

APPRENTICESHIP BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

A Targeted Approach to Apprenticeship



This resource guide is designed for professionals in state and local business outreach, workforce development, education, and apprenticeship who work with employers to expand the use of Registered Apprenticeship as a work-based learning strategy. It provides a roadmap for identifying and collaborating with businesses whose workforce needs can be addressed through Registered Apprenticeship. If you are currently casting a wide net with your business outreach and are seeking a more focused approach that can yield a higher number of successful business/apprenticeship partnerships, the approach presented here is for you.

KEY APPRENTICESHIP MINDSETS



Successfully collaborating with businesses to create and implement apprenticeship programs is as much about your motivations as it is your technical knowledge. How you think about apprenticeship directly affects your ability to connect with businesses so you can create solutions that work for them. The following mindsets provide a foundation for your efforts to develop successful business relationships.

THE THREE MINDSETS

1. Apprenticeship is a **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT TOOL** for business.
2. Apprenticeship is a formalized **APPROACH THAT ENHANCES EXISTING BUSINESS PRACTICES**.
3. A pitch made to a **BUSINESS IS ONLY AS GOOD AS THE APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM THAT IS CREATED**.

REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP IS A WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT TOOL FOR BUSINESS. As a busy workforce development professional, you may find yourself in promotion mode — “selling” the benefits of apprenticeship to businesses through apprenticeship information events, job fairs, promotional materials, and one-on-one conversations. These activities have their place, but to increase your efficiency and to maximize the quality of your engagements with businesses, you need to take a more consultative approach. Think of apprenticeship as one of the many workforce development tools that help meet business needs. Your initial discussions with a business should focus on uncovering their recruitment, hiring, retention, and upskilling challenges (or “pain points”) and responding with tools and solutions that address those issues.

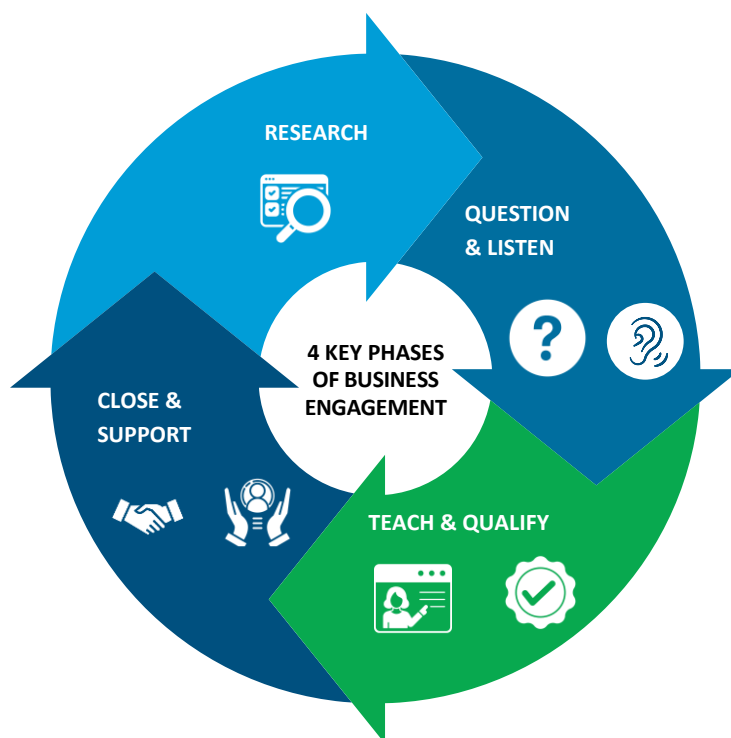
REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP IS A FORMALIZED APPROACH THAT ENHANCES EXISTING BUSINESS PRACTICES. Apprenticeship is not a replacement for existing business culture and staffing practices. Rather, the Registered Apprenticeship model builds on a business's existing recruitment, onboarding, mentoring, training, and advancement systems. The result is a more standardized, replicable, and cost-effective approach that feels familiar and gets results.

A PITCH MADE TO A BUSINESS IS ONLY AS GOOD AS THE REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM THAT IS CREATED. The most compelling apprenticeship pitch in the world will not lead to sustained results if the program itself does not address business needs. A strong Registered Apprenticeship Program requires building and maintaining effective partnerships between the business, the apprenticeship system, and education and training providers. The workforce system and intermediaries also play important roles in recruitment, program administration, funding, and supportive services. The more you gain a comprehensive understanding of these partners and their strengths and the more quickly you bring the right players to the table, the better positioned you will be to bring lasting value to the businesses you work with.

Approaching business engagement with these three mindsets will help you engage more effectively with your business customers and create apprenticeship solutions that address their workforce challenges.

FOUR KEY PHASES OF BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

Just as Registered Apprenticeship uses a formalized approach to create replicable results, there are steps you can take that will ensure replicable success. These steps fall into four key phases using distinct components:



RESEARCH

Begin by identifying businesses that could benefit from Registered Apprenticeship. Research available workforce and economic data to determine growth industries, in-demand occupations, and trends.

QUESTION & LISTEN

Validate pain points and learn the business's culture, introduce Registered Apprenticeship in the context of existing business practices, and build trust.

TEACH & QUALIFY

Help businesses to understand how RAPs work and what their role is in the process. Ensure that there is a good match between employer needs and an apprenticeship program.

CLOSE AND SUPPORT

Address concerns, build organizational buy-in for the apprenticeship model, and bring the right partners to the table to begin development of a Registered Apprenticeship Program, if applicable. Provide follow-up and consistent communications to aid in the success of the program.



PHASE 1: RESEARCH

This phase is all about understanding the workforce challenges that Registered Apprenticeship can address and using labor market information and other resources to help you identify businesses that might be struggling with these challenges. The goal of this phase is to help you target your outreach and prepare for initial challenges.

RECOGNIZE THE TOP CHALLENGES The first step to identifying businesses that can benefit from Registered Apprenticeship is to understand which business challenges apprenticeship can help address. Here are examples of key challenges that Registered Apprenticeship is well-suited to address and the indicators you might observe in job postings and other data. Note the descriptions and indicators below and think about how apprenticeship can be tailored to meet each challenge.

CHALLENGE	DESCRIPTION	INDICATOR
SKILLS GAPS IN HIRING	Businesses need to hire and have plenty of applicants, but applicants do not have the skills required to do the job.	Job postings stay open for a long time.
DEVELOPMENT OF EXISTING TALENT	Businesses have opportunities to advance current employees, but those employees lack the required skills for higher-level positions.	Instead of promoting from within, businesses are posting job openings for mid-level positions.
ATTRACTING AND RETAINING TALENT	Businesses are experiencing unusually high turnover and/or having difficulty finding interested applicants.	Jobs are being posted and reposted.
RETIRING WORKFORCE	Businesses are experiencing high levels of retirement in skilled positions.	A business is posting multiple job openings for skilled positions that have not been open in the recent past.
ADVANCING TECHNOLOGY	Businesses have enough workers but are struggling to keep pace with technological and industry advances.	No jobs are open, but the business has expressed an interest in customized and/or technical training.

USE RESEARCH TO IDENTIFY BUSINESSES

With these challenges in mind, you need a process to identify industry sectors and businesses that are experiencing the challenges. Here are strategies that have worked for many workforce development professionals:

1. **Identify important and growing industry sectors and businesses in your regional economy.** Start by gathering information about the most significant industry sectors and businesses in your region. State labor market information and regional economic development agencies provide information that will help with this research. Use reports and data from sector strategies, career pathways

work, or other labor market analyses to understand which industries are expanding, experiencing turnover, anticipating a major retirement wave, and/or experiencing significant technology shifts. Make a list of the largest/most significant employers in these sectors.

2. **Look for businesses with openings that indicate one of the challenges described above.** Visit the websites of the companies on your list and look at their job postings. Also search workforce development job boards looking for the same or similar openings. Assess the likelihood that the selected companies are experiencing hiring, retention, or mid-level skills development challenges based on patterns you see in their job posting activity. If possible, validate your hunches with other available data, such as local and regional reports from active sector strategy work and workforce development plans. Narrow down your list to the 5 to 10 businesses that are most likely to be experiencing the types of issues that Registered Apprenticeship can effectively address.
3. **Review job descriptions.** Looking at your narrower list of businesses, review their job openings to determine if these positions are a good fit for apprenticeship. Research whether Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs) within these occupations currently exist. Are there gaps in apprenticeship programs—either no programs or limited capacity—in these areas? To identify existing apprenticeship programs registered with the U.S. Department of Labor, visit <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/apprenticeship-occupations>.

If you are working in a state that registers its own apprenticeship programs, check with your state apprenticeship agency, which you can find at <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/about-us/state-office>.

KEEP TRACK OF WHAT YOU LEARN

To help keep track of your research, create a spreadsheet of the top businesses that might benefit from Registered Apprenticeship in your geographic area. These are the businesses you are going to reach out to in the next phase. Your spreadsheet should track job titles, position descriptions, postings that are a good fit for apprenticeship, and skill demands for each identified job. If you use a customer relationship management (CRM) system, you may be able to adapt it for this purpose in lieu of a spreadsheet. If you do not have a CRM, be sure to track your main point of contact at the business and log all other contacts to ensure proper follow-up is done. Be organized. Keep copies of job postings for each business in a binder, filed behind each spreadsheet. This will help you prepare for future conversations.

This preparative work gives you a comprehensive understanding of a company's challenges that Registered Apprenticeship might help to address. It enables you to demonstrate from the first contact that you understand and want to work with a company to help them recruit, train, and retain a skilled workforce. For companies that decide to try apprenticeship, the spreadsheet also becomes a useful tool to identify skills and competencies and develop supplemental education and on-the-job learning outlines that align with job descriptions—steps in the process of developing an apprenticeship program that sometimes scare companies away.

PREPARE FOR YOUR INITIAL BUSINESS MEETING

As you prepare for your initial discussion with a business, it is important to understand the context in which the business operates and to be able to use their language. Research and become familiar with the business sector's unfamiliar terms and technologies to understand company lingo and skill demands, and to better identify workforce training pain points. This important preparation establishes you as a credible collaborator and partner and helps demonstrate your commitment to addressing the business's workforce challenges.

Sources of information include the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Information Network (O*NET) database, which has information on skills required for specific occupations (<https://www.onetonline.org>); industry association websites; individual company websites; newspaper articles; and trade magazines. Finish preparing for your initial meeting by preparing three things:

1. A [list of questions](#) you can ask at the first meeting to help you better understand the business' workforce needs and challenges.
2. Your [understanding of the employer's workforce development](#) based on the information gathered.
3. Your [understanding of federal and state regulations around Registered Apprenticeship](#), as well as tax credits and other subsidies that might be available to offset costs to employers.

KNOW THE VALUE OF APPRENTICESHIP

Prepare to enter your conversations with businesses understanding the potential value of apprenticeship to the business you are approaching. This knowledge helps you and the business begin to explore the suitability of apprenticeship as a solution and helps you compare potential cost savings of apprenticeship over the business's current workforce development model. The following are a few of the many benefits of Registered Apprenticeship:

- [Apprenticeship offers a progressive wage system](#). Businesses can start new hires at a lower wage while they learn the skills they need to fully perform the job.
- [Apprenticeship has increased retention rates](#). Businesses do not have to recoup the cost in money and lost productivity of rehiring and retraining for the same position.
- [Apprenticeship provides a repeatable, organized framework for recruitment, hiring, onboarding, and advancement](#). This allows a business to develop a system for hiring and advancing that ensures consistent results.

Your state and region may offer additional financial and programmatic support to businesses that run RAPs. These incentives may include tax credits, candidate recruitment, and screening support through the workforce investment system; supportive services for apprentices; funding to cover the cost of on-the-job learning and supplemental education, either through individual training accounts and on-the-job training funded through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act or through other federal, state, or private sector funding sources; and other supports. Your state workforce and economic development agencies, as well as your local American Job Centers, can help you understand what is

available to businesses in your region. Having a clear understanding of the available incentives will help you customize an apprenticeship solution that best meets your businesses' needs.



PHASE 2: QUESTION AND LISTEN

Once you have identified the companies that look like strong candidates for apprenticeship, you are ready to start building relationships. In this phase, you will ask questions and focus on validating pain points and learning the business's culture, introducing apprenticeship in the context of existing business practices, and building trust.

VALIDATE PAIN POINTS AND LEARN THE BUSINESS'S CULTURE

Focus on listening and understanding. Approach your initial meeting as a listening and information gathering experience; it is not a sales call. Your goal should be for the business to do at least 50 percent of the talking, and you can get there by asking insightful questions and focusing on the issues that matter most to the business. Start with a problem statement rather than a solution statement. For example — “It sounds like you are struggling with retention,” rather than “Registered Apprenticeship is what you need.” Briefly share what you learned through your research and consider using a few of the following prompts to move your conversation forward. Look at the resource on the next page for additional questions you can use to dig deeper.

1. What, if any, challenges do you have attracting and finding qualified candidates that meet your business needs?
2. How has your business' culture and/or investment in your workers contributed to your success in hiring and retaining a good workforce?
3. Have you ever worked with any organizations (American Job Centers (AJC), colleges, schools, vocational rehabilitation, etc.) or other service providers to help you with your staffing needs?

LISTEN

Engage in active listening by engaging closely with what the speaker is saying, indicating understanding, asking relevant questions, and summarizing what you heard them say. While engaging in active listening, read between the lines. Are there things they are cautious about sharing with you? Customize and adapt your responses based on what they have shared with you.



PHASE 3: TEACH AND QUALIFY

When you are ready to start talking about Registered Apprenticeship as a potential solution to a business's challenges, continue using your business-centered approach to the conversation and speak in business terms.

INTRODUCE APPRENTICESHIP IN THE CONTEXT OF EXISTING BUSINESS PRACTICES

Rather than introducing Registered Apprenticeship as a formal government-regulated program, relate the elements of apprenticeship to what the business already does. Introduce the model as an effective, formalized approach to recruitment, onboarding, mentoring, and advancement that will get them the results they need. This phase is focused on helping the business to understand how apprenticeships work and what their role is in the process, while also ensuring that there is a good match between their business needs and a Registered Apprenticeship Program. The worksheet below can help you organize your thoughts as you prepare to have this conversation.

BUSINESS PROCESS	THE BUSINESS'S APPROACH	CORRESPONDING APPRENTICESHIP ELEMENT	YOUR STRATEGY WITH THIS BUSINESS APPRENTICESHIP ELEMENT
JOB DESCRIPTIONS/ POSITION RESPONSIBILITIES	Businesses need to hire and have plenty of applicants, but applicants do not have the skills required to do the job.	WORK PROCESSES/ COMPETENCIES	
RECRUITMENT AND INTERVIEWING	How do you currently recruit new staff members? How do you craft job descriptions? How many applicants do you get, and how many are qualified?	OUTREACH AND SELECTION	
INTERNAL/EXTERNAL TRAINING, EDUCATION, OR ONBOARDING	Once you hire, how do you manage inevitable gaps between the skills outlined in job descriptions and the actual skills of new hires? How do you orient and train staff? Do you hold orientation sessions, send staff to conferences or classes, or offer ongoing training?	SUPPLEMENTAL EDUCATION	
MENTORING/ SUPERVISION OF WORK	How are new hires supported? Do you provide mentoring from managers, supervisors, team leads, or peers?	ON-THE-JOB LEARNING FROM MENTORS	
MERIT-BASED INCREASES, PERFORMANCE INCREASES	Does your company conduct merit-based performance reviews and reward good performance with merit-based increases?	PROGRESSIVE WAGES	
POSITION/TITLE CHANGE/PROMOTIONS	As staff progress, does your business promote them or give them new levels of responsibility?	CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION/ NATIONAL OCCUPATIONAL CREDENTIAL	

BUILD TRUST

You build trust with a business by demonstrating that you take their pain points seriously and can offer them cost effective solutions to their workforce challenges. Cultivate your relationships and further build trust by ending each meeting with clear next steps and a plan to meet or talk again. Here are examples of follow-up strategies that have tangible business benefits:

- Provide examples of how other businesses have used Registered Apprenticeship for t target occupation.
- Offer opportunities for the business to talk with businesses in the same industry/occupation who are successfully using Registered Apprenticeship.
- Submit an apprenticeship solution proposal which includes a potential program and management structure and describes key partner roles and responsibilities—including those of potential education providers, intermediaries, workforce development agencies, and other partners.
- Address myths and misconceptions about apprenticeship once you understand their apprenticeship knowledge. Address any gaps there may be.
- Provide a rough return-on-investment calculator indicating the positive financial and human resource impacts that apprenticeship might have for a particular job or category of jobs.

ADDRESS CONCERNS

There are several apprenticeship concerns or myths that may come up during your conversations. Below are effective responses to help address these challenges. Current Registered Apprenticeship sponsors are some of the best advocates for the model and are particularly effective at addressing these concerns. During this phase, consider connecting your contacts with those actively using apprenticeship.

MYTH	FACT
APPRENTICESHIP COMES WITH A LOT OF PAPERWORK COMPLIANCE REQUIREMENTS	Increasingly, intermediary organizations act as apprenticeship program sponsors to handle administrative responsibilities including registering businesses and apprentices, tracking activities, and reporting results. This eases the burden for businesses, particularly small companies that do not have the personnel to execute such tasks.
APPRENTICESHIPS ARE RIGID AND PROSCRIBED	Apprenticeships can be customized to meet specific industry needs. Education requirements, education providers, timing of classroom training, and length of apprenticeship are all customizable.
APPRENTICESHIP IS PROHIBITIVELY EXPENSIVE	While it is true that elements of apprenticeship have associated costs, businesses are already spending money on hiring, onboarding, and advancing employees. Apprenticeship often reduces these costs.
SIGNIFICANT AMOUNTS OF MONEY WILL BE INVESTED IN TRAINING AN EMPLOYEE WHO MIGHT LEAVE THE JOB	Every employee carries the risk that he or she might leave. Reiterate that apprenticeship has a high retention rate. Remind the business that the cost of training and increasing skills in a company's workforce can be expensive if completed outside of the program, often higher than the cost of apprenticeship.
APPRENTICESHIP IS ONLY FOR THE CONSTRUCTION AND SKILLED TRADES INDUSTRIES	Apprenticeships are successful across many industries, including healthcare, information technology, finance, transportation, and advanced manufacturing.
APPRENTICESHIPS MUST LEAD TO UNION JOBS	Apprenticeships exist in both unionized and nonunionized workforces and industries.

APPRENTICESHIP IS NOT A GOOD FIT FOR EVERY BUSINESS

If apprenticeship is not the right solution for this business, make sure you are still offering them something valuable in exchange for their time. Be prepared to offer high-quality referrals to organizations that can help. Do not just give them the name of an organization. Make a direct referral over email and follow up to make sure the connection was made. Before you connect with employers, make sure you are aware of the components of other programs and how you might connect employers to those if the need arises.

If you believe it is a good match, but the employer is unsure, there are important things to consider.

- **Yes means yes**—If there is clear interest, ensure you follow up quickly, and with exactly what you promised.
- **No means no**—Remember that the relationship is more important than closing a single deal. Listen well enough to know when to pursue or revisit at a better time.
- **Keep the door open**—Keep the conversation going with employers whose circumstances may change over time. Make a commitment to keep them in mind and follow up in the future.



PHASE 4: CLOSE AND SUPPORT

Now that you have built a relationship and the business has indicated an initial interest in apprenticeship, you will want to nurture the relationship and secure a formal commitment. You will focus on addressing concerns about the Registered Apprenticeship model, building organizational buy-in, and bringing the right partners to the table.

BUILD ORGANIZATIONAL BUY-IN

Even though a hiring manager or human resources representative seems interested in apprenticeship and understands its value, there may be multiple future meetings with other partners such as frontline managers and technical experts. Encourage the business to include the department heads and frontline supervisors who know the skills and competencies needed and will help design and validate the Registered Apprenticeship Program, standards, and supplemental education.

BRING THE RIGHT PARTNERS TO THE TABLE

The process for moving from initial business engagement to signed Registered Apprenticeship standards and fully operational programs varies by state. Some business outreach professionals participate only in the initial meeting and hand off the process to another partner. Others will see the process through to the signing of the Registered Apprenticeship agreement, and still others may act as intermediaries through the entire apprenticeship process. Whatever the process is for you and your organization, you will want to ensure that the business is working with all the partners it needs to succeed. Make sure that the right people from the business, the apprenticeship system, the workforce system, educational institutions, and other community organizations are at the table to identify the necessary resources, design the RAP, fill the role of sponsor, and recruit and train apprentices.

A NOTE ABOUT SUCCESS

No matter how strong your business engagement skills are, only a portion of the businesses you engage with early in your consultative sales process will sign Registered Apprenticeship standards and run apprenticeship programs. This is a normal part of the business engagement process, and in sales, it is called the “conversion rate.” Whatever you or your team’s conversion rate might be, a focus on continuous improvement is always a good practice in consultative business engagement.

CONCLUSION

We all know the realities of today's labor market. Positions are available, but workers are not trained to meet business needs or requirements. Likewise, candidates are not able to secure employment because they lack the skills that businesses seek. Apprenticeship can bridge that gap. This resource guide is intended to help you identify businesses who will benefit from apprenticeship, listen to the problems they face, offer value-added solutions, and build lasting and mutually beneficial business relationships. Build that foundation of success by reinforcing the key mindsets and three phases described here. You will not only use your time more efficiently, but you will be effectively helping businesses meet their workforce needs through the use of apprenticeship, a critical work-based learning tool.



LOOKING FOR MORE RESOURCES AND TOOLS ON APPRENTICESHIP BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT?

VISIT

Apprenticeship Industries
www.apprenticeship.gov/apprenticeship-industries

Apprenticeship Professional Learning Network
www.apprenticeshipprofessionals.org