

What Are Youth Apprenticeships?

POSTED MARCH 7, 2023, BY THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION



Youth apprenticeships are growing more popular across the United States. These structured, [work-based learning opportunities](#) offer young people — particularly young people of color and those from low-income households — the opportunity to learn specialized skills that they can use throughout their career.

Apprenticeship programs allow youth and young adults to gain critical job skills and experiences within or outside of high school or college. This can lower the cost of college for students and help them stand out to find high-quality employment in the competitive labor market.

UNDERSTANDING YOUTH APPRENTICESHIPS

Although there is currently [no federal definition](#) of youth apprenticeship, the [Partnership to Advance Youth Apprenticeship \(PAYA\)](#) — a multiyear initiative of the nonpartisan think tank [New America](#) — outlines four key characteristics to youth apprenticeships:

- paid, on-the-job learning under the supervision of skilled employee mentors;

- ongoing assessment against established skills and competency standards;
- related classroom-based instruction; and
- a portable, industry-recognized credential and postsecondary credit upon completion.

Youth apprenticeships also provide the specialized qualifications and knowledge that many employers are seeking from a potential employee but without the financial burden of obtaining a four-year college degree. Alternatively, apprenticeships give young people who are seeking a college degree — but would otherwise be unable to pay tuition and other education expenses — a chance to work and learn simultaneously.

“Youth apprenticeship is a valuable tool when it comes to building a labor market that works for everyone,” says [Allison Gerber](#), Casey’s director of Employment, Education and Training. “These programs prepare young adults entering the labor market for well-paying careers while also engaging employers in building diverse talent pipelines.”

ADVANCING ACCESS TO YOUTH APPRENTICESHIPS

Expanding youth apprenticeship is a strategy for building a more inclusive economy that connects students’ learning needs with the talent needs of industry. PAYA helps states and cities in efforts to expand access to high-quality apprenticeship opportunities for high school-age youth. It works toward those broader goals through eight national partner organizations in fields that include education, policy and workforce development.

PAYA convenes and mobilizes the expertise, experience and networks of national, state and regional partners to:

- **support area partnerships** that increase the number of youth apprenticeship programs aligned to PAYA’s definition and principles for high-quality youth apprenticeship;
- **facilitate learning and innovation** in support of wide-scale adoption of best practices and effective policies across a growing field; and
- **strengthen the case and evidence base for youth apprenticeship** to raise awareness and mobilize policy, action and investment.

PAYA’s national partners follow a set of five guiding principles to deliver high-quality youth apprenticeship opportunities:

1. **Career-oriented.** Does a program set up participants for careers that ultimately allow them to support a family?
2. **Equitable.** Is a program accessible to all students, including those who face racial and economic barriers?
3. **Portable.** Does a program result in useful credentials or college credits?

4. **Adaptable.** Are the lessons from a program valued across an entire industry?
5. **Accountable.** Are participant, program and employer outcomes monitored to ensure that students and programs are successful?

ADDITIONAL YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP RESOURCES

Learn more about how youth apprenticeships benefit young people, communities and industries:

- Find out more about how [PAYA is connecting the education and training needs of young people](#) to the talent demands of employers.
- Discover how [Phillip Fuller found a career in industrial engineering](#) through a PAYA apprenticeship.
- Read about [two recent PAYA resources](#) that shed new light on designing and advancing youth apprenticeship programs in the United States.
- Try the [Youth Apprenticeship Quality Assessment Tool](#), it identifies ways to improve policies, procedures and practices to support learner success.
- Explore a [tool kit](#) that examines how apprenticeship programs can promote equitable outcomes for youth and young adults.
- Read a Casey Foundation-funded [report](#) that discusses how workforce development organizations build quality, work-based learning opportunities for youth and young adults.
- Learn more about the value of [work-based learning strategies](#).