



JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT EQUITY AND DIVERSITY IN APPRENTICESHIP

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Apprenticeship has a track record of success in advancing the careers of workers, but it has historically been, and continues to be, less accessible to women and people of color. This brief outlines what we know about these challenges and some ideas that have proven successful in building connections into apprenticeship through recruitment, preparation, and retention activities.

History of Exclusion in Apprenticeship

Diversity and inclusion are good for business and productivity.¹ Yet, discrimination within the workplace in the United States is prevalent. Women and people of color have well documented obstacles to advancing their careers. For example, the wage gap between men and women has only been slightly narrowed since the 1963 Equal Pay Act when women earned 59 cents for every dollar paid to men.² Currently, women are still paid only 80 cents for every dollar paid to men, with African American women typically making only 63 cents, Latina women only 54 cents, and Native American women only 58 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.³ Candidates with “African American-sounding names” receive fewer call backs from human resources than their “white-sounding” counterparts.⁴ Having access to social capital and networks is still one of the main avenues toward getting a job and people of color tend to have less access to break into these networks, thus reproducing inequality.⁵

These patterns of discrimination are evident on an industry level. In the trucking industry, women continue to face sexual harassment issues that have also resulted in cases being brought to court.⁶ In addition, occupational segregation endures and keeps women out of high-paying construction and other jobs.⁷ Similarly, within spaces such as construction unions, minority representation remains low in some regions.⁸

All of this extends to the apprenticeship system in the United States. As early as 1963, the U.S. Department of Labor commissioned a study following a series of protests by African Americans against the exclusion in various trades’ apprenticeship programs.⁹ Since then, the traditional construction workplace continues to be a hostile environment for women and people of color.¹⁰ In 2016, 5.6 percent of active apprentices in federally registered programs were women, 22.3 percent identified as Hispanic, and 10.1 percent as black.¹¹ Additionally, both women and people of color are overrepresented in the lowest-wage apprenticeship programs, and the lack of diversity within apprenticeship severely limits the future growth of programs.¹²

A Path to Equity

Several strategies have been demonstrated to diversify apprenticeships. Specifically, advancing equity can be done by creating stronger recruitment and referral systems into apprenticeship programs, creating new pre-apprenticeships or aligning existing job-training programs to apprenticeships, and enhancing services that increase the retention and success of apprentices.

IDENTIFYING DIVERSE CANDIDATES

Using a wide range of partners effectively increases the recruitment of diverse candidates. Community-based organizations such as women- or youth-serving organizations, neighborhood centers, affordable housing groups, and churches are also good partners because each one can offer different resources and expertise.¹³ Community colleges are poised to support recruitment, but many still need support in that role.¹⁴ Encouraging word-of-mouth marketing, particularly among women veterans, can help increase female participation in pre-apprenticeships. One successful tactic is using military career transition personnel to assist in this effort.¹⁵ Active recruitment and using population-specific strategies, such as using pictures of women in program flyers and brochures, can also be effective ([Adding a Gender Lens to Nontraditional Jobs Training Programs](#)). The Women in Apprenticeship and Nontraditional Occupations Act of 1992 has led to support

for ongoing grants to community-based organizations to provide technical assistance in these areas, as well as the development of an [interactive website](#) that provides technical assistance in the recruitment, training, placement, and retention of women in apprenticeship and nontraditional occupations. Marketing specifically to women, but not as a “one-size-fits-all” strategy, can increase interest and participation.¹⁶

PREPARING DIVERSE CANDIDATES FOR APPRENTICESHIP

Job-readiness programs prepare individuals for employment within an industry, and pre-apprenticeships further align with the entrance requirements for apprenticeship programs. Helmer, Blair, and Gerber find that pre-apprenticeships can help low-income, minority, and female workers locate, navigate, and retain employment in the construction industry.¹⁷ Such apprenticeship preparation programs have been shown to be successful in supporting a pipeline of women and people of color, and youth in many cities such as Seattle, Detroit, New Orleans, and Cincinnati.¹⁸ Many of these programs cite the value of readiness and skill building as central to their impact. Job-readiness programs can be a particularly effective strategy among youth due to the atmosphere of building supportive networks.¹⁹ Specifically, work-based learning can boost participation in employment due to the earn-and-learn model, dispelling misconceptions that millennials have regarding apprenticeships such as participation means not receiving college credit, and providing high school students with a “preview” of the industry.²⁰ While job-readiness programs can help individuals navigate career options, they need to maintain a diversity lens to best increase the access and success of underrepresented populations. Strategies include designing safety equipment/tools with women in mind and using gender-neutral terms in training materials ([Adding a Gender Lens to Nontraditional Jobs Training Programs](#)). The U.S. Department of Labor leverages these lessons to provide a range of pre-apprenticeship [resources](#) and [tools](#) for practitioners.

RETAINING DIVERSE APPRENTICES

Gaining entrance into an apprenticeship program is not enough—retention is also key for maintaining diversity. Helmer and Altstadt show that, within construction, minority candidates cancel apprenticeships at higher rates than whites, as well as women cancelling at higher rates than men, due to common barriers such as unsupportive work environments and poorly designed programs.²¹

Pairing apprentices with mentors also improves completion rates.²² The Greater Cincinnati Workforce Network, a regional partnership of philanthropy, government, employers, education, and community organizations, has curated promising practices in retention, including several key recommendations. Specifically, employers can retain a diverse workforce by committing to investing in additional support services for those who need it.²³

POLICY TOWARD EQUITY

Equity can be built into apprenticeships not only programmatically but also through local, state, and federal policy. Colborn and Jenkins suggest that, by modifying state-funded financial aid policies to include apprenticeship classroom instruction, there may be greater uptake by underrepresented populations.²⁴ Policies to increase women in apprenticeship also include offering support with travel and child care to female apprentices.²⁵ Expanding and diversifying the apprenticeship system can have impact beyond apprenticeship by providing another avenue for educational and career success. Lerman suggests policymakers support alternatives to the “academic-only” college-focused mindset in America, using apprenticeship to narrow the country’s postsecondary achievement gaps in both gender and race.²⁶

Conclusion

There is still a lot to learn about equity, diversity, and inclusion in apprenticeship. Most of these findings and lessons are based on experiences in construction and with women. As the apprenticeship system grows to include non-trade sectors such as information technology and financial services, more needs to be learned about how to achieve greater equity in these other industries and with other populations. Moreover, this brief presents lessons from the perspective of the apprenticeship system. Future research should focus on the perspectives of population-serving organizations / training providers, and exploring how to get them interested in and equipped to connect to the apprenticeship system, thus resulting in the diversification of apprenticeship.

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About Equity Partners in Registered Apprenticeship

Under a contract awarded by the U.S. Department of Labor, Jobs for the Future is serving as an equity partner in Registered Apprenticeship and working to connect women, people of color, and opportunity youth to RA programs. JFF has convened a national partnership that includes CVS Health, Hilton, The Hartford, National Association of Workforce Boards, Community College Workforce Consortium, Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund, Upwardly Global, and FASTPORT, as well as regional partners in Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles / Long Beach, and Philadelphia. These employers, community colleges, workforce boards, and community-based organizations, with technical assistance from JFF, seek to advance equity in RA by creating stronger referral systems into RA programs, creating new pre-apprenticeships or aligning existing job-training programs to RA, and enhancing services that increase the retention and success of apprentices.



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JFF is a national nonprofit that builds educational and economic opportunity for underserved populations in the United States. JFF develops innovative programs and public policies that increase college readiness and career success and build a more highly skilled, competitive workforce. With over 30 years of experience, JFF is a recognized national leader in bridging education and work to increase economic mobility and strengthen our economy.

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