

YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP



Introduction

Youth Apprenticeship is an emerging Apprenticeship program model that is specifically designed for young adults ages 16-24 and provides structured pathways that help to develop new skills and gain work experience through a combination of paid employment, mentorship, work based learning, and related instruction.

Youth Apprenticeships are an “Options Multiplier” which prepares young adults with a range of education and career opportunities, which can include full-time employment, full time college, a mix of part-time training and employment, or a Registered Apprenticeship program leading to a more advanced occupation.

Many families see traditional post-secondary education as the only route to economic mobility for their young adults, yet today’s workforce demands are reshaping what success after high school can look like.



The Youth Apprenticeship Landscape

The definition of a Youth Apprenticeship varies from state to state, as there is no federal definition of what a Youth Apprenticeship is. Some states have different names to define what a Youth Apprentice is and what their work requirements are. Youth Apprenticeship can also be referred to as Career and Technical Education (CTE) Apprenticeship, Registered Youth Apprenticeship, Quality Pre-Apprenticeship or Modern Youth Apprenticeship.



You can discover what definition and requirements your state has for Youth Apprenticeships at <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/about-us/apprenticeship-system>.

There are two traditional types of Apprenticeship:

- 1** **Registered Apprenticeship (RA)** - Has met the Department of Labor (DOL) definition and had met the approval and has been designated a state. Apprenticing is seen as a job and is occupationally specific with the learner receiving an industry recognized credential.
- 2** **Pre-Apprenticeship** - No federal definition and varies among states, not seen as a job but are designed to prepare people to succeed in RA. Sometimes paid and sometimes receives credentials.

Youth fit into both Registered Apprenticeships and Pre-Apprenticeships. Youth Apprentices typically must be 16+ years old to enter these programs. Keep in mind that Youth Apprentices cannot typically work full-time hours due to state requirements and may be restricted by high school diploma or GED entry requirements.



The Options Multiplier: Pathways to Career Readiness

As the workforce evolves, being “career ready” means more than earning a diploma, it means gaining real skills, experience, and direction before high school graduation. Youth Apprentice Pathways give students structured, hands-on opportunities that combine learning with paid employment. They not only build industry-relevant skills but also provide recognized experience and credentials that can count toward future education or career goals. By following a pathway, whether it is Apprenticeship or not, students expand their options and prepare for multiple post-graduation opportunities.

Youth Apprenticeship Pathways have several different options. Full-time Employment, Youth Apprentices can start their careers with paid On the Job Learning (OJL) and gain industry experience. This option is dependent on working requirements. Full-time Education, Youth Apprentices can enroll full-time at a post-secondary institution such as a community college, vocational school, or university to build on college credits that they earned through their Youth Apprenticeship program. Employment and Education, Youth Apprentices can continue working and enroll in college courses to complete a degree. This can take many forms, including stackable credentials, flexible work-based learning models, and dual enrollment,

representing just a few of the many ways Youth Apprentices can engage in pathways.

As the workforce evolves, we need to shift the mindset that career readiness depends solely on traditional post-secondary degrees or singular credentials. Youth can achieve economic mobility through pathways that offer comparable skills, credentials, and earning potential. Through these pathways, students can earn, learn, and step into careers that provide both growth and opportunity.



Restorative Workforce Pathways

Restorative Workforce Pathways provide supportive and structured routes to employment for Youth who face barriers to education and career advancement. This includes **Opportunity Youth**, who are youth ages 16-24 who are not currently connected to school or work, but also includes youth who are navigating justice involvement, housing instability, foster care transitions, economic hardship, or limited access to workforce opportunities. Through education, paid work experience, and wraparound supports, these models create sustainable pathways to long-term employment and mobility. **Examples of coordinated pathway programs →**

- **Youth Build** – provides community-based education and pre-apprenticeship training for young people ages 16–24 who have left school without a diploma, combining academic instruction, occupational skills training, and leadership development to prepare participants for employment, credentials, and long-term career pathways.
- **Workforce Pathways for Youth (WPY)** - expands job training and career-connected opportunities for young people by partnering out-of-school organizations with local workforce systems to deliver skill development, work experience, and industry-aligned pathways that prepare youth for long-term employment.
- **Re-Entry Employment Opportunities (REO)** - provides funding to develop and test workforce strategies that improve employment outcomes for justice-involved youth and adults by building partnerships and scaling proven community-based models within the public workforce system.



Why Wage Matters

Workforce development programs like Apprenticeships and CTE programs are proven models for promoting economic mobility. However, many participants, especially youth, face significant barriers that make earning a wage essential to their ability to participate and succeed. Barriers such as tuition, transportation, childcare, housing, and the responsibility to contribute to family income, can affect whether youth continue their education.

“Earn and Learn” programs enable youth to build work experience and skills while pursuing their education, offering the flexibility needed to balance academic and employment responsibilities. These programs are made possible through mutually beneficial partnerships between industry employers and educational institutions. By addressing barriers to participation, industries can strengthen their talent pipelines, learning institutions can improve retention of youth learners, and youth can gain paid work experience, credentials, and a clearer pathway to career advancement.



	Youth Apprenticeship	Pre-Apprenticeship	Internship
Wage	Paid a stipend or starting hourly wage On the Job Learning (OJL) under the supervision of employee mentors	Paid a stipend, starting hourly wage, or unpaid On the Job Learning (OJL) under the supervision of employee mentors	Paid a stipend or typically unpaid
Credential	A portable, industry recognized credential and postsecondary credit	May or may not lead to a credential but not always nationally recognized	No credential is earned but can add to student’s coursework requirements for credit



Strength Through Partnerships: The Workforce Intermediary Model

Workforce intermediaries bring together multiple partner organizations in the workforce system align needs and expectations, coordinate stakeholders, reduce development and administrative burdens, and promote successful workforce outcomes. The intermediary can be one of the core partners or be another organization such as a nonprofit or labor organization like a workforce board.

Community Action Agencies (CAAs) are valuable partners to engage in a workforce intermediary and provide wraparound services that can be missing link to participant success.

Agencies can help address needs that impact workforce participation, such as reliable transportation, safe housing, food security, financial coaching, and support with books and/or technology. Together, these services reduce barriers to employment, expand access to quality jobs, and strengthen outcomes for employers, educational institutions, and workforce partners.

Taking on workforce initiatives doesn't have to be a solo venture! You can discover what partners align with your workforce goals or discover an existing workforce intermediary by using tools like Partner Finder:

<https://www.apprenticeship.gov/partner-finder> or

Workforce Development Board Finder:

<https://www.careeronestop.org/LocalHelp/WorkforceDevelopment/find-workforce-development-boards.aspx>.

Figure 1 | Core Partners in Youth Apprenticeship





Pickens County Community Action Committee

Carrollton, Alabama

In rural Carrollton, Alabama, **Pickens County Community Action Committee (PCCAC)** is making a positive impact through the Department of Labor's **YouthBuild** program. YouthBuild at PCCAC serves young adults ages 16–24 who need support with career development, earning a high school diploma or GED, or developing the workforce skills necessary to secure employment.

With a program focus on home rehabilitation, students are able to earn certifications in construction and receive on-the-job-training in areas such as carpentry or drywall as well as receive a **Pre-Apprenticeship Certificate Training (PACT)** offered through the **Home Builders Institute (HBI)**. Through strong partnerships with community colleges and apprenticeship trade schools, participants can explore and advance along multiple career pathways, gaining the education, training, and credentials needed to achieve sustainable employment and economic self-sufficiency.

Through YouthBuild, PCCAC helps remove obstacles to employment by offering transportation assistance, help obtaining identification, soft skills training, interview clothing, mental health services, and a paid weekly stipend, empowering participants to focus on their education and career goals.



This resource is supported by Grant Number 90ET0502 from the ACF Office of Community Services, Community Services Block Grant within the Administration for Children and Families, a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Neither the Administration for Children and Families nor any of its components operate, control, are responsible for, or necessarily endorse this resource (including, without limitation, its content, technical infrastructure, and policies, and any services or tools provided). The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Administration for Children and Families and the ACF Office of Community Services, Community Services Block Grant.