The Apprentice Journey
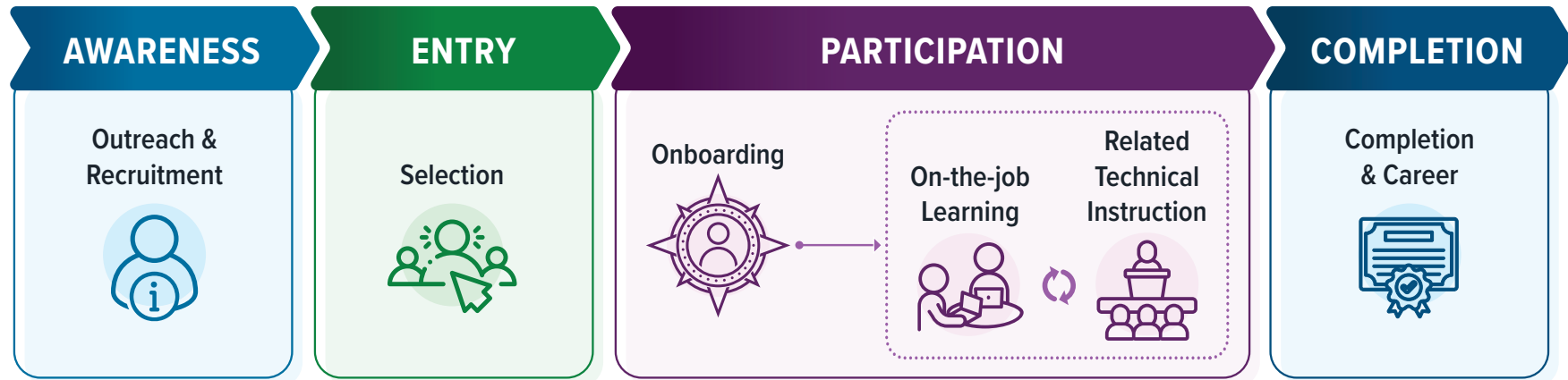
A Framework for Advancing an Equitable and Inclusive Apprenticeship System

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THE APPRENTICE JOURNEY

AWARENESS	ENTRY	PARTICIPATION		COMPLETION
Outreach & Recruitment	Selection	Onboarding	On-the-job Learning / Related Technical Instruction	Completion & Career

Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs) provide opportunities for individuals to access well-paying careers through a training model that combines paid on-the-job-learning (OJL) and related technical instruction (RTI). For many, completing a RAP is a pathway to economic stability. Apprenticeship is a talent development strategy that can support nontraditional learners and people from historically underrepresented populations and underserved communities. However, many promising candidates never pursue apprenticeship, and those who do may not be selected for or complete their apprenticeship programs. To fully realize the power and potential of apprenticeship in the United States, it is critical to understand how different individuals and groups may experience the apprentice journey and to make adaptations that respond to challenges that may arise. Doing so helps partners in the apprenticeship ecosystem identify and take action on pain points and repeat what's working. The end result is a system that provides equitable access to RAPs and provides all apprentices with supports to successfully complete their training.

The Apprentice Journey Framework is a visual representation of individuals' experiences, processes, needs, and perceptions throughout their engagement with the apprenticeship system, from first awareness of apprenticeship opportunities through completion of apprenticeship. Partners in the apprenticeship ecosystem can use this framework to understand how individuals experience the apprenticeship system; identify what helps and what may hinder diverse individuals' successful navigation of each stage and progression to the next; and identify opportunities for innovation and improvement. While the Apprentice Journey Framework can be used to assess a range of apprentice experiences, it is particularly useful for examining issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.

Stages and Activities

The Apprentice Journey Framework is composed of four stages: awareness, entry, participation, and completion. In each stage, apprentices experience activities (as depicted below) that are generally common to all RAPs. While there may be some variation from program to program, an awareness of the activities that individuals navigate in each stage is important for understanding the apprentice journey.

Awareness

Outreach & Recruitment | Individuals learn about apprenticeship and opportunities to join RAPs in field(s) of interest. They get information through advertisements, social media posts, word of mouth, career fairs, career counselors, pre-apprenticeship programs, career and technical education programs, or internal postings for incumbent workers. Individuals begin to see apprenticeship as a possible career pathway.

Entry

Selection | Selection may involve filling out an application, providing a résumé, submitting school transcripts, participating in an interview, taking an aptitude test, and/or other types of assessment activities. Individuals begin to engage with an employer or apprenticeship training center and get a first look at workplace culture.

Participation

Onboarding | Individuals sign an apprenticeship agreement with the program. They learn about the RAP's policies and procedures, including anti-harassment policies, RTI schedules, assignment to a mentor (called a "journey worker" in the construction trades), introduction to tracking OJL hours, safety practices, and more. Individuals begin to see themselves as apprentices.

OJL | Apprentices "earn and learn" in the workplace by participating in hands-on training under the guidance of a mentor. Apprentices develop knowledge and skills in their occupation as they progress through the work processes and competencies and receive wage increases for skills gains. Individuals are immersed in workplace culture and are navigating their RAP and seeking to solve problems and address challenges that may arise.

RTI | Apprentices participate in classroom or lab learning experiences that support their OJL. RTI may be offered online, or apprentices may need to go to physical classrooms to receive instruction. Individuals are balancing aspects of student life—navigating coursework, homework, and class schedules—in addition to OJL.

Completion

Completion & Career | Apprentices successfully complete their RAP and receive a portable, nationally recognized credential allowing them to work as fully qualified employees. Individuals have reached a milestone that marks the end of their training. They begin to navigate next steps as skilled workers and to make decisions about advancing their careers, which may include staying with their current employer, applying for advanced training, returning to school, and/or becoming a mentor for new apprentices.

Surfacing Insights to Drive Policy and Practice

The Apprentice Journey Framework can be used to surface insights about how individuals experience each stage of the journey, including pain points and challenges they may encounter that make moving to the next stage more difficult. These insights can be used by partners across the apprenticeship ecosystem to identify equity gaps and other challenges, enhance programming, and consider areas where new strategies and partnerships can improve access, participation, and completion outcomes for diverse individuals in RAPs.

Partners in the apprenticeship ecosystem can use this framework as a tool, working with potential, existing, and former apprentices, to analyze their experiences by asking critical questions to uncover patterns or recurring issues that could be addressed by improved practices, processes, and policies. To assist in this work, we have curated examples of questions that partners can use based on insights from existing research about factors the contribute to apprentices leaving their RAPs and strategies for increasing retention (Improving Apprentice Completion Rates). Partners can identify which areas they can impact—people, programs and processes, and/or partnerships and systems—to build a more inclusive and robust apprenticeship system.

Examples of critical questions to consider at each stage of the Apprentice Journey:

AWARENESS

Outreach and Recruitment

People: Who is receiving information about and getting exposure to RAP opportunities? What actions do they take as a result of that information? Do individuals see themselves represented in program marketing materials?

Programs & Processes: What is the employer's and/or sponsor's plan for outreach to reach diverse potential participants? How are outreach strategies being assessed for effectiveness?

Partnerships & Systems: How can RAPs coordinate with and leverage the broader workforce development system and other organizations serving diverse job seekers so that information about RAPs reaches a diverse audience? What partners could be engaged in outreach and recruitment to reach more diverse potential participants?

ENTRY

Selection

People: Who is making it through each step of the selection process and who is not? Are there noticeable patterns of different demographic groups that don't progress past certain steps?

Programs & Processes: Is the application process easy to navigate? Is every prerequisite for selection necessary to do the job? Do applicant-facing materials explain the selection process and provide information on the RAP, employer, and industry? How are selection and/or interview committees formed? Do they reflect the diversity of the workforce?

Partnerships & Systems: What partnerships exist with community-based organizations, pre-apprenticeship programs, or others to prepare diverse individuals with the basic skills and knowledge needed for selection into RAPs?

PARTICIPATION

Onboarding

People: What do apprentices say are their key takeaways from the onboarding process? Do they receive sufficient training on the program's anti-harassment policies and their Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) rights? Do they understand how to access resources to support their success starting at onboarding and throughout the RAP (such as childcare assistance, referrals to supportive services, and information about affinity groups)?

Programs & Processes: Is there a clear onboarding process that is followed consistently for every apprentice or cohort of apprentices? How does the program ensure that new apprentices understand the expectations for participation in the RAP?

Partnerships & Systems: What policies might be implemented to ensure that all RAPs provide timely and effective onboarding that helps new apprentices understand expectations and resources available to support them? What resources exist to help RAPs design effective onboarding processes?

OJL

People: Are apprentices receiving training that is focused on supporting their learning rather than on task completion? Do apprentices experience respectful workplace culture? Are apprentices encouraged to discuss any concerns they may have about their training with their employer or apprenticeship coordinator?

Programs & Processes: What training is provided to mentors to ensure they are providing quality training? Are diverse apprentices paired with well-trained mentors who are invested in their progress in the apprenticeship? What does the data show about how apprentices are progressing through skill and competency attainment milestones? Are there disparities based on sex, race, ethnicity, age, disability status, or other factors?

Partnerships & Systems: What strategic partnerships are in place with organizations that can provide supports to help with apprentice well-being (such as resources for navigating state unemployment systems during layoffs, financial literacy and planning tools, substance misuse recovery referrals, etc.)?

RTI

People: Do apprentices know how to access support for classroom learning such as that for English language learners, individuals with learning disabilities, and individuals experiencing other academic challenges? What challenges might apprentices experience accessing RTI classes (cost, scheduling, etc.)?

Programs & Processes: Are RTI costs prohibitive for participating in RAPs? What processes are in place to support apprentices who have been out of school for several years to adjust to life as a student? What does the data show about how apprentices are progressing through RTI? Does the data show disparities between different groups?

Partnerships & Systems: What partnerships are in place with organizations that provide support for individuals with learning disabilities, English language learners, and others who may experience challenges with classroom learning?

COMPLETION

Completion & Career

People: What do completers say about their apprenticeship experience? Are there differences in how diverse individuals experienced workplace and RAP culture? Are completers able to articulate options they have for career advancement (advanced training, continued education, etc.)?

Programs & Processes: What processes are in place to support retention in employment for RAP completers? What are the RAP completion rates for apprentices, and are there differences in completion rates for different demographic groups?

Partnerships & Systems: How do RAPs fit into broader career pathway and sector strategy work in the region? To what extent do apprentices earn college credit and short-term credentials that provide access to advancement opportunities? What is known about career advancement opportunities after RAP completion, and who is able to access those opportunities? Do the data show disparities indicating that certain populations leave the industry after completion?

Information generated from exploring these questions can be used to provide a more nuanced understanding of how individuals experience RAPs so that employers and/or sponsors and other apprenticeship partners can develop practices, processes, and policies that are both responsive to apprentice needs and proactive in removing barriers that apprentices may encounter. Surfacing insights through thoughtful exploration of how diverse apprentices experience each phase in their journey is particularly useful in driving the development of policies and practices that support building a more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible apprenticeship system.

Using the Framework Across the Apprenticeship Ecosystem

- **Apprenticeship system leaders and policymakers** can use knowledge gained about the apprentice experience to make informed decisions about policy changes and alignment, evaluation of outcomes, resource allocation, interagency collaboration, and other strategies that create a more effective and intentional approach for supporting apprentice success.

- **Apprenticeship professionals** on the frontlines can work with employers to include equitable and inclusive elements in the design of RAPs and to suggest and facilitate partnerships that can help address common challenges and barriers impacting apprentice success.

- **Employers** can adapt internal processes to be more equitable, gain a deeper understanding of factors in the workplace that increase retention, and develop staff training that supports more impactful and effective training delivery and apprentice supports.

- **RAP training staff and RTI providers** can gain insight into the processes that support effective training, mentorship, and applied learning.

- **Partnering organizations,** such as workforce, education, or community partners, can identify how their services can be integrated across all stages of the Apprentice Journey to impact apprentice success and achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.

- **Apprentices** can be empowered to anticipate and respond to challenges.

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AIR Apprenticeship and Work-Based Learning
(www.air.org/apprenticeship).

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