



Justin Held, CEBS  
Senior Research Analyst

by | **Justin Held, CEBS**

Already struggling to replace retiring tradespeople, apprenticeship programs expect recruiting and retaining apprentices to continue to be a challenge. However, these programs are engaged in a variety of key recruitment and retention initiatives and predict a positive hiring outlook in their industry in the next two years, according to a recent International Foundation survey.

*Top Trends in Apprenticeship Programs: 2018 Survey Results* is the fifth Foundation survey of apprenticeship programs. A total of 284 training program representatives completed the survey: 207 from the United States and 77 from Canada. The study examines the challenges faced by programs and apprentices, recruitment and retention initiatives, life skills initiatives (including financial literacy), program communication strategies and instructor quality initiatives. The survey also examines program partnerships and demographics at the program and respondent levels.

### Program Challenges

Apprenticeship programs anticipate a variety of challenges during the next two years. At the program level, respondents most often cite difficulties in replacing the number of retired tradespeople, with 83.8% citing the challenge as either very or somewhat prevalent. Responding programs also are finding difficulty in communicating the value of a trade to prospective apprentices (73.2%) and external stakeholders (72.2%). Programs are struggling with the level of government oversight in apprenticeship programs (69.7%) and low levels of quality candidates for training (69.0%). Programs also are challenged by a lack of potential candidates (65.1%) and funding sources (63.7%).

Asked to rate challenges for individual apprentices within the next two years, program represen-

tatives stated that the most prevalent challenge is unemployment due to the cyclical/seasonal work of some skilled trades (59.8%, cited as either very or somewhat prevalent). This is followed closely by prescription drug/opioid abuse (58.4%), an epidemic that is affecting all reaches of the employment relationship. A number of challenges related to economic conditions follow, including decreased job security (54.9%), increased worker hours due to reduced hires (51.0%), unemployment due to economic conditions (50.7%) and difficulty of apprentices finding employment (49.3%). Responding programs are less likely to identify transportation issues (46.1%) or language and communication barriers (45.8%) as prevalent apprentice challenges.

### Recruitment and Retention Initiatives

Apprenticeship program representatives anticipate a number of retention-based challenges within the next two years. The most prevalent challenge is apprentices receiving offers of more steady work in other industry sectors, cited by nearly seven in ten respondents (69.1%) as a very or somewhat prevalent challenge. Apprentice poaching remains a prominent recruiting challenge in apprenticeship programs, cited by 63.7% of respondents. *Poaching* occurs when outside organizations recruit apprentices away from the organization in which they completed their education. Other common retention challenges include the length of time required to produce skilled workers (62.7%) and the physical/hands-on nature of work (60.2%). Less often, respondents cited a lack of available hours (59.5%), low wages/benefit levels during training (58.5%) and safety concerns (54.6%) as prevalent retention challenges.

Responses vary regarding anticipated changes in apprentice recruitment within the next two

years. About three in ten (30.6%) respondents anticipate it will be more difficult to recruit apprentices, while 8.1% anticipate less recruiting difficulty. Respondents cited similar challenges when addressing changes in program retention ability. More than one in four (26.4%) survey respondents stated that within the next two years it will become more difficult to retain apprentices, while 9.2% of respondents stated that it will become easier.

As part of their recruitment efforts, programs are making concerted efforts to recruit specific population groups. More than four in five responding apprenticeship programs are targeting females (81.3%), followed by minorities (74.6%) and military members/veterans (72.9%). Responding programs also make efforts to recruit members of Aboriginal/Native American populations (41.5%) and immigrants (30.3%). Because of these efforts and general economic conditions, more than seven in ten (71.8%) responding programs anticipate a positive hiring outlook in their industry in the next two years.

### Life Skills Initiatives

Life skills extend beyond job-related duties and are focused on the personal development of apprentices. More than three in five (60.6%) responding programs offer these types of skills training, with an additional 18.0% considering adding components in the future.

Programs that offer life skills training typically address a variety of com-

ponents. The most commonly cited were work skills/behavior (84.3%), mathematical (83.1%), personal safety (75.6%), leadership (72.1%) and financial literacy (70.9%) skills. More than one-half of programs that offer life skills training address communication/social skills (64.0%), union citizenship (63.4%) and computer/technology skills (56.4%).

Programs that offer financial literacy initiatives were asked a number of followup questions regarding program offerings, instructors, success and future outlook. Financial literacy initiatives most commonly include instruction on budgeting/spending plans (86.1%), savings (59.8%), borrowing/loans (55.7%), credit cards (54.9%), annuities (48.4%) and managing a bank account/checkbook (44.3%). A number of other topics are addressed, including insurance (40.2%), spending (39.3%), retirement plan benefits (29.5%), investment management and asset allocation (27.0%), avoiding scams/identity theft (26.2%), interest/compounding (25.4%) and preretirement financial planning (25.4%).

Financial literacy programs use a variety of internal and external parties to deliver content. More than one-half (53.3%) of programs utilize external experts, followed closely by union staff (44.3%) and training fund staff, either without (37.7%) or with (19.7%) financial literacy certification.

A majority of respondents with financial literacy programs consider



their programs to be very or somewhat successful (5.7% and 50.8%, respectively). Finally, all survey respondents were asked whether they planned on changing their emphasis on financial literacy initiatives in the future. In the next two years, more than one-half (56.4%) of responding programs anticipate increasing their emphasis on these initiatives, while 43.6% of respondents do not expect a change in emphasis.

### Communication Initiatives

Responding apprenticeship programs use a wide variety of methods to communicate with their apprentices. The most common methods include e-mail messages, used by almost nine in ten (89.4%) respondents, followed by print material distributed on site (87%). Three in four utilize text messages (75.0%), followed by print material sent to homes (71.5%), publicly accessible external websites (70.4%) and

social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram (65.1%). As a followup, respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of their specific communication strategies. The most effective communication strategies are text messages (79.8%), e-mail messages (69.3%) and print material distributed on site (65.2%). Programs were less likely to find success with internal websites (55.8%), video (55.8%) and social media channels (55.8%).

### Partnerships

Apprenticeship programs collaborate extensively with various external partners to provide education, job assistance, the use of facilities and funding opportunities. Nearly three in four (73.6%) responding programs partner with labor organizations, followed by construction contractors (71.5%), technical/community colleges (59.5%) and high schools/school boards (58.5%). Programs often partner with colleges/universities (51.8%), community-based organiza-

tions (50.4%) and preapprenticeship programs (45.8%). More than two in five responding programs partner with government agencies (41.9%) and vocational schools (41.9%).

The nature of these formal partnerships varies. Of programs that partner with external organizations, almost two in three (65.2%) do so for recruitment and outreach purposes. More than one-half of responding programs partner for education/instruction-based purposes (57.8%), followed by job- (44.1%) and funding-related (35.2%) purposes, completing an articulation agreement (33.3%) or the use of facilities (31.5%). Nine in ten (90.0%) programs involved in partnerships stated that the partnerships were either very or somewhat effective.

Top Trends in Apprenticeship Programs: 2018 Survey Results is available free to members at [www.ifebp.org/apprenticeship2018](http://www.ifebp.org/apprenticeship2018). Nonmembers can purchase the survey through the Foundation Bookstore at [www.ifebp.org/books.asp?7938E](http://www.ifebp.org/books.asp?7938E).

# benefits

MAGAZINE

Reproduced with permission from *Benefits Magazine*, Volume 55, No. 3, March 2018, pages 8-10, published by the International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans ([www.ifebp.org](http://www.ifebp.org)), Brookfield, Wis. All rights reserved. Statements or opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views or positions of the International Foundation, its officers, directors or staff. No further transmission or electronic distribution of this material is permitted.



pdf/218