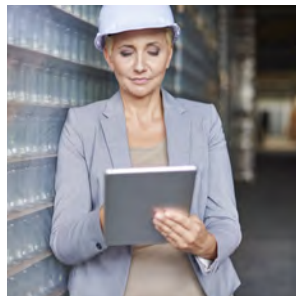
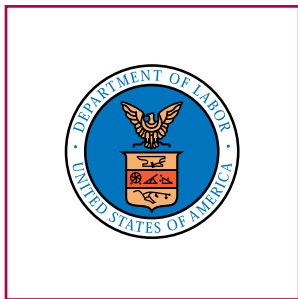


PRE-APPRENTICESHIP: PATHWAYS FOR WOMEN INTO HIGH-WAGE CAREERS

A Guide for Community-Based Organizations and Workforce Providers





Introduction to Guide

Registered Apprenticeship is a solid pathway to skilled jobs that combines on-the-job learning with related classroom instruction. Apprenticeship is an “earn and learn” model that provides workers with income while they learn on the job. Apprenticeship programs are increasingly found not only in the Skilled Trades, but also in Advanced Manufacturing, Healthcare, Information Technology and a host of additional fields with career opportunities that provide wages that allow people to be self-sufficient. Quality pre-apprenticeship programs prepare workers to enter and succeed in Registered Apprenticeship programs.

All across America, community leaders are coming together to expand apprenticeship training. In fact, the President has set a goal of doubling the number of apprentices. A significant element of this focus on expanding apprenticeship is to increase the diversity of apprentices. Currently, women comprise only 6 percent of apprentices, although they make up 47 percent of the U.S. labor force. Pre-apprenticeship programs can increase opportunities for better-paying jobs for women.

Community-based organizations (CBOs) and other workforce intermediaries are often the providers of pre-apprenticeship services. This guide will offer information and resources to help organizations develop, build and sustain quality pre-apprenticeship programs that prepare individuals for Registered Apprenticeship programs in non-traditional, high-wage occupations. While the focus is on expanding apprenticeship opportunities for women – disadvantaged, low-wage jobs, or those interested in a career change – these strategies can also be applied to other groups seeking quality, family-sustaining jobs. Additional resources and tools used by successful pre-apprenticeship programs are available at <http://www.doleta.gov/oa/preapp>.

Introduction to Apprenticeship and Pre-Apprenticeship

What is Registered Apprenticeship?

Registered Apprenticeship is an employer-driven training model. Apprenticeship programs provide on-the-job learning from an experienced mentor and related classroom instruction on the technical and academic aspects of the job. The training is rooted in industry skill standards and competencies. Apprenticeship programs help companies successfully recruit, develop and retain a highly-skilled workforce for the jobs they need filled.

Registered Apprenticeship is the term used for apprenticeship programs that have a formal structure, in which employers have established learning standards that meet national and state quality expectations. When individuals successfully complete a Registered Apprenticeship program, they receive a national credential that is recognized anywhere in the industry.

Apprentices earn a paycheck as soon as they begin an apprenticeship, so they are earning while they build their skills and knowledge. Apprentices also earn progressively higher wages as their skills develop. The apprenticeship training model works for a broad variety of industries and there are apprenticeship programs in over 1,000 occupations, and growing. Programs vary in length and may be as short as one year or as long as six years.

REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS

You may encounter “informal” apprenticeship programs as you explore the field. To maximize the benefit to your participants, ensure the employers you work with have registered their apprenticeship programs with the U.S. Department of Labor’s (USDOL) Office of Apprenticeship or your State Apprenticeship Agency. Registration demonstrates the program has met national standards for quality and rigor. These programs may display the ApprenticeshipUSA logo to indicate they have met national standards for registration with USDOL or a State Apprenticeship Agency. You can look up programs that are registered nationally at <http://oa.doleta.gov/bat.cfm>.

What is Pre-Apprenticeship?

Pre-apprenticeship is a program or set of services designed to prepare individuals to enter and succeed in a Registered Apprenticeship program. A pre-apprenticeship program, by definition, has a documented partnership with at least one Registered Apprenticeship program. Quality pre-apprenticeship programs are a starting point toward a successful career path for under-represented job seekers (such as disadvantaged women and men, individuals with disabilities and others) who may not be aware of this approach to obtain good jobs with opportunities for advancement. Pre-apprenticeships help individuals meet the entry requirements for apprenticeship programs and ensure they are prepared to be successful in their apprenticeship.

There are a wide variety of pre-apprenticeship programs serving a broad range of populations. Some programs focus on serving a specific target population, such as veterans, while many pre-apprenticeship programs focus on youth. Two national federally-funded youth programs that exemplify characteristics of quality pre-apprenticeship programs are [Job Corps](#) and [YouthBuild](#). However, pre-apprenticeship is not only for youth; this strategy is also effective with career changers and adults with barriers to employment.

This guide focuses on pre-apprenticeship strategies for disadvantaged women entering non-traditional occupations. The term “non-traditional” refers to occupations in which women comprise less than 25 percent of the total workers, such as Construction, Advanced Manufacturing and Information Technology. Many of these fields provide quality benefits and high, family-sustaining rates of pay.

Framework for Quality Pre-Apprenticeship Programs

USDOL, in partnership with businesses, labor organizations, workforce organizations and other stakeholders, developed a framework for pre-apprenticeship programs. This framework identifies the characteristics of quality pre-apprenticeship programs, as follows:



- › Training and curriculum based on industry standards, approved by the employer operating the apprenticeship program (typically referred to as a program sponsor).
- › Strategies that increase apprenticeship opportunities for disadvantaged individuals, and those with limited training or limited credentials. These involve:
 - » Strong recruitment efforts for under-represented populations
 - » Education and pre-vocational services that prepare participants to meet the minimum qualifications for entry into a Registered Apprenticeship program
 - » Activities introducing participants to apprenticeships and assisting them to apply for Registered Apprenticeship programs
- › Access to support services that help participants remain in the program (such as child care, transportation, counseling and ongoing career services).
- › Collaboration with program sponsors to promote apprenticeship to other employers as a quality approach to attain and retain a skilled workforce.
- › Hands-on experience that simulates the work performed in the apprenticeship, while observing proper supervision and safety protocols.
- › Formal agreements, wherever possible, with apprenticeship sponsors for entry into Registered Apprenticeship programs upon successful completion of the pre-apprenticeship program.

For additional information on elements of a quality pre-apprenticeship program, please review USDOL’s [Training and Employment Notice 13-12](#).

Providing Pre-Apprenticeship Services

CBOs are well-positioned to play a strong role in preparing under-represented populations for apprenticeship programs. They are well-known in communities and are frequently the entry point for under-skilled individuals and other targeted groups seeking support to develop a solid career path.

Many workforce-oriented CBOs already provide services such as career counseling, remedial math and language skills, job readiness skills and referral to and placement in training programs and jobs. These are the elements necessary for pre-apprenticeship programs targeting disadvantaged participants, as well. From a Green Building Technology pre-apprenticeship in New York, to an Advanced Manufacturing program in Ohio and many other programs across the country, CBOs are using the pre-apprenticeship model to help women successfully enter new careers in non-traditional occupations. These examples, and more, follow.

Expanding Opportunities for Women in Non-Traditional Occupations

OCCUPATION/INDUSTRY	EXAMPLES OF CBO PROGRAMS
TRANSPORTATION/HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION	Oregon Tradeswomen Inc. (Portland, OR) runs a core construction pre-apprenticeship program. They work closely with the Oregon Department of Transportation to ensure pre-apprenticeship training meets the needs of the Registered Apprenticeship program.
GREEN BUILDING TECHNOLOGY	Nontraditional Employment for Women (New York, NY) has developed a core construction program that incorporates green building technology, thereby supporting businesses’ needs for qualified workers to retrofit commercial buildings.
CARPENTRY, ELECTRICAL, PLUMBING	West Virginia Women Work (Morgantown, WV) has three skilled trades training sites that provide a free 11-week pre-apprenticeship and skills training program for women. This program has an 80 percent job placement rate into Registered Apprenticeship programs and entry-level construction jobs.
ADVANCED MANUFACTURING	Chicago Women in Trades (Chicago, IL) is re-engineering its welding pre-apprenticeship program based on the National Institute for Metalworking Skills, American Welding Society and related industry specifications. These include an increased use of precision technology.
ADVANCED MANUFACTURING	Partners for a Competitive Workforce (Cincinnati, OH) is planning an approach through which women will learn manufacturing skills while their children engage in science, technology, engineering and math activities.



Women in Pre-Apprenticeship Programs

Customers may come to your organization for help addressing challenges to success in employment. With your expertise in delivering these services, you will be well-positioned to support participants in pre-apprenticeship strategies.

Apprenticeship programs can be life-changing – helping individuals to start a pathway to careers with good wages, benefits, and opportunities for advancement. Apprenticeship opens up economic opportunities that participants may have never dreamed possible, allowing them to support themselves and their families for a lifetime.

Apprenticeships not only benefit workers, but they are also a proven model for businesses to train and retain highly-skilled workers and enhance the diversity of their workforce. The nation’s economy also benefits, by ensuring that we are tapping into all available talent in the country.

As you develop your pre-apprenticeship program, you will want to be aware of some specific challenges disadvantaged women may face entering non-traditional occupations.

Important Considerations for Pre-Apprenticeship Providers

CHALLENGE	SOLUTIONS
FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN: Despite clear evidence that women have the skills to perform and excel in non-traditional jobs, some may have concerns that they will not be accepted on the job. Others may be unaware of the expectations and working conditions in that line of work.	A pre-apprenticeship program must set clear expectations for participants about what they will encounter on the job. It is important to prepare participants for the work culture and working conditions of their selected field. Wherever possible, program activities should include visits to apprenticeship sites. Additionally, your skills training component should simulate the real work environment and any myths about apprenticeship should be dispelled.
OVERCOMING BARRIERS: Disadvantaged single mothers are likely to face challenges in obtaining quality child care that meet pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship training schedules. Additionally, many jobs in the skilled trades require reliable personal transportation, as travel to different job sites is typical. Women considering apprenticeship in a non-traditional occupation may fear discrimination in the form of stereotyping or sexual harassment.	Many CBOs routinely work with customers facing child care challenges, transportation issues and other barriers. They know the solutions lie in quality partnerships with organizations that provide or broker affordable, quality child care resources and can support participants’ transportation needs. Consider partnering with auto repair shops for discounted repair services and check into Working Cars for Working Families, a program of the National Consumer Law Center, or Ways to Work for leads on reliable vehicles. While it is not easy to be among the first in a non-traditional occupation in a community, women who enter these fields make it easier for all who come after them. Ensure your program helps participants understand their workplace rights. You are also encouraged to provide ongoing support and mentoring for program graduates who enter apprenticeship training.
MEETING MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS: CBOs must understand the apprenticeship program’s minimum requirements to ensure that their candidates will qualify as an apprentice. These qualifications may include a High School Diploma, General Educational Development equivalency (or other high school equivalency credential), specific math skills, the ability to lift 20 pounds or others.	It is important that your assessment activities identify participants who have a good chance for success in your program. In your assessment and participant selection process, be sure to keep in mind all of the minimum qualifications required by your apprenticeship partners. You will also need to incorporate skill-building and training for these requirements into your pre-apprenticeship program. Pre-apprenticeship programs must be prepared to teach participants the skills they do not already have.
LIVING AND WORK EXPENSES: It may be difficult for some participants to stay financially solvent during the pre-apprenticeship period. They may also need help getting started with tools, work clothing and other start-up costs once they enter an apprenticeship.	It is recommended to include a cash stipend in your pre-apprenticeship training program. This will help participants pay their bills, which will help you retain your participants. For support with work-related costs, explore state social services grants, reach out to foundations, or partner with local workforce agencies that might be able to cover these costs for eligible participants. You can also discuss with apprenticeship sponsors the possibility of donating funds for initial job-related expenses. You may also discuss with your Board of Directors establishing a reserve fund to meet participants’ needs on a routine or emergency basis.

Key Elements of a Quality Pre-Apprenticeship Program

This section describes the major elements that promote success for pre-apprenticeship programs.



PARTNERING WITH APPRENTICESHIP SPONSORS

Registered Apprenticeship program sponsors may include individual employers, business consortia, joint labor-management partnerships, community colleges and even CBOs. Keep in mind that sponsors typically are your customers as well as your partners and champions. The best way to satisfy your sponsors is by delivering a pool of pre-screened, qualified, job-ready candidates for their apprenticeship training programs.

In some cases, and particularly for new industries, CBOs can play a critical role in bringing employers and other partners together to develop new apprenticeship programs. For CBOs interested in serving a catalytic role in establishing new apprenticeship programs, see USDOL’s Quick-Start Toolkit at www.doleta.gov/oa/employers/apprenticeship_toolkit.pdf. The more traditional role, however, is for pre-apprenticeship programs to work with existing sponsors. There are three major components to establishing relationships with existing apprenticeship sponsors: connecting with sponsors, determining sponsors’ needs and defining the sponsor relationship.



I. CONNECTING WITH PROGRAM SPONSORS

- › **Work closely with federal and state apprenticeship officials.** Federal and state apprenticeship staff routinely assist employers in establishing and growing Registered Apprenticeship programs. They will know which programs need a supply of workers and they also support sponsors in diversifying their workforce. Visit www.doleta.gov/oa/contactus.cfm to locate contact information for your state and federal apprenticeship officials.
- › **Learn how apprenticeship works within the industry you plan to support.** Identify how that particular industry's apprenticeship system is organized in your state or local community. Do sponsors in the industry tend to be individual companies, industry consortia, joint apprenticeship and training committees or some of each? What roles do intermediaries play, including community colleges, workforce development entities, CBOs and others?
- › **Determine the best point of contact within a company.** It is important to find a point of contact that will work with you to provide information on the apprenticeship program and help you shape the pre-apprenticeship. Your best contact may be the Apprenticeship Coordinator, the Training Coordinator or the Union Steward.

- › **Get to know members of local Joint Labor-Management Organizations, sometimes known as Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committees.** These groups oversee apprenticeship and other skills upgrade programs in many industries, and are commonly the entry point to Registered Apprenticeship in the building trades. They will welcome a pipeline of qualified women for their training programs.

II. DETERMINING SPONSORS' NEEDS

- › **Listen to employers' needs.** Sponsors will generally welcome your interest and your support. After all, you will be helping them find skilled workers and diversify their workforce. You will want to fully understand their workforce needs and how to effectively connect your pre-apprenticeship services to their apprenticeship program. Examples of the types of questions to work into your discussion include:
 - » What qualities, skills and knowledge do you need apprenticeship candidates to have?
 - » Is your program currently accepting new apprentices? How many apprentices do you anticipate hiring in the next one to two years?
 - » What are the application requirements? Does the program have fixed application dates or are applications accepted on an ongoing basis?
 - » What are the program's length, hours and completion requirements?
 - » What is the current retention rate of your apprentices? What is the retention rate of women in your program?
 - » How can we assist you to attain federal or community-based diversity goals?
 - » What ongoing support would you like us to provide for the participants you accept from our program?
- › **Identify other stakeholders.** It will be beneficial to connect with an industry association, local Building Trades Council, a State Apprenticeship Council or other business group. Attending meetings of these groups will help you make additional connections and gain a deeper understanding of the industry's workforce needs and challenges. Your federal or state apprenticeship contact may be able to arrange introductions.

III. DEFINING THE SPONSOR RELATIONSHIP

- › **Review the sponsor's Apprenticeship Standards.** The standards document spells out the terms and conditions for the recruitment, selection, employment, training and supervision of individuals in that apprenticeship program, as required by USDOL or a State Apprenticeship Agency. It also provides an outline of required training for the job, minimum qualifications for entry into the apprenticeship, apprentice selection procedures and applicable affirmative action information. Reviewing these standards will help you to design your pre-apprenticeship program so that participants are prepared to successfully enter and complete the apprenticeship.
- › **Involve the sponsor in developing your program.** To solidify the partnership with the apprenticeship sponsor and to ensure you will be able to deliver well-qualified candidates, involve the program sponsor in the development of your pre-apprenticeship program. Be sure to discuss with the sponsor the most important hard and soft skills for your program to address. Because apprenticeship programs, especially in the skilled trades, have traditionally employed men, selection criteria may inadvertently include qualifications that inhibit the participation of women. Having this discussion with sponsors will allow you to



provide input regarding any apprenticeship selection criteria that are not job-related and unnecessarily screen out female candidates.

It is also valuable to invite the sponsor to participate in your program’s process for selecting participants. Company representatives should be invited to sit on interview panels for your prospective candidates. Involving the sponsor from the beginning of the process will increase the company’s confidence in the program completers you refer to them. Additionally, set up mechanisms for frequent, ongoing communication to ensure your program’s efforts remain aligned with the sponsor’s workforce needs.

- › **Determine whether the sponsor can provide you with commitments.** Ideally, the program sponsor will commit to accepting pre-apprenticeship completers into their apprenticeship program (sometimes known as facilitated or direct entry agreements). Sponsors may also be able to provide resources to support your participants. However, a sponsor’s initial commitments may involve smaller steps until you have demonstrated success by delivering the apprenticeship candidates the program needs. As with all partnerships, you are seeking collaborative solutions where all parties benefit from the relationship.
- › **Agree on ongoing feedback mechanisms.** Once you are working with sponsors, you will want to ensure your services are meeting their needs. Make the feedback process simple for sponsors – and take their input seriously to improve your program. This will promote longevity of your partnership along with sustainability and growth of your program.

THE VALUE OF MANY (AND DIVERSE) PARTNERSHIPS

In addition to the critical partnerships with apprenticeship program sponsors, consider establishing strong relationships with some or all of the following:

- › Public workforce agencies/American Job Centers
- › Education partners (K-12, community and technical colleges, universities)
- › Vocational Rehabilitation and community disability organizations
- › Economic development organizations
- › Business and industry groups
- › Labor unions and joint labor-management organizations
- › City and state women’s commissions
- › Women’s foundations and community foundations
- › Other CBOs and faith-based organizations

Various partners will bring different resources to the table. For example, other CBOs or faith-based organizations may serve as a resource for recruiting participants, while business and industry groups may provide financial contributions to keep your program and its participants thriving. Public workforce agencies may contribute funding for services for eligible participants and/or assist with participant recruitment, assessment or testing. Education partners may be willing to provide space or equipment for your program, or may be able to assist with curriculum development or delivery.

Invite all relevant partners to engage in your program, and identify ways you can work together that benefit their organizations as well. Additionally, having a variety of partners will raise the visibility of your organization in the community and advance the possibility that partners will include you during their planning processes. Involve partners in your significant events, such as recruitment activities and graduation ceremonies.

Strong partner connections may also provide new opportunities for your program. For instance, many local workforce systems are focused on building career pathway models in key industry sectors in the regional economy. Pre-apprenticeship programs can serve as a major component in mapping and developing career pathways. Your participation in building these career pathways could result in additional visibility, participants or resources for your program.

Note that there may be multiple labor and industry groups, workforce agencies and education partners in your service area. Make an effort to reach out to each of them, as they are likely to have unique service strategies and priorities that provide different opportunities to work together.

COMMUNITY BENEFITS AGREEMENTS

Community Benefits Agreements can be a mechanism for partner unity around increasing quality employment opportunities for women and minorities. Community Benefits Agreements are used in some industries to support employment of community residents and to promote diversity of apprentices. For instance, an agreement might be established between a local building trades’ council and a government entity or owner of a construction project. This social compact develops bridges between communities and apprenticeship programs and may include hiring targets for

women and minorities and/or promote fair treatment in hiring, training and work assignments. Apprenticeship officials, local elected officials or workforce partners may be aware of Community Benefits Agreements you could leverage on behalf of your participants. The [Partnership for Working Families](#) may also be able to help you develop a Community Benefits Agreement if there is not already one in place. Examples of successful agreements are provided below.

- › **Portland, Oregon Public Project Labor & Community Benefits Agreement.** Oregon Tradeswomen Inc. was instrumental in championing the development of this agreement, which includes the unique feature of financial support for pre-apprenticeship programs. The agreement provides for: (1) apprenticeship diversity/facilitated entry for women and minorities through recruitment and retention goals based on apprenticeship project hours; (2) workforce diversity for women and minorities at experienced worker levels; (3) a number of local hiring and community contracting goals; and (4) a funding mechanism to support community-based pre-apprenticeship programs based on a percentage of project costs to the employer.
- › **New York City Mayor’s Commission on Construction Opportunity.** Nontraditional Employment for Women (NEW) worked with a broad coalition of stakeholders in New York



City’s construction industry to develop and implement 10 recommendations to improve access to construction employment opportunities for minorities, women, veterans and high school graduates. Among the provisions are: (1) a commitment by construction trades unions to ensure 10 percent of apprentice slots for women; (2) an agreement with developers and other institutions to set an overall staffing goal of 15 percent for women in apprenticeship and skilled worker positions; (3) naming NEW as a city partner for a public service campaign to recruit women into the trades; and (4) allowing NEW program graduates direct entry into union apprenticeships.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

RECRUITMENT

Effective outreach and marketing is crucial to attracting candidates to your pre-apprenticeship program. Your mission is to sell prospective participants on the value of the services you provide and how these services can result in career pathway opportunities through apprenticeship.

There are many sources to recruit women who could benefit from career opportunities:

- › Social service agencies
- › English as a Second Language and Adult Literacy programs
- › Head Start programs

- › Libraries
- › Workforce centers
- › High schools and community colleges
- › Neighborhood centers
- › Faith-based events for women
- › Vocational Rehabilitation and other disability organizations
- › Non-profit organizations, such as the Urban League, United Way, YWCA and others
- › Grassroots community organizing groups
- › Advocacy organizations

As you plan your outreach strategies, be sure you target efforts to those individuals truly in need of support to attain career success. Your program can transform their lives! Note that you may need to recruit three to four times the number of candidates that you will accept into the program. Individuals may show interest, but decide apprenticeship is not for them. There will be others you will determine are not a good match for the program. For these individuals, be prepared to offer or refer them to other career services.

Some ways to promote your program include: developing flyers that inform job seekers of your program and its benefits; encouraging program graduates to talk with friends and potential candidates about their experience; and using social media to market your program. It is valuable to feature diverse women in non-traditional fields (especially minority women and female veterans) in your marketing and social media campaigns so that pre-apprenticeship candidates can visualize themselves in your program and doing that type of work.

When should you recruit? Consider how many individuals you are prepared to train at a time and how many training cycles you plan to conduct in a year. How many of your graduates can sponsors accept per year? Match your recruitment and training cycles to those of your apprenticeship sponsors’ programs for optimal success.

You may wish to consider holding an annual recruitment event, involving all your partners and apprenticeship program sponsors. Some individuals that attend may not be ready to begin your program at that time, but you will plant the seed for their future participation. Be sure to have plenty of flyers and program materials on hand for attendees to take away.

Military career transition personnel may be a resource to help you recruit women veterans. Encourage word-of-mouth marketing among women veterans who have successfully completed your program. Additionally, the [Helmets to Hardhats program](#) could be a potential partner in the building trades.

Outreach needs to be an ongoing activity. This is a great opportunity to build your community presence with program candidates, partners and additional apprenticeship sponsors.

INFORMATION AND ORIENTATION SESSIONS

You might consider holding orientation sessions prior to each training cycle – or monthly, depending on your staff capacity and the number of apprentices needed by your Registered Apprenticeship sponsors. During the sessions, present information on apprenticeship and the industry. Be sure to honestly portray all of the potential challenges and advantages of this career path.

At these sessions, you will also want to describe your program, including details such as minimum qualifications for entry, attendance and participation requirements, success rates for acceptance into apprenticeship programs and other valuable information that will help candidates make an informed decision.

SETTING RECRUITMENT GOALS

Chicago Women in Trades conducts three training programs a year, each with 25 participants. They typically recruit 600 – 700 potential candidates a year to fill these programs. Of the initial candidates that attend information sessions, 150 – 200 women choose to continue with the process and 100 – 125 of these women do well enough on assessments to make it to the interview stage. From this pool of candidates, the final 75 participants for the year are selected.

ASSESSMENT AND SELECTION OF CANDIDATES

The types of candidates you want to choose are individuals who are motivated and willing to do all that is necessary to succeed and become quality candidates for Registered Apprenticeship programs.

Pre-apprenticeship programs frequently use tests to determine the suitability of candidates, such as reading and math skills (geared toward the level the apprenticeship sponsor requires), following instructions and willingness to work as part of a team. Your apprenticeship program sponsors may have additional selection criteria, such as physical strength and endurance or drug testing. Note that while some degree of initial aptitude may be required, your program can help participants improve in several of these areas. A variety of tools and resources currently used by pre-apprenticeship programs to assess candidates are available at <http://www.doleta.gov/oa/preapp>. Additionally, be sure to provide accommodations to level the playing field for candidates with disabilities. Some resources are provided in the Tools and Resources section at <http://www.doleta.gov/oa/preapp>.

Once you have identified interested and potentially qualified candidates, schedule interviews – either one-on-one or as a panel. This may be the most important element of your selection process, as you will get to know candidates, determine how ready they are for your program and whether they are a good fit for an apprenticeship. As noted in the Defining the Sponsor Relationship section, invite your apprenticeship sponsors to participate in the interview process. Their initial endorsement of your participants will be beneficial when you refer your program graduates to their apprenticeship programs.

The final step of this process is for all members of the selection team to review all results and, from there, select participants for your program. If you are fortunate enough to have more qualified candidates than you can serve at one time, put candidates on a waiting list or offer them first choice for the next training cycle.

Training Curriculum

An effective pre-apprenticeship training curriculum includes at least two vital components: entry-level occupational skills based on industry standards and job readiness skills. A pre-apprenticeship training program for disadvantaged women should be tailored to women in the specific occupation, and provide a safe, supportive environment in which participants will learn and thrive.



KEY CONSIDERATIONS IN DESIGNING YOUR PRE-APPRENTICESHIP CURRICULUM

- › **Work with your Registered Apprenticeship sponsors in designing the curriculum.** This will ensure your training produces well-qualified apprenticeship candidates who are able to pass entry-level exams to begin formal apprenticeship programs.
- › **Identify existing curriculum you can use and adapt.** Talk with your state apprenticeship officials, who can guide you toward existing curriculum in the field. Examples of construction pre-apprenticeship curricula are available at <http://www.doleta.gov/oa/preapp>.
- › **Align basic skills training to the job requirements.** If the apprenticeship will require proficiency with certain types of math, be sure your curriculum correlates to the types of math needed on that job. Consider employing instructors who are skilled in the occupational field, as they are likely to be in a better position to shape basic skills and other training to reflect the job. It can also inspire women going into that field if qualified female instructors are serving as role models or mentors.
- › **Ensure the program addresses physical requirements of the job.** If the apprenticeship job will require specific levels of strength or endurance, incorporate physical conditioning into your program. This might take the form of cardio workouts or strength and agility exercises each time the class meets.

- › **Consult the [Universal Design for Learning](#)** to ensure accessibility of your curriculum for participants with disabilities.
- › **Incorporate hands-on and experiential learning that simulates the work environment and apprenticeship job.** Provide opportunities for participants to work together to solve problems during project-based activities. Additionally, allow participants to experience different facets of the occupation so they can decide which type of work they are most interested in within the field. Field trips to sponsor sites are a good way for participants to see what the jobs will require.
- › **Determine the appropriate program length.** The length of your program depends on the number of contact hours the apprenticeship sponsor requires of entry-level candidates, as well as whether you plan a full- or part-time program. Your staff capacity (including instructors, coaches and others) will also determine how many weeks each participant group will spend in training. Be sure to keep class sizes as small as possible so each participant will receive plenty of support.

SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

What are soft skills? They are basic skills needed to be successful in any work environment, such as showing up on time, dressing appropriately for the workplace, effective communication and good teamwork skills.

Ensure your soft skills training mirrors the environment participants will encounter in the apprenticeship program. Don't be afraid to include strict attendance, punctuality, dress code and conduct policies – and to hold participants accountable for meeting these standards.

Other skills your participants will need to demonstrate include filling out applications, interviewing and conflict resolution on the job. You may be able to embed a lot of these elements into your overall curriculum, thereby keeping it all relevant and reinforcing their importance for job success. Be sure to use industry-specific skills and vocabulary in all aspects of your curriculum. This will prepare your participants for the real-world situations they will encounter in their apprenticeship.

A brief overview of tips for tailoring your curriculum to women is provided in [Putting a Gender Lens on Pre-Apprenticeship Curriculum](#).

DATA COLLECTION AND PARTICIPANT CASE FILES

As with any program you would operate, it is important to collect data on participants, aggregate program outcomes and maintain detailed participant case files. While you will likely have in mind a format for customer data collection and case files, a checklist of typical program data elements is available at <http://www.doleta.gov/oa/preapp>. Be sure to collect all data required by the apprenticeship sponsor and partners providing financial support for your program.

Retaining Participants

The individuals you enroll may have some barriers to employment success. Through your services and community partnerships, you have helped them learn to manage these challenges so they can succeed. Ongoing support may be needed to help some participants remain in your pre-apprenticeship program, to stay focused during the waiting period (if any) to enter a Registered Apprenticeship program, and to successfully complete their apprenticeship.

There are steps you can take to promote retention at each of these phases. These suggestions involve case management strategies, peer-to-peer activities and skills you can help participants build that will serve them throughout their lives.

- › Valuable case management activities during the pre-apprenticeship program include goal setting and development of specific career plans. Having solid career goals and plans can help a participant remain focused on desired outcomes during discouraging times. To the extent possible, provide opportunities for participants to meet one-on-one with designated staff on an as-needed basis.
- › As noted in the Partnership section of the guide, you will have established strong connections with social service agencies and other community organizations. Use these contacts to help your participants overcome any remaining barriers, such as health care, child care, transportation needs, or substance abuse or legal issues. Your local United Way agency can identify providers, as well. Your community partners may also be willing to serve as mentors for your participants, particularly if they are also customers in their programs.
- › Incorporate opportunities for peer support among participants into your program. This will build their networking skills, establish mechanisms for participants to help and support each other and encourage their continued connections after they complete your program and launch their careers. Group events – during and after your program – can promote this peer support. For example, host a monthly evening social hour, invite program alumni to engage in community service projects or sponsor a job club for participants that involves tradeswomen, apprenticeship sponsors, public workforce center staff and other community partners. Check with partners to see if they can host events, contribute refreshments or otherwise enhance these activities.

BUILDING PEER NETWORKS

- › *North American Building Trades Unions sponsors Women Building the Nation, an annual three-day conference for tradeswomen from all crafts to network, learn skills and develop strategies to recruit, retain and advance the leadership of women in construction.*
- › *The annual National Association of Home Builders International Builders' Show includes a schedule of events specifically for tradeswomen. At the 2015 conference, the group Professional Women in Building sponsored leadership training, roundtable discussions, a Women in Building awards luncheon and other activities.*



An essential element of quality pre-apprenticeship programs is arranging activities that expose participants to apprenticeship programs and help them apply to Registered Apprenticeship programs. This can be achieved by involving participants in relevant industry events (e.g. job fairs or trade-related networking events) and preparing them for applications, testing and other apprenticeship entry requirements.

Toward the end of your curriculum, activities should include helping participants to develop a quality résumé and line up references, as well as facilitating entry into an apprenticeship program with one of your sponsor partners. This is also the time to discuss/review the physical and cultural environment your participants are likely to experience on the job, to help set their expectations appropriately.

Depending on the industry, the strength of the regional economy and individual sponsor practices, your program graduates may have a waiting period before they can be accepted into an apprenticeship. Work with partners and community contacts to identify interim jobs where your graduates can gain valuable experience in the field while maintaining financial security.

PARTICIPANT FOLLOW UP

Case management is also critical for at least the first year of participants’ formal apprenticeship program and into the second year, if possible. This is a period when apprentices may be most vulnerable to dropping out of an apprenticeship. There are many ways to stay in touch with program graduates on a routine basis, including surveys, focus groups or phone, text or email check-ins.

Each of these methods provides the opportunity to determine participants’ additional needs and to receive valuable feedback about the services you have provided. As staffing permits, establish an “open door” policy so program graduates feel comfortable getting advice or referrals for challenges that come up throughout their apprenticeship.

INTERIM EMPLOYMENT

The Women in Nontraditional Employment Roles (WINTER) program in Los Angeles works to place its pre-apprenticeship graduates in the construction industry while waiting for apprenticeship opportunities to open. WINTER focuses on finding interim jobs that will relate to and keep participants’ skills sharp for the trade they plan to enter. The interim jobs also help participants build confidence in their ability to succeed in the apprenticeship position. The program maintains its own job bank and employer network. Job developers on staff support program participants through this process.

Sustaining Your Program

Once your pre-apprenticeship program is in place, you will want to look ahead and put in place strategies to maintain and enhance its effectiveness. This process really begins on day one of your program and will be an ongoing activity.

Sustainability involves continuing program goals, practices and activities that contribute to the desired outcomes and help to improve the program. Continuing success with your program will involve multiple components that are explored below.

- › **Demonstrate your ongoing commitment to apprenticeship and women in non-traditional occupations.** Apprenticeship sponsors seek a stable and regular supply of candidates who are qualified to enter their apprenticeship program. Ask your program sponsors for feedback on the qualifications of candidates you have sent them and listen to their suggestions for improvement. This will help you make any needed changes to the pre-apprenticeship curriculum. Once you have built strong relationships with apprenticeship sponsors, consider inviting one or more to serve on your board. Involving sponsors at this level may promote additional loyalty to and investment in your pre-apprenticeship program.
- › **Conduct a planning session with your board at least annually.** Your board of directors is a reliable source of feedback as well as your partner in envisioning the future. Review your pre-apprenticeship program vision, mission and goals. What parts of your strategy have worked well? Which parts do you need to improve on? What staff, financial or other resources do you need to grow your program? The goal should be to position your program as a successful and vital community resource.
- › **Market your program to attract additional funders, partners and apprenticeship sponsors.** While delivering services, gather data, anecdotes and success stories that you can use to market your program. Regardless of any materials you may customize for different audiences, you will need to gather standard information that you can use as needed. In addition to statistics, success stories are a great way to make the program real for readers. However, make sure to maintain participant confidentiality in telling their stories, or gather appropriate permissions if participants’ names and photos are to be used.

With these components in mind, you will want to develop a plan for the sustainability and continued success of your pre-apprenticeship program. A sustainability plan might contain the following elements:

- › Invite local, state or federal officials to visit your site or to participate in major program events. Extend invitations to local media outlets, apprenticeship sponsors and other partners, as well.
- › Gather data that helps tell the story of your program, including:
 - » A snapshot of your participants
 - » The achievements and outcomes of your participants
 - » The value of the program for businesses who are the apprenticeship sponsors affiliated with your program
 - » The strong community partnerships that support the program
- › Use social media to highlight successes, attract funders/sponsors and to recruit new participants. Electronic newsletters can also help promote your message.



- › Participate in community events and accept invitations to present at trade events and meetings of women's organizations.
- › Identify champions for your program. These may be board members, tradeswomen, elected officials, labor officials, local business leaders or former participants. Provide your champions with marketing materials and data so they can promote the program whenever opportunities arise.
- › Review your brand. Are your program's name and logo memorable? Do they evoke an image of success and align with your vision for the program? If you believe this area needs some work, talk with your board, staff, sponsors and participants to come up with a brand that better represents your program for the future.

Consider your sustainability plan as a road map for continuing and growing your program. Celebrate and publicize accomplishments to build support and momentum for future success.

We hope you will find this guide to be a valuable resource as you develop a pre-apprenticeship program tailored to women entering non-traditional fields. Please be sure to visit <http://www.doleta.gov/oa/preapp> to access additional tools and resources and further enhance your knowledge. The support you provide to the women you serve will reap rewards not only for your participants, but also for the employers that need their expertise. Communities benefit, as well, from the addition of well-trained workers earning family-sustaining wages in satisfying careers.