

How Apprenticeship Fits Within the Workforce System

Apprenticeship is a proven strategy for developing skilled workers and strengthening local talent pipelines. It combines paid work experience with job-related instruction and a clear pathway for advancement. For youth and young adults with disabilities in particular, apprenticeship offers an opportunity to learn through experience, build confidence, and enter careers with long-term growth potential.

State and local partners across the workforce system each help make apprenticeship successful. When these efforts are aligned, apprenticeship becomes easier to access, easier to navigate, and easier to sustain. When they are disconnected, individuals, families, and employers may struggle to understand how to engage.

This brief explains how apprenticeship and the workforce system fit together—and how shared leadership can expand opportunity.

Why This Matters Right Now

Communities are working to address:

- Talent shortages in critical industries
- Increased demand for career-connected learning
- Barriers to employment for young people transitioning into adulthood
- The need for clearer pathways that link learning and work

Youth and young adults with disabilities often experience:

- Fewer early work experiences
- Limited exposure to career pathways
- Gaps in support while transitioning into adult work environments

Apprenticeship provides a structured, supported entry into employment.

But it works best when multiple systems coordinate around a shared purpose.

How These Systems Support Apprenticeship

Partner	Primary Role	Contribution to Pathways
Business / Employers / Intermediaries	Define skills and provide paid work experience	Ensure training leads to real jobs and advancement
Education & Training Providers	Deliver related technical instruction	Connect classroom learning to workplace skills
Workforce System (including VR)	Support preparation, referral, and job success	Provide guidance, stabilization, accommodations, and supportive services
Apprenticeship Offices (SAA / OA)	Approve and support programs	Ensure consistency, quality, and sustainability

These partners operate within the same system, even when they do not yet feel connected.

What Leadership Can Do

Expanding apprenticeship does not require building new systems. It requires **aligning the systems that already exist**.

Leadership can:

- 1. Ensure the right partners are at the table**
(Business, Workforce, Education, Apprenticeship Office)
- 2. Support clear communication and referral pathways**
(Who does what, when, and how information moves)
- 3. Strengthen stability and continuity**
(Shared goals, shared expectations, shared outcomes)

These are leadership actions that build capacity, not workload.

What This Means for Youth and Young Adults with Disabilities

When systems are aligned:

- Entry points become clearer
- Supports are coordinated
- Training is accessible
- Mentors and partners know how to help
- Success is shared—not left to the individual to navigate alone

Apprenticeship becomes more than a job.

It becomes a pathway to belonging, identity, and long-term career growth.

Strong apprenticeship systems grow over time, through communication, shared purpose, and steady alignment. Leadership does not have to solve everything at once. The next step is simply to bring partners together, create clarity, and move forward one coordinated decision at a time.

