



BETTER WORKPLACES
BETTER WORLD™

TALENT IN ACTION

SHRM's Vision for Employer-
Led Apprenticeships

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WHAT IS AN APPRENTICESHIP?

A Proven Path from Learning to Earning

Apprenticeships are a workforce development strategy that trains individuals in specific occupations using a combination of on-the-job training and related instruction. The occupations with the largest number of apprentices tend to be in skilled trades and construction.

Registered apprenticeships are programs that have met national standards for registration with the U.S. Department of Labor (or an approved state apprenticeship agency). Organizations that register have access to a nationwide network of expertise, tax credits, and opportunities for funding. Because apprenticeships combine structured, on-the-job training with classroom or virtual instruction, they effectively bridge the gap between academic learning and practical skill development.

SHRM's support of the expansion and modernization of Registered Apprenticeships comes not only as the world's largest HR trade association dedicated to creating better

workplaces where people and businesses thrive together, but also as an organization that actively utilizes these apprenticeships.

SHRM's 2025 Talent Trends research highlights ongoing challenges in recruiting and hiring for full-time roles. More than two-thirds of organizations (69%) report ongoing struggles to fill roles — levels not seen since 2016, following a peak in 2022.

The [SHRM Foundation](#), SHRM's 501(c)(3) philanthropic arm, established the [Human Resource Registered Apprenticeship Program](#) in 2021, which provides an inclusive pathway for individuals to advance their careers as emerging HR specialists. This 12-to-24-month competency-based program offers employers a reliable solution for sourcing and developing HR talent, using SHRM-developed standards to ensure apprentices gain the skills needed for today's workplace.

HOW ARE THEY USED IN THE WORKPLACE?

Few Employers Offer Apprenticeships—But Those Who Do See Big Results

SHRM's 2025 Talent Trends show that organizations that offer or partner with registered or customized apprenticeship programs (22%) remain in the minority. However, among that relatively small cohort, 82% indicate that their apprenticeship programs have been somewhat

effective or very effective at addressing talent shortages. This suggests that apprenticeships can be a high-impact talent pipeline, even if most employers have yet to invest in them directly.

Because apprenticeships blend structured, on-the-job training with classroom or online instruction, they can neatly bridge the gap between theoretical learning and practical skill development. The reported high effectiveness indicates that, when well-designed and aligned to organizational needs, apprenticeships can quickly produce job-ready talent, particularly in positions where specialized, technical, or trade skills are in short supply. Equally important, the relatively low adoption rate signals a significant opportunity for employers: There is untapped potential to leverage apprenticeships as a differentiator in talent acquisition and development.

HOW HAVE APPRENTICESHIPS EVOLVED, AND WHAT IS HAPPENING WITH THEM NOW?

Federal Apprenticeship Policy Over the Years and the Trump Administration's Plan to Strengthen It

In the federal context, “apprenticeship” and “registered apprenticeship” have traditionally been synonymous. While registered apprenticeships remain the primary model, other apprenticeship approaches exist outside the registered framework. In recent years, there have been efforts to create parallel tracks that combine the government-backed, standardized benefits of registered apprenticeships with the flexibility and adaptability demanded by today’s economy.

In 2020, the Trump administration established a parallel system—Industry-Recognized Apprenticeship Programs (IRAPs)—through a final rule under the National Apprenticeship Act. This model created Standards Recognition Entities (SREs), nongovernmental organizations authorized to approve IRAPs under more flexible standards than those required for registered apprenticeships. IRAPs were designed to expand industry involvement and reduce regulatory oversight without replacing the traditional registered apprenticeship system. The first IRAPs launched in late 2020.

Drawing on data, experience, and on-the-ground expertise, SHRM [aims](#) to guide future policy as the Employment and Training Administration pursues the nationwide goal of more than one million active apprentices.

Read more on [SHRM.org/advocacy](https://www.shrm.org/advocacy)

However, in September 2022, the Biden administration repealed the IRAP rule, reaffirming its commitment to the traditional, government-regulated Registered Apprenticeship model.

Since then, the current administration has focused on expanding registered apprenticeships, issuing several executive orders and identifying them as a “cornerstone” of its strategy to build a demand-driven, skilled workforce. Aligned with the goals outlined in the Executive Order Preparing Americans for High-Paying Skilled Trade Jobs of the Future, the secretaries of Labor, Commerce, and Education (the Departments) were tasked with an ambitious goal: surpassing 1 million new active apprentices by expanding registered apprenticeships into high-growth sectors, scaling the model nationwide, improving efficiency, supporting participants, and strengthening ties to education through Perkins V and federal student aid.

On August 12, the Departments released a joint report, America’s Talent Strategy: Building the Workforce for the Golden Age. As part of Pillar I: Industry-Driven Strategies, which focuses on building reliable talent pipelines through a workforce system led by industry and aligned with America’s economic priorities, the Departments released a joint report stating their intent to develop a plan that will enhance the employer value proposition for registered apprenticeships, deploy federal funding strategically to drive adoption, and build a robust network of state partners and intermediaries to promote growth without compromising quality.

SHRM’S POLICY PERSPECTIVE ON APPRENTICESHIPS

Employer-Driven, HR-Led Solutions for a Modern Workforce

SHRM supports apprenticeships as a valuable tool for workforce development—when they are designed in partnership with employers and reflect the realities of the modern workplace. HR professionals, with their expertise in hiring, training, compliance, and talent strategy, are essential to bringing apprenticeship policies to life. From evaluating skills and managing benefits to overseeing retention and workforce planning, HR is uniquely positioned to lead the integration of apprenticeships into organizational practice. That’s why HR buy-in is critical—HR leaders must be equipped to understand how these programs work and how to embed them into broader talent management strategies.

As organizations innovate to meet the needs of evolving workplaces, balancing short-term demands with long-term strategies, public policy must also be ready to adapt. Just as there is no one-size-fits-all approach to upskilling and reskilling, SHRM has long recognized that the same is true for apprenticeships. Building on this expertise, SHRM and the SHRM Foundation helped shape Industry-Recognized Apprenticeship Programs (IRAPs), advocating for flexible, employer-driven workforce solutions. Through engagement with the Department of Labor, participation in stakeholder roundtables, and ongoing advocacy, SHRM ensured IRAPs aligned with the realities of the modern workplace, demonstrating agility, responsiveness, and a commitment to meeting the needs of employers and workers.

To ensure apprenticeship policies are practical, sustainable, and employer-driven, SHRM recommends that federal and state policies:

1. Strengthen Education-to-Employment Pipelines

Apprenticeships should serve as a bridge between learning and earning. Public policy must invest in and promote strong, coordinated partnerships among employers, educational institutions, and workforce development agencies to ensure programs prepare individuals for in-demand careers and help workers remain competitive in a rapidly evolving job market.



Many SHRM members already provide training and development opportunities that mirror apprenticeship models—but under different names and without the formal structure. These employers are not avoiding apprenticeship; they are simply not using the same language or processes. Bridging this gap requires reframing apprenticeship in terms that reflect how employers already operate—emphasizing skills development, career mobility, and long-term workforce strategy. To explore challenges, opportunities, priorities, and effective strategies across key talent pipelines, learn more about the [SHRM E² Initiative](#).

2. Minimize Administrative Barriers

The apprenticeship registration process must be streamlined and accessible to encourage broader participation. Overly complex, rigid, or bureaucratic requirements risk excluding small- and mid-sized businesses and discouraging prospective apprentices. Regulatory guidance should emphasize clarity and simplicity for both employers and workers. Additionally, the federal government should evaluate how, when prudent, more flexible apprenticeship models—such as those piloted through initiatives like IRAPs—can complement the Registered Apprenticeship system, helping organizations scale programs to meet evolving talent needs.

Many current apprenticeship frameworks are written in government-centric language and structures that do not align with modern workplace realities. This misalignment creates unnecessary confusion and administrative burden. To expand adoption, the system must use employer-facing language, streamline compliance requirements, and simplify participation—especially for HR professionals already managing multiple regulatory demands.

3. Adapt to Regional and Industry-Specific Workforce Needs

A modern apprenticeship system must be flexible enough to adapt to changing labor market demands—both by industry and geography. Policymakers should prioritize regional responsiveness and allow employers to tailor programs based on local workforce needs, while maintaining quality standards. This flexibility can be supported by exploring complementary models, including innovative approaches like IRAPs, to ensure apprenticeship pathways reflect the diversity of industries and economic conditions.

SHRM recommends that apprenticeship expansion begin by engaging a subset of its employer members—particularly those already running successful workforce development programs—through focus groups, advisory panels, and other employer-led feedback mechanisms. These practitioners can provide critical, real-world insights that inform scalable models. Apprenticeships must be responsive—not one-size-fits-all.

4. Redesign Technical Assistance and Support Systems

Technical assistance (TA) must evolve to meet the needs of employers. Rather than directing organizations to generic manuals or compliance checklists, TA should be delivered by practitioners with firsthand experience building and sustaining apprenticeship programs. Peer-to-peer support from employers who have successfully implemented apprenticeships is more effective than passive resources—especially for HR professionals navigating new or complex systems.

HR plays a pivotal role in executing apprenticeship strategies. As such, technical assistance must be tailored to the realities of talent acquisition, learning and development, and organizational change. SHRM urges policymakers to invest in practitioner-informed TA systems that support, not overwhelm, those on the ground.

5. Increase Funding Flexibility and Modernize Performance Metrics

SHRM supports increased federal investment in registered apprenticeships, along with greater flexibility in how existing funds—particularly under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)—can be used. Currently, workforce development boards face limited incentives to prioritize apprenticeships. Inflexible funding and performance metrics focused narrowly on short-term job placement or program completion create pressure for “quick wins” rather than long-term workforce development.

Policymakers should adjust these metrics to reflect meaningful outcomes such as skill development, job retention, and wage growth. These are the results that matter most to employers—and the ones that truly close skills shortages. Realigning funding priorities and performance measures with employer-defined success will help ensure apprenticeships are sustainable and impactful. Talent in Action: SHRM’s Vision for Employer-Led Apprenticeships |

6. Invest in Industry-Specific Pilot Programs

To drive innovation and expand apprenticeship adoption in high-demand sectors, SHRM supports investment in sector-specific pilot programs—especially in emerging fields such as information technology, cybersecurity, data analytics, and human resources. These pilots should explore both traditional Registered Apprenticeships and more flexible, employer-driven models, such as those demonstrated through initiatives like IRAPs, to identify scalable approaches that meet diverse industry needs. This blended approach can show how complementary models work together to expand access, improve responsiveness, and maintain quality standards.

Expanding apprenticeships into white-collar and knowledge-based sectors will make these programs more relevant to a broader range of employers and more aligned with modern workforce realities. Doing so will also strengthen national talent pipelines in areas where skills gaps are growing fastest, ensuring the apprenticeship system remains adaptable and future-focused.

7. Bolster Competency-Based Models

Competency-based apprenticeship programs ensure apprentices gain demonstrable skills aligned with industry needs, addressing skills gaps and supporting economic resilience. Flexible and personalized, they let participants progress at their own pace and earn stackable credentials for early completion while keeping pathways open for further development. SHRM advocates for public policies that accelerate adoption through funding, tax credits, grants, and technical assistance. Clear frameworks for competency assessment and credential portability, along with strong public-private partnerships, will keep curricula aligned with evolving demands. Investments in digital platforms and flexible delivery can expand access, fostering a skilled, adaptable, and inclusive workforce.

The Path Ahead

Apprenticeships have the potential to be a powerful tool for talent development—if they are redesigned to fit the needs of today’s workforce. That means simplifying systems, using employer-aligned language, providing practical support, and measuring what truly matters. SHRM is ready to serve as a bridge between policy and practice, ensuring modern apprenticeships are not only effective, but truly employer-driven and HR-enabled.

Explore SHRM's policy priorities and initiatives aimed at enhancing [workforce development](#) through employer-driven strategies and HR leadership.