including expanding funding for community colleges and using incentives to encourage the growth of registered apprenticeship programs. One significant part of this effort is the American Apprenticeship Grants (AAG) competition, which has made available \$100 million in funds to organizations and partnerships that increase apprenticeship opportunities.

The goal of the AAG program, as outlined by the White House, is to expand the number of apprenticeships in high-growth fields such as information technology, health care and advanced manufacturing. Grants are awarded to employers as well as to partnerships among employers, community colleges, local and state governments, labor organizations and nonprofits, with the aim of scaling up successful apprenticeship models and on-the-job training programs that provide clear pathways to in-demand jobs.



# benefits

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## LAUNCHING A MENTORED APPRENTICESHIP MODEL: HOW AND WHY

Apprenticeships, a proven path to middle- and high-skilled careers, should be built on the skills employers need and use effective mentoring, according to the keynote speaker at the Institute for Apprenticeship, Training and Education Programs taking place January 18-20, 2016.

### Benefits of Expanding Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are a time-tested method of training that leads to middle- and high-skilled careers across industries. Upon completing their programs, 87% of apprentices are employed. Their average starting salary is over \$50,000.<sup>1</sup> Every dollar that governments invest in apprenticeships returns \$27 in economic growth.<sup>2</sup> In the United States, apprenticeships historically have been underutilized. For example, it would take a 16-fold increase in the number of U.S. apprenticeships to be on par with Germany.

Expanding apprenticeships has broad economic implications. In competitive European countries such as Switzerland, the Netherlands and Germany, vocational work-study programs are built into school curriculum. Thirty percent to 70% of young people undertake apprenticeships after completing secondary school and, in these countries, youth unemployment rates are half or less than in the U.S. These European skill-building programs are designed around the needs of businesses to sustain economic competitiveness. At the same time, they create logical transitions from school to work, giv-

## takeaways >>

- In European countries with strong vocational work-study programs, youth unemployment rates are half or less than in the United States.
- Apprentices are paid while they learn, so they graduate without student loan debt.
- As baby boomers retire, the shortage of workers with the skills to replace them is expected to grow. The manufacturing industry faces a shortage of two million workers in the next decade.
- Tiered apprenticeships combine academic study, on-the-job training and mentoring.
- Apprenticeships should be long-term commitments with attractive pay and a clear career ladder.
- Mentoring provides both formal training and informal, personalized coaching.

ing the next generation clear pathways to rewarding and well-paying careers.

Apprentices graduate without student loan debt because they are paid while they learn. As national student loan debt passes the \$1 trillion mark, viable “earn-and-learn” methods for training a skilled workforce are gaining traction. More apprenticeships will mean a greater number of clear and affordable pathways to careers for all job seekers, including unemployed youth, underemployed college graduates, military veterans and career changers.

Apprenticeships also are a key tool for addressing talent shortages. Even as unemployment remains high, employers across industries struggle to recruit and retain talent. As more baby boomers march into retirement, critical skills shortages will continue to grow. Too few skilled workers means that projects sit idle and revenue growth falls short of potential. In manufacturing alone, 500,000 jobs currently sit empty, and the industry faces a shortfall of two million workers over the next decade.<sup>3</sup>

While certain positions in business and industry (e.g., engineers, scientists, physicians and senior executives) re-

quire university degrees, most do not. According to Georgetown University’s Center on Education and the Workforce, the U.S. faces a shortfall of five million skilled workers by 2020. Two-thirds of these jobs will not require four-year degrees, but many will require postsecondary education such as an associate degree or apprenticeship.<sup>4</sup>

The future of many high-growth sectors—including information technology, advanced manufacturing, health care and energy—relies on their success in building and continually increasing the skills of a more diverse and permanent workforce. Progressive multiyear apprenticeships are the key to filling this tall order.

### Tiered Apprenticeships Build and Sustain Lifelong Careers

Tiered apprenticeships combine academic study, on-the-job training and mentoring to impart both soft and technical skills, leading to middle-class incomes and beyond. Effectively structured apprenticeship programs engage and retain top talent, providing a career ladder and setting up the current generation of workers to be the managers and leaders of tomorrow.

My own career path began with an apprenticeship, which planted the seeds for my interest in training, mentoring and workforce development. After several years traveling the world as a chef, I pursued a related interest in hospitality human resources and later earned an executive M.B.A. degree. During the next chapter of my career, I began leading the Institute for Workplace Skills and Innovation (IWSI), a nonprofit that trains and employs apprentices throughout Australia. IWSI’s value in a country where the unemployment rate for the 15-to-24 age group is around 15% is priceless.

With IWSI Group, I began conceptualizing structures to teach skills to unemployed individuals and engage them in the workforce. It soon became clear that government agencies were not positioned to finance, orchestrate or scale tiered apprenticeship programs within companies or across industries. These programs need to be built around the actual skills needs of companies—not just for individual apprenticeship modeling but also for large-scale efforts. Companies are the stakeholders most concerned with hiring and retaining top talent. The cornerstone of IWSI’s program is its unique mentoring system, which makes assistance available not only to employees but also to employers.

In the last few years, the Institute, through partners WPC Group and the Skilling Australia Foundation, has worked with dozens of companies, trade associations and governments worldwide to formalize multiyear, progressive apprenticeship programs. At any given time, our organization represents 600 to 700 adults in mentored apprenticeships who learn and earn simultaneously. Eighty-two percent of these apprentices are expected

to complete three- or four-year programs, receive trade certifications and earn successive raises and promotions within the companies that mentored/apprenticed them. Perhaps most notable is that they will not be saddled with university debt. The data we have gathered on learn-and-earn apprenticeships is being used by other organizations committed to training jobless young adults.

Identifying the elements of successful apprenticeship models, such as those in Germany, Australia and other countries, and customizing them into master models for programs in the United States is the focus of my U.S. leadership team. For U.S. employers, the expansion of apprenticeships represents great opportunity even as it poses certain challenges.

Unlike Germany, Switzerland or other European countries where apprenticeship is an integral part of the educational system, the U.S. faces the challenge of innovating new skills-development pathways that will lead directly to the jobs companies need to fill. Therefore, the move to expand apprenticeships requires scaling up existing models and forging a greater number of partnerships between educators and employers. It also requires parents and educators to encourage youth to make the leap into high-growth, skills-based career tracks.

### How to Launch a Mentored Apprenticeship Model

At the core of successful apprenticeship training models are two key components: on-site work and mentoring. Strategically designed apprenticeship programs aggregate, monitor and streamline the changing inputs and relationships required to promote workers and pave paths of sustainable employment.

Apprenticeships that involve mentoring provide trainees with the frame of reference they need to forge a sustainable path, including networks and training resources. Hybrid training, from one-on-one development to being on the job, bridges school and the world of work. Mentors are experienced, trusted facilitators who coach both apprentices and employers.

The following model aligns this dual focus:

- **Demonstrate long-term commitment and investment.** The world of work has been conditioned to react to and prepare for short-term agreements and short-term gains. A hearty program alters this perspective and will be more attractive.

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### Education

**Institute for Apprenticeship, Training and Education Programs**

**January 18-20, 2016, Rancho Mirage, California**

Visit [www.ifebp.org/apprenticeshipinstitute](http://www.ifebp.org/apprenticeshipinstitute) for more information.

### From the Bookstore

**Top Trends in Jointly Managed Apprenticeship Programs—2014 Survey Results**

International Foundation. 2014.

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<< bio



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- **Offer attractive pay and show participants a career ladder** that adds responsibilities and better-paying roles progressively within the hiring enterprise.
- **Expect a time commitment from the apprentice, typically spanning four years.** Lengthy programs are essential for both companies and apprentices to identify and reap the real value of the apprenticeship.
- **Connect each apprentice with a mentor.** Bonds of loyalty and trust that develop between apprentices and their mentors create the basis for employee satisfaction, retention and skill-building progress.
- **Partner with local educational institutions,** including community colleges and vocational-technical schools that provide off-site supplemental education for employees' on-the-job learning.
- **Focus on creating measurable value for the whole enterprise.** Apprenticeships should be designed around a company's business needs. All individuals have a unique mix of innate skills, both soft and tech-

nical, that need to be interpreted and connected to an enterprise's goals. Thus, each apprentice needs a customized performance plan that aligns with enterprise-wide objectives.

The following is a mentor structure that my teams have found to be effective in keeping apprentices engaged and focused on progressing toward their success models:

- **Management level:** Senior manager, executive or business owner who leads the enterprise's workforce development and strategy. This person creates the workforce development policies and the culture to leverage employee buy-in and involvement companywide. This advocate is the most critical in ensuring that the apprenticeship program is successful, documented and sustainable.
- **Supervisory level:** Internal staffers or a contractor who has undertaken a trade apprenticeship and has the appropriate skill level. This person is responsible for the apprentices' day-to-day training at the worksite.

### Recruiting Mentors and Apprentices

To engage participation from mentors and apprentices, an organization must break down clearly how each party benefits and contributes within the company. An apprenticeship needs to be promoted as a true career pathway within a business. To recruit the right apprentices, companies need to highlight the value that apprenticeships offer apprentices themselves.

To attract and engage apprentices, employers should promote the following qualities:

- An apprenticeship is not just a job, but a career pathway.
- Apprentices develop technical skills and work toward sustainable employment while earning money.
- Apprentices have the opportunity to work with more experienced employees and to function in a team-based, cross-cultural workplace.
- Apprentices are exposed to new methodologies and learn how to think analytically, rather than being limited to doing menial tasks.
- Apprentices work under managers who are trained in contemporary leadership.
- Apprenticeships are a viable avenue to experience work-life balance and become an empowered and trusted member of a team.

- Finally, apprentices should look at pay as a training wage and an opportunity to be paid to study, rather than having to spend thousands of dollars to earn a college degree and end up with debt.

Efforts to recruit mentors should highlight the value that mentors offer employers and apprentices:

- With many management roles being eliminated, mentoring often replaces traditional supervisory roles.
- Mentors help company leaders identify and transfer organizational knowledge while supporting, guiding and teaching less experienced employees.
- Mentoring provides formal training and an informal method of educating talent and engages tomorrow's workforce.

There are several styles of mentoring, including structured processes and informal, personalized coaching. My organization uses both approaches but relies on informal approaches to clarify issues that affect an apprentice's progress. Identifying and developing mentors is as important as identifying and developing the apprentices themselves. Mentors need to focus on skills that are in demand in the workplace, on motivation triggers and on how to be a team player.

All stakeholders in the U.S. economy, from workers themselves to companies to communities populated by high numbers of jobless youth, benefit from strategically implemented apprenticeship programs. Expanding successful apprenticeship models across industries is a win-win. Apprenticeships are direct pathways to skilled careers for this generation of job seekers. At the same time, they hold the promise of closing talent shortages for businesses and building a more solid foundation for economic growth. 🎯

### Endnotes

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