Apprenticeships: Rediscovering an Ancient Path to Sustainable Skilled Careers

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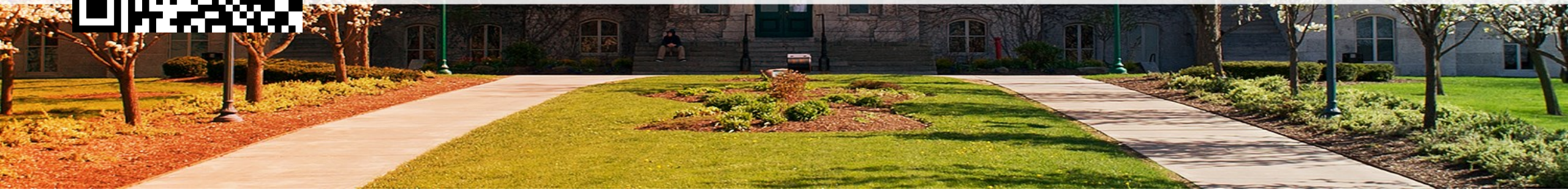

Overview

- Prior to the current administration, Federal and State funding had been used to support registered apprenticeship programs
  - Are those investments benefiting people with disabilities?
  - Do people with disabilities face barriers to participation?
  - What policy levers can be pulled to increase participation?
- Research approach
  - Desk review
  - Analysis of Registered Apprenticeship microdata
  - Interviews with experts
  - Interviews and presentation with VR agencies

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Importance in current policy environment

Bipartisan-Included in Project 2025 Blueprint

Research approach-Case example of identifying multiple potential policy levers to affect change

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What is a Registered Apprenticeship (RAP)?

- EARN WHILE YOU LEARN
- Combination of classroom instruction and on-the-job training
- Length of the program varies by industry. Generally, around 4 years (but can be 1-5 years)
- Occupational Credential

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Not your grandfather's apprenticeship

- Numbers
  - Roughly 680,000 current apprentices in the US in 2024 (an 85% increase over the past 10 years)
  - Number with disabilities is unknown. Maybe around 2.3%
- Wide range of Careers
  - Half are in Construction and Extraction.
  - Educational Services (17%)
  - Health Care 5%)
- Range of sponsors
  - Union (58%)
  - United Services Military Apprenticeship Program (16% of all apprentices)
- Route to Apprenticeships
  - Union, military, job search, current employer.
  - Apprentices have varying levels of education

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Are people with disabilities participating in apprenticeship programs?

- Requirement to ask disability questions began in 2019.
- By 2024, almost half of the 679,000 apprentices had reported a disability status (yes or no) based on DOL self ID form.
- Among those who reported a disability status, 2.3% reported having a disability. Lower than the disability rate for 20-34-year-olds on the BLS (3.8%).
- Apprentices with disabilities are highly concentrated in a small number of programs.
  - Two hundred programs (1.1% of all programs) accounted for over 60% of all apprentices with disabilities.
  - Among these larger programs, almost half include a focus on veterans.

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Characteristics of apprentices with disabilities

RAPIDS data 2024

	No Disability	With Disability
Race/Ethnicity		
White Non-Hispanic	55%	62%
Black or African American	11%	13%
Hispanic or Latino (Any race)	25%	15%
Gender		
Female	13%	21%
Male	85%	77%
Age		
Ages 24 and Under	42%	30%
Ages 25-54	56%	66%
Ages 55+	2%	4%

	No Disability	With Disability
Education		
Less than HS graduate	4%	3%
HS graduate or equivalent	68%	54%
Some College or Assoc	16%	29%
Bachelor's degree or higher	5%	9%
Veteran Status		
Veteran	6%	28%
Non-Veteran	91%	66%

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Structure of the Registered Apprenticeship System—Potential Partners (1)

- **Oversight Agency:** Registers and oversees programs,--29 states have a State Apprenticeship Agency (SAA). 22 states are overseen by U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Apprenticeship (OA)
- **Intermediaries:** helps businesses create, launch, and expand apprenticeship programs
- **Sponsors:** Overall responsibility for the apprenticeship program. May be a single business, consortium, union, community college etc.
- **Training providers:** Required technical instruction is most commonly provided by Community colleges, but may also be provided by employers, unions, or industry associations.

Structure of the Registered Apprenticeship System—Potential Partners (2)

- **Unions:** Half of apprentices are in programs with union involvement and unions affect apprenticeship policy (Apprentices with disabilities less likely than other to be in union apprenticeships).
- **Employers:** May sponsor their own RA or work with a sponsor
- **Department of Veterans Affairs, Workforce Development Boards, AJCs, and Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies:** may provide funding, may be working with employers to create or fill apprenticeship opportunities.
- **State Governments:** May prioritize apprenticeship through tax credits, state and local wage subsidies. May use the bully pulpit.
- **US Department of Labor:** May provide financial grant funding

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Focus on one part of the puzzle--Challenges Facing VR agencies

Where are the potential apprentices?

- Do VR clients want to go into apprenticeships?
- It is a long-term commitment
- Apprenticeship is one of many career pathway opportunities. Is this the right one?
- Lack of knowledge about apprenticeship opportunities. Need training for counselors to transmit info
- Stigma

Where are the apprenticeships?

- Where are the apprenticeships and how can we place VR clients in apprenticeships?
- Some apprenticeship opportunities are slotted for incumbent employees. Difficult to know which jobs may lead to an apprenticeship.
- Employers may be hesitant to bring people with disabilities into apprenticeship programs.
- Some states are trying to create new apprenticeships for VR clients, others are trying to connect VR clients to existing programs. Both approaches have challenges

Conclusion

- Apprenticeships may bridge the gap between jobseekers with disabilities and the evolving demands of employers.
- Although the size of the program is limited, it is critical that this opportunity is fully accessible to people with disabilities.
- Advocates need to keep an eye on how the system evolves to ensure ADA compliance.

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Contact Info and Disclaimer

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