



ABA Quick Tips

Developing Apprenticeship Standards

The purpose of this **Quick Tip** is to offer ABA grantees promising practices for developing apprenticeship standards. Standards are the documentation an apprenticeship sponsor compiles that details the elements of their apprenticeship program. These elements include the minimum requirements and qualifications for participation, the proposed on-the-job training and related training instruction (RTI), selection procedures, and ways apprentices can claim credit for previous related experience. Standards are submitted to the federal Office of Apprenticeship (OA) or the State Apprenticeship Agency (SAA), depending on the state, to register the program.

Quick Tips offer short, easy to use strategies, recommendations, and tips for Apprenticeship Building America (ABA) grantee consideration, exploration, and use. The tips and recommendations listed below draw from the expertise of ABA Technical Assistance Coaches, research, and grey literature (see references below).

Prepare to Develop Your Standards

Sponsors can do some pre-work to make the standards development process more efficient.

- ▶ **Explore what needs to be included in a set of standards.** OA has an online [Standards Builder](#) that walks sponsors through documenting (building) their standards. This can be used as starter template in both OA and SAA states. There is an accompanying [Standards Builder User Guide](#) that sponsors can review in the preparation stage to examine what needs to be included in apprenticeship standards. Since requirements may vary in SAA states, sponsors in those states should also review their state's SAA website for more details. Another helpful resource is Urban Institute's [Starting a Registered Apprenticeship Program: A Guide for Employers and Sponsors](#).
- ▶ **Review OA guidance regarding apprentice to journey worker ratios.** While a 1:1 apprentice to journey worker ratio is typical, sponsors can propose an expanded ratio, meaning a ratio of more than one apprentice to one journey worker. As described in DOL [Circular No. 2021-02](#) high hazard industries and certain collective bargaining agreements require a 1:1 ratio, however, if sponsors of occupations in other industry sectors provide adequate justification and empirical evidence, an expanded ratio will be considered. The justification and empirical evidence should include "ratios for approved programs within the same occupations in the same geographic areas; ratio practices in the occupation on a national basis; the level of physical engagement; the level of supervision in similar environments, and relevant industry/occupational studies" (U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration, Office of Apprenticeship, 2021). Sponsors should research state ratio requirements since they can vary.
- ▶ **Research apprentice wages for your targeted occupation.** As you consider a progressive wage scale, find out the national averages through [O*NET](#) and going rates in your local area. Your local workforce investment board is a good source for local apprenticeship data. Programs that begin at minimum wage, do not include timely wage progressions, or do not appropriately compensate for previous relevant experience may deter prospective apprentices. With competitive, progressive wage schedules, sponsors and employers can bolster their programs by training more apprentices and rewarding them for their progress. (Urban Institute, 2021).
- ▶ **Decide on the apprenticeship approach.** Deciding if you will be using a time-based, competency-based or a hybrid apprenticeship approach¹ will enable you to access resources that align to your approach, saving you time and effort in developing apprenticeship standards. The next section provides details and links to these resources.

¹ With a **Time-based** approach, apprentices complete a required number of hours in on-the-job training and related instruction. With a **Competency-based** approach, apprentices progress at their own pace—and demonstrate competency in skills and knowledge, through proficiency tests, but are not required to complete a specific number of hours. With a **Hybrid** approach, apprentices complete in a range of minimum and maximum hours and successful demonstration of identified and measured competencies.



Take Advantage of Available Resources

Unless you are developing apprenticeship standards for a new occupation not currently on the OA- approved occupation list, take advantage of available resources rather than starting from scratch.

- ▶ **Sample Work Process Schedules.** Sponsors should review available work process schedules based on the apprenticeship approach:
 - *For a time-based approach:* Review the work process schedules in the [US DOL Work Processes Drop-box](#). All the work processes are OA-approved Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs).
 - *For a competency-based approach:* Check out the [Urban Institute Competency-Based Resource Library](#) funded by OA to help streamline the standards development process. The frameworks have been drafted in cooperation with employers, educators, and other workforce and training experts. The Frameworks include work process schedules and full competency-based frameworks for a wide range of occupations.
 - *For a hybrid approach:* Use a framework from the Urban Institute's Competency-Based Resource Library if one is available for your targeted occupation. Then, review sample time-based work process schedules from the US DOL Work Process Drop Box. See what is applicable from both sources.
- ▶ **The Registered Apprenticeship Standards Library.** Urban Institute's Registered Apprenticeship Occupations and Standards Center of Excellence includes the [Registered Apprenticeship Standards Library](#) which includes national guidelines, occupational frameworks, and apprenticeship program standards for hundreds of apprenticeships.
- ▶ **Sample RTI Outlines.** Use one of Urban Institute's Full Competency Frameworks (if it is available for your targeted occupation) for a sample RTI outline. You can use as is or tweak based on local needs. These are applicable to RTI for all apprenticeship approaches.
- ▶ **Healthcare-Specific Standards.** If your focus is a healthcare occupation, use the [Healthcare Career Advancement Program \(H-CAP\) National Library](#). This Library is organized by occupation and has sample work processes, RTI outlines, and more.

Additional Considerations

National Program Standards (NPS) or National Guidelines for Apprenticeship Standards (NGS) apply to some apprenticeship sponsors. Below are the situations where these may apply.

- ▶ **National Program Standards (NPS):** NPS apply to apprenticeship sponsors that are national in scope, such as a national employer, trade or industry association, labor organization, education institution or consortium. The sponsor submits their standard to OA. If registration is approved by OA, SAAs must grant reciprocal approval for the standard and the sponsor does not need to register at state level. The exception to this is if there are state requirements that make it necessary to adapt the standard, for example wage or ratio regulations in the state. Sponsor seeking NPS registration need to submit a plan that demonstrates they are addressing the NPS criteria outline in DOL [Circular No. 2022-01](#).
- ▶ **National Guidelines for Apprenticeship Standards (NGS):** NGS may be a good fit for apprenticeship sponsors that have national scope and want to develop an adaptable [standards template](#) for their local affiliates to register programs in their states. As stated by OA, "NGS provides a nationally-certified—but locally registered—framework for occupational standards, while also preserving programmatic flexibility to account for local needs and requirements." For NGS, the apprenticeships are registered on a state-by-state basis, either with OA or SAA, depending on the state. There is no national registration. For guidance about NGS, review DOL [Circular No. 2022-02](#).



References

- ApprenticeshipUSA. Standards Builder. <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/employers/registered-apprenticeship-program/register/standards-builder>
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- U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. *Building Registered Apprenticeship Programs: A Quick-Start Toolkit*. https://www.doleta.gov/oa/employers/apprenticeship_toolkit.pdf
- U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration, Office of Apprenticeship. *Circular 2021-02 Guidelines for Reviewing Apprentice to Journeyworker Ratio Requests*. <https://www.swacca.org/media/1259/dol-circular-2021-02-guidelines-for-reviewing-apprentice-to-journeyworker-ratio-request-1-13-21.pdf>
- WorkforceGPS. Developing Apprenticeship Standards and Work Processes. <https://apprenticeship.workforcegps.org/resources/2017/11/30/09/34/Example-Apprenticeship-Standards-and-Work-Processes>

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