

Registered Apprenticeship: Federal Role and Recent Federal Efforts

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Summary

Apprenticeship is a workforce development strategy that trains a worker for a specific occupation using a structured combination of paid on-the-job training and related instruction. Increased costs for higher education and possible mismatches between worker skills and employer needs have led to interest in alternative workforce development strategies such as apprenticeship.

The largest federal role in supporting apprenticeships is the administration of the registered apprenticeship system. In this system, the federal Department of Labor (DOL) or a DOL-recognized state apprenticeship agency (SAA) is responsible for evaluating apprenticeship programs to determine if they are in compliance with federal regulations related to program design, worker protections, and other criteria. Programs that are in compliance are “registered.” While registration does not trigger any specific federal financial incentives, registered programs may receive preferential consideration in various federal systems and apprentices who complete a registered program receive a nationally recognized credential.

Historically, registered apprenticeship has been the primary avenue through which the federal government has supported apprenticeship and, in the federal context, *apprenticeship* has historically been synonymous with registered apprenticeship programs. While there have been some efforts to expand federal involvement in apprenticeship beyond the registered system, this report focuses on registered apprenticeship.

To register an apprenticeship, a sponsor (an employer, union, industry group, or other eligible entity) submits an application to the applicable registration agency (either DOL or the appropriate SAA). The application must include a work process schedule that describes the competencies that the apprentice would learn and how on-the-job training and related instruction would teach those competencies. The application must also include a schedule of wage increases for the apprentice, a description of safety measures, and various assurances related to program administration and recordkeeping.

If the registration agency finds that the program is in conformity with the requirements, the program receives provisional registration. Once a program receives permanent registration, the registration agency is responsible for reviewing the program for conformity not less than once every five years.

Since FY2016, the federal government has supplemented its typical registration activities with competitive grants to support the expansion of registered apprenticeship as a workforce development strategy. These grants have directed funds to state agencies and other apprenticeship stakeholders through a variety of strategies. There were also several executive actions related to apprenticeship in the first Trump Administration and the Biden Administration.

While registered apprenticeship sponsors do not necessarily qualify for federal funding, several education and workforce programs have identified apprenticeship as an eligible use of funds. For example, some veterans may qualify to receive GI Bill benefits while participating in a registered apprenticeship and registered apprenticeships are eligible for federal workforce development funds through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

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Introduction

Apprenticeship is a workforce development strategy that trains a worker for a specific occupation using a structured combination of paid on-the-job training and related instruction. Increased costs for higher education and possible mismatches between worker skills and employer needs have led to increased congressional interest in alternative workforce development strategies such as apprenticeship.

Historically, the primary federal mechanism in the United States for supporting apprenticeships has been registering individual programs that comply with federally-directed standards (“registered apprenticeships”). Registration is carried out by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) or a DOL-approved state agency. Since FY2016, Congress has supported expanded use of apprenticeship through a series of grants to states and other entities.

This report discusses federal efforts related to registered apprenticeship. It begins by describing the long-established federal role in certifying apprenticeships programs through the registered apprenticeship system. The report then discusses more recent federal efforts to support the expansion of registered apprenticeship as a workforce development strategy, including several grant programs.¹ It also discusses relevant executive actions during the first Trump Administration and the Biden Administration, and discusses legislative action in the 116th through 118th Congresses. The appendix of the report discusses federal funding streams that focus on other human capital development strategies but can support apprenticeship in certain circumstances.

In the federal context, *apprenticeship* and *registered apprenticeship* have historically been synonymous. This report focuses on registered apprenticeship, and when it refers to “apprenticeships” and “apprentices” it is referring to registered programs and their participants, unless otherwise specified.

Registered Apprenticeship System

Statute, Regulations, and Administration

The National Apprenticeship Act of 1937 directs DOL to “formulate and promote the furtherance of labor standards necessary to safeguard the welfare of apprentices.”² DOL has carried out these provisions primarily by developing a system of standards for apprenticeship programs and recognizing (“registering”) individual programs that are in compliance with those standards.

The National Apprenticeship Act is relatively concise, and the registered apprenticeship system has been established and developed predominantly through regulations and non-regulatory guidance.³ The agency within DOL that carries out the National Apprenticeship Act is the Office of Apprenticeship (OA); the chief official of OA is the administrator.

Registration agencies are responsible for determining apprenticeship programs’ compliance and registering individual programs. A registration agency can be the OA at DOL or a state agency

¹ An examination of executive actions taken by the second Trump Administration and whether or how they may impact federal grants for registered apprenticeship is beyond the scope of this report.

² See 29 U.S.C. §§50 et seq.

³ Primary regulations are at 29 C.F.R. §§29-30.

that OA has recognized as meeting specified standards. Registration agencies also issue certificates of completion to apprentices who complete a registered program.

An apprenticeship *sponsor* is the entity that operates an apprenticeship program. A sponsor can be an employer, a group of employers, a union, an industry group, an educational institution, or other eligible entity. A sponsor is responsible for compliance during the registration process and subsequent operation of the program.

Registration of an apprenticeship program does not entitle an apprenticeship sponsor to direct financial support from the federal government. Registration can make it easier for an apprenticeship program to operate within the eligibility rules of some federal programs and systems. For example, registered apprenticeship programs are approvable for GI Bill support, and are automatically eligible training providers for federal workforce funds under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).⁴ It is very likely, however, that at least some federally registered programs do not receive any federal funds.⁵

Registration Agencies

Registered apprenticeships are programs that have been certified by a qualified registration agency as being in compliance with applicable standards. DOL's Office of Apprenticeship may register programs. A state may also elect to establish a state apprenticeship agency (SAA) that can register apprenticeship programs in the state.

If a state elects to establish an SAA, the SAA is subject to approval by DOL using a process established in regulations.⁶ The state must submit an application to DOL that specifies the applicable agency and describes its standards, criteria, and requirements for registration. Once approved by DOL, an SAA's recognition is effective for five years, during which DOL monitors the state agency. After five years, DOL may notify the SAA that it is in conformity with regulations and renew its recognition for an additional five years. If the SAA is not in conformity, under the regulations, DOL would notify the state of its nonconformity and provide technical assistance. After the nonconformities are corrected, the regulations say DOL would renew recognition for another five years.

Currently, 29 states operate an SAA and 21 states register programs through DOL (see **Figure 1**). The District of Columbia operates an SAA. Apprenticeship programs in Puerto Rico are registered through DOL.

⁴ For more information on how registered apprenticeship operates in these and other systems, see the **Appendix** of this report.

⁵ Some states may offer tax benefits to apprenticeship sponsors. DOL has compiled a list of state-level tax benefits at <https://doleta.gov/oa/taxcredits.cfm>.

⁶ See 29 C.F.R. §29.13. DOL has issued additional guidance on obtaining recognition as an SAA through Office of Apprenticeship Circular No. 2023-02, https://www.apprenticeship.gov/sites/default/files/bulletins/circular-2023-02_0.pdf.



To register an apprenticeship program, the apprenticeship sponsor must submit an application to the applicable registration body (either DOL or an SAA).⁷ The application must include a description of the program and how it complies with standards established in regulation.

⁷ In the case of an apprenticeship that will operate in multiple states, the sponsor can apply for approval from DOL as a National Program.

Why Register an Apprenticeship Program?

Because many apprenticeship sponsors receive no direct financial benefit from the federal government, it may be reasonable to ask why a sponsor would choose to register a program. There are several potential benefits:

- *Ease of operation in other federal contexts.* Some federal programs and policies may offer preferential treatment or simplified processes for registered apprenticeship programs. For example, registered apprenticeship programs have an abbreviated approval process for GI Bill funding and workforce funding under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Unregistered apprenticeship programs would have to apply for these programs under separate on-the-job training criteria. See the **Appendix** for more interactions between registered apprenticeship and other federal policies.
- *Widely recognized indicator of program quality.* Workers who finish a registered apprenticeship receive a DOL certificate of completion, which is a nationally recognized credential. The wide acceptance of this credential may make a registered apprenticeship more attractive to prospective apprentices and prospective employers.
- *Technical support.* Sponsors of registered programs can receive assistance from registration agencies in program design and delivery as well as marketing and recruitment.

Qualified Occupations

Not all occupations are suitable for apprenticeship. Regulations specify that an occupation for which a worker can be trained through an apprenticeship must

- involve skills that are customarily learned in a practical way through a structured, systematic program of on-the-job supervised learning;
- be clearly identified and commonly recognized throughout an industry;
- involve the progressive attainment of manual, mechanical, or technical skills and knowledge which, in accordance with the industry standard for the occupation, would require the completion of at least 2,000 hours of on-the-job learning to attain; and
- require related instruction to supplement the on-the-job learning.⁸

DOL maintains a list of more than 1,000 apprenticeable occupations.⁹ Sponsors who wish to establish an apprenticeship in a new occupation may contact DOL or the applicable SAA for an apprenticeability determination.¹⁰

Program Frameworks and Standards of Apprenticeship

Sponsors have a number of options in designing an apprenticeship program. Regulations establish three general frameworks for a program:¹¹

- *Time-based approach* measures skill attainment through completion of a specified number of hours of on-the-job training (at least 2,000), as specified by the work process schedule (see below).

⁸ See 29 C.F.R. §29.4.

⁹ U.S. Department of Labor, “Apprenticeship Occupations,” <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/apprenticeship-occupations>.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Labor, “Apprenticeship Occupation Request,” <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/employers/registered-apprenticeship-program/register/apprenticeship-occupation-request>.

¹¹ For more details on each of these approaches, see U.S. Department of Labor Apprenticeship Circular 2016-01; “Guidance for Competency-based, Hybrid, and Time-based Apprenticeship Training Approaches,” October 20, 2015; <https://doleta.gov/OA/cir16/Cir2016-01.pdf>.

- *Competency-based approach* measures skill attainment through the apprentice's demonstration of specified skills and knowledge, verified by the sponsor. A competency-based program must still address how on-the-job training is incorporated into the program.
- *Hybrid approach* measures an apprentice's skill attainment through a combination of a specified minimum number of on-the-job hours and verified demonstration of competencies.

Each registered apprenticeship program must have a written plan specifying the terms and conditions of the apprenticeship ("program standards"). Among other required content, the plan must include a *work process schedule*, which outlines the major competencies of the occupation and how a combination of on-the-job training and/or related instruction will lead to the worker demonstrating proficiency in those competencies.

Regulations specify a number of components that the apprenticeship sponsors' standards must address. Standards relate to program design, apprentice protections, and rules related to administration and recordkeeping. Some key standards include the following:¹²

- Outline of the work processes in which the apprentice will receive supervised experience and training and the approximate amount of time spent on each process.
- Description of the related instruction the apprentice will receive in a classroom or alternative setting. A minimum of 144 hours of related instruction per year is recommended.
- Schedule of progressively increasing wages for the apprentice. The entry wage may not be less than the federal minimum wage, or a higher wage level if required by another federal law, state law, or collective bargaining agreement.
- Assurance of adequate and safe equipment and facilities and safety training for apprentices.
- Definition of probationary period for apprentices in the program. The probationary period cannot exceed 25% of the length of the program or one year, whichever is shorter.
- Contact information for the appropriate authority to receive, process, and make disposition of complaints.

Additional standards relate to administrative matters such as the construction of apprenticeship agreements, credit for previous experience, compliance with Equal Employment Opportunity provisions, and records maintenance.¹³

¹² For an employer-targeted guide to developing program standards, see the DOL-issued *Standards Builder User Guide* at https://www.apprenticeship.gov/sites/default/files/Standards_Builder_User_Guide.pdf.

¹³ Full standards are in regulations at 29 C.F.R. §29.5(b). DOL also presented the standards as a 23-item checklist in DOL Circular 2015-01; "Policy on Authentication and Issuance of Certificates of Registration of Apprenticeship Programs;" June 24, 2015; <https://doleta.gov/OA/cir15/Cir2015-01.pdf>.

Related Instruction Component of Registered Apprenticeship

While on-the-job training is the most visible component of apprenticeship, registered apprenticeship programs are also required to have a related instruction component. Regulations define “related instruction” as “an organized and systematic form of instruction designed to provide the apprentice with the knowledge of the theoretical and technical subjects related to the apprentice’s occupation.” While there is no required amount of related instruction, regulations recommend at least 144 hours per year.¹⁴

Related instruction can be provided by a postsecondary institution such as a community college, directly by the apprenticeship sponsor, or through another provider. It can be provided in a classroom setting or through other means, such as self-study. Related instruction may lead to a degree or other credential, but it is not required to do so. Related instruction is often provided at no cost to the apprentice, but there is no requirement to that effect.¹⁵

Program Approval and Registration Process

If the registration agency finds that the program conforms to standards in regulation, the program is granted provisional approval for one year. At the conclusion of the provisional year, the registration agency reviews the program for quality and conformity with regulations. After the review, the registration agency may make the program’s registration permanent; continue provisional approval through the first training cycle; or, if the program is not in compliance, recommend the program for deregistration.¹⁶

Oversight, Program Performance, and Deregistration

Once a program is permanently registered, the registration agency must review the program not less than once every five years to ensure that it remains in compliance with the required standards. Regulations specify that factors in evaluation must include, but are not limited to, the following:¹⁷

- *Quality assurance assessments.* These reviews determine that programs are providing on-the-job training, related instruction, wage increases, and meeting other requirements consistent with registration standards.
- *Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Compliance Reviews.* The registration agency may review company records or interview employees or hiring officials to ensure compliance with EEO requirements.¹⁸
- *Completion rates.* To evaluate completion rates, the registration agency compares a program’s rate to the national average. Apprenticeships that are cancelled during the probationary period do not have an adverse effect on the program’s completion rate.

¹⁴ 29 C.F.R. §29.5(b)(4).

¹⁵ A 2016 report commissioned by the U.S. Department of Commerce on business perspectives on apprenticeship noted that related instruction “is usually tuition-free to the apprentice” and that “many of the companies with whom we spoke also pay hourly wages or a flat stipend to the employee for their classroom time.” See U.S. Department of Commerce, *The Benefits and Costs of Apprenticeship: A Business Perspective*, November 2016, archived at the Department of Education’s Education Resources Information Center at <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED572260.pdf>.

¹⁶ See 29 C.F.R. §29.3 for more details.

¹⁷ 29 C.F.R. §29.6.

¹⁸ See 29 C.F.R. §30 for full EEO information and 29 C.F.R. §30.13 for information on compliance reviews.

In cases where a program sponsor has completion rates below the national average, the registration agency will provide technical assistance. In cases of persistently low completion rates, the program may be subject to deregistration.

Deregistration Process

A registration agency may undertake deregistration proceedings if a program fails to comply with the required standards of apprenticeship or demonstrates “persistent and significant failure to perform successfully.”¹⁹ Regulations define a program that fails to perform as one that²⁰

- consistently fails to register at least one apprentice,
- shows a pattern of assessments by the registration agency identifying poor quality in the apprenticeship program over several years,
- demonstrates an ongoing pattern of very low completion rates over a period of several years, or
- shows no indication of improvement in the areas identified by the registration agency during a review process as requiring corrective action.

If a program is not performing in accordance with standards or requirements, the registration agency must notify the sponsor in writing of the shortcomings and the remedies required. Following this notice, the registration agency must “assist the sponsor in every reasonable way to achieve conformity.” If the program does not demonstrate the required corrections in the allotted period of time, the registration agency notifies the sponsor of deregistration proceedings.²¹ The sponsor may request a hearing with an administrative law judge. If the sponsor does not request a hearing, the recommendation for deregistration and all supporting documents are submitted to the administrator of the Office of Apprenticeship. The administrator makes the final decision regarding deregistration.

Role of Intermediaries in the Registration Process

While a sponsor has the option of designing an apprenticeship program independently and then registering the program directly with the applicable registration agency, many sponsors work with an intermediary in the development and registration of a program. Intermediaries can assist employers with the development of a program that will meet the required standards. Intermediaries can facilitate connections with providers of related instruction or help sponsors develop their own instructional programs. Intermediaries can also assist sponsors with applying to a registration agency and, once registered, recruiting apprentices. A variety of entities can serve as intermediaries.²²

In some cases, an intermediary can serve as a program sponsor. In these cases, an intermediary can develop a program, register it, and then partner with individual employers to carry out the actual apprenticeships. Under this arrangement, the employer agrees to implement the program as designed by the intermediary and the employer is responsible for recruiting, hiring, providing on-

¹⁹ See 29 C.F.R. §29.8 for more information on deregistration.

²⁰ The four subsequent bullet points repeat language from 29 C.F.R. §29.8(b)(1)(ii). Some terms, such as “poor quality assessments” and “very low completion rates” are not defined in regulations.

²¹ Specifically, the registration agency may establish that a reasonable cause for deregistration will be made unless the sponsor demonstrates corrective action within 30 days. This period can be extended for an additional 30 days.

²² A description of roles for intermediaries and a listing of intermediaries that have received DOL funding is available at <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/sites/default/files/DOL-IndFSht-RAIndIntermed-080224a.pdf>.

the-job learning, and paying wages.²³ This approach allows individual employers to participate in an apprenticeship program while limiting development costs.

For example, the Wireless Infrastructure Association developed and registered the Telecommunications Industry Registered Apprenticeship Program (TIRAP), a group of apprenticeship programs associated with the telecom sector. Individual employers that wish to use a program complete an *employer acceptance agreement*, committing to the work processes and other standards developed for TIRAP and approved by DOL. Individual employers are then responsible for recruiting apprentices and carrying out the program, using the TIRAP standards.²⁴

United Services Military Apprenticeship Program (USMAP)

In some circumstances, members of the Armed Forces may complete a registered apprenticeship program while serving on active duty. Typically, USMAP participants may complete at least some apprenticeship requirements through their normal military duties.

Military apprenticeships are registered with DOL using an application process that is similar to the process used by civilian employers. Members of the Armed Forces who complete a USMAP apprenticeship receive a certificate of completion from DOL, which can serve as a nationally recognized indicator of proficiency in an occupation to civilian employers.

USMAP participants pursue an apprenticeship that is related to their military occupational specialty (MOS), though there may be several apprenticeship options within a single MOS.²⁵ For example, a utilitiesman in the Navy (an occupation responsible for working with plumbing, heating, steam, fuel, and other systems) may pursue an apprenticeship in six different occupations.²⁶

Pre-apprenticeship Programs

Pre-apprenticeship programs are educational programs designed to prepare individuals for a registered apprenticeship program.²⁷ Pre-apprenticeship programs can provide instruction in general education (e.g., mathematics) or vocational fields. DOL does not register or formally regulate pre-apprenticeship programs, though it has issued guidance on the characteristics of a quality pre-apprenticeship program.²⁸ Among other attributes, DOL specified that a quality pre-apprenticeship program should have facilitated entry into a registered apprenticeship program.

²³ For more information on workforce intermediaries serving at the sponsor, see U.S. Department of Labor Office of Apprenticeship Bulletin 2016-16; “Guidance on Organizations that can serve as Registered Apprenticeship Sponsors,” March 21, 2016; https://www.apprenticeship.gov/sites/default/files/bulletins/Bulletin_2016-26.pdf.

²⁴ See Wireless Infrastructure Association, “Building A Telecommunications Talent Pipeline: Apprenticeship Guidebook,” https://www.tirap.org/wp-content/uploads/TIRAP-Guidebook-A01-A16_SRUUpdated.pdf.

²⁵ The Office of the Secretary of Defense publishes registered apprenticeship programs and their associated MOS codes for each branch of the military at <https://usmap.osd.mil/find-a-trade.htm>.

²⁶ Robert Lerman et al., *The United States Military Apprenticeship Program: Implementation Study and Feasibility for an Impact Study*, Urban Institute, November 2015, [https://www.dol.gov/asp/evaluation/completed-studies/The_United_Services_Military_Apprenticeship_Program_\(USMAP\).pdf](https://www.dol.gov/asp/evaluation/completed-studies/The_United_Services_Military_Apprenticeship_Program_(USMAP).pdf). See p. 8 for utilitiesman example.

²⁷ There is a definition for “pre-apprenticeship program” in 29 C.F.R. §30, which is associated with the equal employment opportunity regulations of registered apprenticeship programs. There is no definition for a pre-apprenticeship program in the regulations associated with labor standards for registered apprenticeship programs in 29 C.F.R. §29.

²⁸ For example, DOL identifies elements of a “quality pre-apprenticeship program” and provides examples of such programs on its apprenticeship website at <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/employers/explore-pre-apprenticeship>. See (continued...)

Registered Apprenticeship Participation Data

Table 1 presents participation in registered apprenticeships from FY2015 through FY2024. Members of the Armed Forces who participated in USMAP are included in the national totals in the table.²⁹

Table 1 includes counts of active, new, and completer apprentices. Readers should not use the data in the table to calculate annual completion percentages. The multiyear nature of most programs means that most new apprentices would not complete a program until a subsequent fiscal year. Further, new apprentices who discontinue a program within the probationary period may be included in the table but would not be counted in the eventual calculation of the program's completion rate.

Table 1. Registered Apprenticeship: Participation and Completion
FY2015-FY2024

Fiscal Year	Active Apprentices	New Apprentices	Completers
2015	359,788	178,133	48,024
2016	396,216	186,872	55,445
2017	437,080	210,124	63,933
2018	490,770	243,429	74,387
2019	547,053	268,158	84,719
2020	562,418	221,715	88,711
2021	572,396	242,481	107,168
2022	596,819	273,194	104,186
2023	638,234	307,333	112,178
2024	679,960	311,339	111,767

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, “Apprentices by State,” <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/data-and-statistics/apprentices-by-state-dashboard>, accessed January 15, 2025, which included data through December 18, 2024.

Notes: National totals include programs registered by the U.S. Department of Labor, State Apprenticeship Agencies, and U.S. Military Apprenticeship Program. Data reflect the most recent data publication and may differ from some previously published data.

DOL collects and publishes data through a combination of a centralized system and submissions from state apprenticeship agencies. DOL is engaged in a series of modernization efforts related to the collection and publication of apprenticeship data.³⁰ These data include information on the occupation and industry of programs as well as demographic details on apprentices. While published industry and occupation data can offer some insight on the specifics of registered

also U.S. Department of Labor Training and Employment (TEN) No. 23-23, “Quality Pre-Apprenticeship Programs,” March 5, 2024, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/advisories/ten-23-23>.

²⁹ During the period covered in **Table 1**, participants in USMAP typically accounted for between 15% and 20% of the active apprentices and completers in each year. Full data can be generated at the link included in source for **Table 1**.

³⁰ See <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/data-and-statistics/apprentices-by-state-dashboard>, which provides aggregated data as well explanations of sources and a downloadable file with apprentice-level data.

apprenticeship programs, missing data and inconsistent classification present challenges in summarizing data related to industry and occupation.³¹

Recent Federal Activity

Historically, registered apprenticeship has been primarily a private sector initiative with federal oversight. More recently, there have been a number of efforts to expand the federal role and support apprenticeship more directly. Since FY2016, Congress has appropriated an increasing amount of funding for apprenticeship expansion activities.

There were also executive branch actions related to apprenticeship during the first Trump Administration and the Biden Administration. In 2020, the Trump Administration finalized a rule that created a system for Industry-Recognized Apprenticeship Programs that would operate in parallel with the existing registered apprenticeship system.³² These regulations were repealed by the Biden Administration in 2022.³³ In early 2024, the Biden Administration published proposed rules that would significantly modify the regulations associated with the registered apprenticeship system, though the rule was subsequently withdrawn.³⁴

Recent Grant Programs

Since FY2016, appropriations to DOL have included dedicated funding for apprenticeship expansion. DOL has used these funds to support a range of initiatives.

Grants Supported by Appropriated Funds

The laws that have provided appropriations to DOL for each of the past six fiscal years have included provisions for DOL funding “to expand opportunities” relating to registered apprenticeship “through grants, cooperative agreements, contracts, and other arrangements.” Appropriations for these activities were \$90 million in FY2016 and increased each year, reaching \$285 million in each of FY2023 and FY2024. (See **Table 2**.) The apprenticeship funds were typically available through the end of the DOL program year that aligned with the appropriated fiscal year (e.g., FY2020 funds were available through the end of program year 2020, which ended June 30, 2021).

³¹ For example, of the approximately 680,000 active apprentices in FY2024, almost 120,000 did not list an occupation and more than 82,000 did not provide an industry. Interpreting industry distribution can be further complicated by large numbers of participants in construction occupations being classified as “public administration” or “educational services,” possibly due to a program being sponsored by a school or public entity. For example, the three most common occupations in the “educational services” industry are electrician, carpenter, and plumber. Interpreting occupational data can be further complicated due to nonstandardized reporting labels. For example, a search for occupations that include the term “electrician” returns more than 50 distinct occupation labels.

³² See *Federal Register*, March 11, 2020, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/03/11/2020-03605/apprenticeship-programs-labor-standards-for-registration-amendment-of-regulations>.

³³ See *Federal Register*, September 26, 2022, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2022/09/26/2022-20560/apprenticeship-programs-labor-standards-for-registration>.

³⁴ See *Federal Register*, December 27, 2024, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/12/27/2024-31078/national-apprenticeship-system-enhancements-withdrawal>.

Table 2. Appropriated Funds for Apprenticeship Expansion, FY2016-FY2024

Fiscal Year	Funding Level (\$ in millions)	Public Law
2016	\$90	P.L. 114-113
2017	\$95	P.L. 115-31
2018	\$145	P.L. 115-141
2019	\$160	P.L. 115-245
2020	\$175	P.L. 116-94
2021	\$185	P.L. 116-260
2022	\$235	P.L. 117-103
2023	\$285	P.L. 117-128
2024	\$285	P.L. 118-47

Source: CRS analysis of specified laws. Each of these laws provided appropriations to DOL for the specified fiscal year.

Notes: Applicable public laws provided appropriations to DOL for the fiscal year.

The authorizing language associated with this funding is broad and the funds have supported a variety of apprenticeship-related initiatives and the specific grantees and activities have varied from one year to the next.³⁵ Activities funded by these appropriations are typically carried out through grants and contracts.

The largest portion of the appropriated funds have supported a series of grants to state agencies. These grants have supported various state-directed activities, including efforts to increase the number of apprenticeships, expand the range of industries that utilize apprenticeship, and integrate apprenticeship into state workforce development and education strategies.³⁶

Other grants from the appropriated funds have supported partnerships of apprenticeship stakeholders to pursue a range of apprenticeship expansion activities. For example, the Apprenticeships Building America grant program supported pre-apprenticeship strategies and the establishment of industry-led apprenticeship hubs.³⁷ DOL has also used appropriated apprenticeship funding to award contracts to apprenticeship intermediaries to facilitate apprenticeship expansion in emerging and established industries.³⁸

³⁵ DOL publishes a list of active grants and contracts related to apprenticeship at <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/investments-tax-credits-and-tuition-support/active-grants-and-contracts>. Most, but not all, of the grants listed on this page are supported by the appropriated apprenticeship funds discussed in this section. A smaller number of the investments listed on the page are from different funding streams.

³⁶ A recent example of the funding strategy is State Apprenticeship Expansion Formula Grants, which used appropriated funds from FY2023. Funding was made available through FOA-ETA-24-03, available at https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/grants/SAEF2_FOA-ETA-24-03.pdf. Grants were announced in July 2024, applicable news releases are at <https://www.dol.gov/newsroom/releases/eta/eta20240710> and <https://www.dol.gov/newsroom/releases/eta/eta20240711-0>.

³⁷ The applicable Funding Opportunity Announcement describes registered apprenticeship hubs as “Registered Apprenticeship intermediaries to convene local stakeholders with the ultimate goal of developing and launching RAPs.” See FOA at <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/grants/ABA2%20FOA-ETA-24-04.pdf>. For information on grantees, see <https://www.dol.gov/newsroom/releases/eta/eta20240711-0>.

³⁸ For example, see <https://www.dol.gov/newsroom/releases/eta/eta20230719-0>.

Grants Supported by H-1B Training Funds

When sponsoring temporary foreign workers on H-1B visas, employers pay a fee, part of which is subsequently allocated to DOL to support training programs.³⁹ The department has some flexibility in choosing the exact activities that are supported by these funds.⁴⁰

In some instances, DOL has elected to use these funds to support apprenticeship expansion strategies. For example, in 2020 DOL used its part of H-1B funding to support a series of grants to partnerships of public and private entities to expand apprenticeship in sectors and occupations that have not traditionally utilized apprenticeship as a workforce development strategy.⁴¹

Apprenticeship Requirements on Tax Benefits in the Inflation Reduction Act

The 117th Congress enacted the law commonly known as the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA, P.L. 117-169) in August 2022. Among other provisions, the IRA included a number of tax credits for taxpayers constructing, and in some case performing alteration or repair, of qualified clean energy facilities, property, projects, or equipment.

The authorizing provisions for some credits specify that to claim the maximum credit, certain taxpayers must employ registered apprentices for specified percentages of the labor hours associated with the credit.⁴² Both DOL and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) have provided guidance related to the apprenticeship requirements associated with these tax credits.⁴³

Industry-Recognized Apprenticeship Programs (IRAP): Rulemaking and Repeal

In March 2020, the Trump Administration finalized regulations establishing a system for Industry-Recognized Apprenticeship Programs (IRAP).⁴⁴ Like the regulations that establish the registered apprenticeship system, the IRAP regulations were established under the authority of the National Apprenticeship Act. The IRAP system was intended to operate in parallel with the

³⁹ See 8 U.S.C. §1356(s)(2). H-1B visas are for temporary workers in “specialty occupations” that typically require at least a bachelor’s degree. For more information, see CRS Report R47159, *Temporary Professional Foreign Workers: Background, Trends, and Policy Issues*.

⁴⁰ Allowable uses of the H-1B funds allotted to DOL are established in 29 U.S.C. §3224a. These provisions direct DOL to use the funds to support job training and related services associated with “high growth industries and economic sectors” and specify that grants may be awarded to “partnerships of private and public sector entities.”

⁴¹ Information on grantees is available at <https://www.dol.gov/newsroom/releases/eta/eta20200218>. The funding opportunity announcement for these grants is available at <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/skillstraining/FOA-ETA-19-09%20CSG.pdf>.

⁴² By meeting the requirements related to apprenticeship and prevailing wages (prevailing wage requirements are not described in this report), taxpayers can increase qualified IRA-authorized tax incentives by five times.

⁴³ DOL provides guidance on the IRA requirements in the context of the registered apprenticeship system at <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/inflation-reduction-act-apprenticeship-resources>. The IRS has collected guidance related to the apprenticeship requirements at <https://www.irs.gov/credits-deductions/prevailing-wage-and-apprenticeship-requirements>.

⁴⁴ For a more detailed discussion on the IRAP rule, see CRS Report R46622, *Final Rule on Industry-Recognized Apprenticeship Programs*.

existing registered apprenticeship system. In September 2022, the Biden Administration finalized the repeal of the IRAP rule.⁴⁵ These developments are explained in more detail below.

Trump Administration and Establishment of IRAP Regulations

In June 2017, President Trump issued Executive Order (EO) 13801.⁴⁶ Among other directives, the EO instructed the Secretary of Labor to “consider proposing regulations” that “reflect an assessment of whether” to modify the registration process to increase the role of nongovernment entities.

In June 2019, DOL published a proposed rule in the *Federal Register* to establish a process for recognizing new Standards Recognition Entities (SREs) that would be authorized to approve IRAPs as being in compliance with federal standards.⁴⁷ A final rule with a similar framework was published in March 2020.⁴⁸

The standards that SREs would apply to IRAPs were specified in the rule. Generally, the IRAP standards were more flexible than the registered apprenticeship standards in terms of how training is provided and assessed, how apprentices’ wages are set, and other matters.

The new system of SREs and IRAPs was established as an alternative system, co-existing with the established registered apprenticeship system in which governmental agencies approve apprenticeship programs as being in compliance with federal standards. The new IRAP system did not substantively amend regulations related to registered apprenticeships. In the final rule, DOL noted that “an industry-led alternative model may be better suited to some industries.”⁴⁹

The final rule took effect May 11, 2020. On September 23, 2020, DOL announced the first group of SREs, indicating that 18 SREs had been approved to recognize IRAPs in 20 industries and nearly 130 occupations.⁵⁰ The first IRAP program was announced on October 1, 2020.⁵¹

Biden Administration Action and Repeal of IRAP Regulations

In February 2021, as part of efforts to reaffirm support for the registered apprenticeship system, the Biden Administration and DOL acted to slow the implementation of the IRAP system and consider its elimination. In the accompanying statement, the Biden Administration said that IRAPs “have fewer quality standards than registered apprenticeship programs – for example, they fail to require the wage progression that reflects increasing apprentice skills and they lack the

⁴⁵ See *Federal Register*, September 26, 2022, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2022-09-26/pdf/2022-20560.pdf>.

⁴⁶ See the full text of EO 13801 at <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2017-06-20/pdf/2017-13012.pdf>.

⁴⁷ The full proposed rule in the *Federal Register* on June 26, 2019, see <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/06/25/2019-13076/apprenticeship-programs-labor-standards-for-registration-amendment-of-regulations>.

⁴⁸ The full final rule was in *Federal Register* on March 11, 2020, see <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/03/11/2020-03605/apprenticeship-programs-labor-standards-for-registration-amendment-of-regulations>.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14298.

⁵⁰ U.S. Department of Labor, “U.S. Department of Labor Announces First Group of Standards Recognition Entities for Industry-Recognized Apprenticeship Programs,” September 23, 2020, <https://www.dol.gov/newsroom/releases/eta/eta20200923>.

⁵¹ U.S. Department of Labor, “U.S. Department of Labor Announces First Industry-Recognized Apprenticeship Program,” October 1, 2020, <https://www.dol.gov/newsroom/releases/eta/eta20201001-0>.

standardized training rigor that ensures employers know they are hiring a worker with high-quality training.”⁵²

The Biden Administration rescinded EO 13801, which informed the establishment of the IRAP rules and accompanying system. The Administration further asked DOL to “consider new rulemaking to reverse these programs.”⁵³

In November 2021, DOL published a *Federal Register* notice, proposing a rule that would rescind the IRAP regulations.⁵⁴ In September 2022, DOL published a final rule formalizing the repeal of the IRAP regulations.⁵⁵

Biden Administration 2024 Proposed Rule and Subsequent Withdrawal

In January 2024, DOL published a notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM) that would have revised existing regulations related to the registered apprenticeship system.⁵⁶ Published under the title of “National Apprenticeship System Enhancements,” the NPRM would have established a combination of refinements to the existing system and new policies. In the *Federal Register* announcement accompanying the rule, DOL stated objectives to improve the protection, safety, and welfare of apprentices and to promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility principles throughout the national apprenticeship system. A final rule was submitted to the Office of Management and Budget in June 2024 but withdrawn in December 2024.⁵⁷ In withdrawing the rule, DOL stated that comments to the proposed rule “have raised some ideas and concepts ... that would benefit from more outreach and dialogue with interested parties and the regulated community before it develops a new regulatory proposal]”⁵⁸

Compared to the existing regulations, the NPRM would have provided more detailed guidance on the policies and procedures associated with the registered apprenticeship system. The NPRM would have codified certain responsibilities for DOL’s Office of Apprenticeship and modified procedures for the sponsors’ registration and implementation of apprenticeship programs. The NPRM would have also changed policies associated with state apprenticeship agencies.

The NPRM would have established some policies that did not have a direct analogue in current activities, including establishing a new apprenticeship program type. The NPRM would have created a new *registered career and technical education (CTE) apprenticeship program*. These programs would have been formally linked with educational institutions at the secondary and

⁵² The White House, “Fact Sheet: Biden Administration to Take Steps to Bolster Registered Apprenticeships,” February 17, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/02/17/fact-sheet-biden-administration-to-take-steps-to-bolster-registered-apprenticeships/>.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ See *Federal Register*, November 15, 2021, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/11/15/2021-24786/apprenticeship-programs-labor-standards-for-registration>.

⁵⁵ See *Federal Register*, September 26, 2022, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2022/09/26/2022-20560/apprenticeship-programs-labor-standards-for-registration>.

⁵⁶ The NPRM was published in the *Federal Register* on January 17, 2024; see <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/01/17/2023-27851/national-apprenticeship-system-enhancements> <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2021-11-15/pdf/2021-24786.pdf>. DOL subsequently provided a webinar discussing the rules. For information on the webinar and associated slides, see <https://www.workforcegps.org/events/2024/01/15/20/07/An-Overview-of-Proposed-Rulemaking-1205-AC13-National-Apprenticeship-System-Enhancements>.

⁵⁷ See *Federal Register*, December 27, 2024, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/12/27/2024-31078/national-apprenticeship-system-enhancements-withdrawal>.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

postsecondary level. These programs would have required fewer hours than a traditional registered apprenticeship program and would have focused on a more general *industry skills framework* rather than competency in a specific occupation.

Recent Legislative Activity⁵⁹

In recent years, Congress has considered legislation that would replace the existing National Apprenticeship Act with a more detailed statute. In recent Congresses, lawmakers have considered similar bills that would codify the existing registered apprenticeship system in statute, make certain administrative changes, and authorize appropriations for several new funding streams.

Bills passed by the House of Representatives in the 116th and 117th Congresses were not taken up in the Senate. Similar legislation introduced in the 118th Congress did not see action in either chamber.

116th Congress

In September 2020, the House Education and Labor Committee considered and ordered reported H.R. 8294, the National Apprenticeship Act of 2020.⁶⁰ In November 2020, the full House considered and passed H.R. 8294. The Senate did not take up the House-passed H.R. 8294.

H.R. 8294 would have amended and substantially expanded the National Apprenticeship Act. It would have codified a number of existing definitions and administrative practices related to apprenticeship and authorized appropriations for several new funding streams for FY2021 through FY2025.

Major components of the bill would have done the following:

- establish a permanent statutory authorization for OA at DOL and authorize dedicated funding for the office;⁶¹
- establish statutory definitions for pre-apprenticeship and youth apprenticeship; among other criteria, these programs would have to be aligned with a registered apprenticeship program;⁶²
- define the national apprenticeship system as consisting of registered apprenticeship programs, pre-apprenticeship, and youth apprenticeship;⁶³ this definition would effectively exclude IRAP programs;
- authorize grants for State Apprenticeship Agencies and State Offices of Apprenticeship in states that have not established an SAA;⁶⁴ and
- authorize competitive grants to eligible partnerships for the purposes of expanding apprenticeship (including creating new programs in nontraditional

⁵⁹ Recent congresses have considered a number of apprenticeship-related bills. This section focuses on a series of bills that would make system-wide changes to the national apprenticeship system and have seen legislative action. Other bills to make more incremental changes or bills that change that treatment of apprenticeship in other context (e.g., tax credits) are not discussed.

⁶⁰ The House Education and Labor Committee issued a committee report for H.R. 8294 in the 116th Congress. See H.Rept. 116-567.

⁶¹ See H.R. 8294, Section 111.

⁶² Ibid., Section 2.

⁶³ Ibid., Section 2.

⁶⁴ Ibid., Section 113.

industries and occupations), encouraging employer participation in the national apprenticeship system, supporting intermediaries, and strengthening alignment between apprenticeship programs and secondary and postsecondary education. The authorization level for these grants is \$400 million in FY2021 and gradually increases to \$800 million in FY2025.⁶⁵ Funds authorized for these grants account for more than three-quarters of the total funds authorized under the bill.

117th Congress

On February 5, 2021, the House passed H.R. 447, the National Apprenticeship Act of 2020.⁶⁶ H.R. 447 would have authorized appropriations from FY2022 through FY2026. Other primary elements of H.R. 447 were generally substantively similar to H.R. 8294 in the 116th Congress.

118th Congress

In the 118th Congress, H.R. 2851 was introduced by Representative Bobby Scott, the ranking member of the Education and Workforce Committee and sponsor of H.R. 447 in the 117th Congress. H.R. 2851 would have authorized appropriations from FY2025 through FY2029. Other primary elements of H.R. 2851 were generally substantively similar to the above-discussed bills from the prior two Congresses. Companion legislation to H.R. 2851 was introduced in the Senate as S. 2122. Neither H.R. 2851 nor S. 2122 received a committee markup or other legislative action in the 118th Congress.

⁶⁵ Ibid., Sections 201-204.

⁶⁶ H.R. 447 did not have a committee markup and a committee report was not issued.

Appendix. Federal Funding Streams That May Directly Support Apprenticeship

In addition to the activities at DOL's Office of Apprenticeship, there are other federal funding streams that can directly support apprenticeship or individual apprentices. These funding streams most frequently support other means of human capital development, but they can also support apprenticeship in some circumstances. This section highlights some federal funding streams in which the administering departments have issued guidance on how to utilize funds for apprenticeship. It is likely that there are other federal funding streams that could support apprenticeship in certain circumstances.⁶⁷

Workforce Funding through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) authorizes formula grants to state workforce agencies to support job training and career services.⁶⁸ WIOA funding is administered at the state and local levels by Workforce Development Boards (WDBs), which are partnerships of local employers, training providers, and other workforce stakeholders. State and local WDBs have autonomy to support workforce development through a variety of activities.

Statute and guidance have specified a number of ways in which WDBs can use WIOA funds to support apprenticeship.⁶⁹ For example, the on-the-job training provisions of WIOA allow WDBs to reimburse apprenticeship sponsors for a portion of wages paid to apprentices. The training provisions of WIOA allow funds to be used for expenses related to an apprenticeship program's related instruction.

In addition to potentially providing direct financial support for apprenticeship programs, WIOA contains several administrative provisions that institutionally integrate local registered apprenticeship programs into state workforce systems. WIOA specifies that there must be a representative from a registered apprenticeship program on each state and local WDB. These boards are responsible for recognizing local workforce programs that meet local needs and approving those programs for WIOA funding. Registered apprenticeship programs qualify for automatic inclusion as an eligible training provider under WIOA; they do not need to be approved by a WDB.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Additional examples are included in DOL's *Federal Resources Playbook for Registered Apprenticeship*, available at <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/sites/default/files/playbook.pdf>.

⁶⁸ For more information on WIOA and the funding streams and state workforce agencies it authorizes, see CRS Report R44252, *The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and the One-Stop Delivery System*.

⁶⁹ For a more-detailed discussion of the integration of WIOA and registered apprenticeship, see Department of Labor Training and Guidance Letter 13-16, "Guidance on Registered Apprenticeship Provisions and Opportunities in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)", issued January 12, 2017, https://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/corr_doc.cfm?docn=9125. Section 7 of the TEGL explicitly aligns allowance uses of WIOA funds with registered apprenticeship activities. Policies associated with this TEGL were subsequently clarified in 2021 with TEGL 13-16, Change 1, available at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/advisories/training-and-employment-guidance-letter-no-13-16-change-1>.

⁷⁰ Training under WIOA is most commonly carried out through *individual training accounts* (ITAs). Recipients of accounts may choose a training program from a list of eligible providers. For a provider to receive ITA funding, a participant must choose the provider's program.

GI Bill and Veterans Education Benefits

Individuals eligible for a GI Bill, including former members of the Armed Forces, can typically use their benefits while pursuing an approved apprenticeship. For example, veterans who use the Post-9/11 GI Bill (the most common education benefit for recent veterans) while pursuing a registered apprenticeship program qualify for a housing allowance while participating in the apprenticeship.⁷¹ The amount of the housing allowance varies by geographic location and other factors. Post-9/11 GI Bill participants in a registered apprenticeship program receive up to 100% of the housing allowance for the first six months of the program. The allowance then declines 20 percentage points every six months until reaching 20%. The declines in the housing allowance are intended to align approximately with scheduled wage increases in the apprenticeship program.⁷² Post-9/11 GI Bill participants pursuing apprenticeship more than half-time also receive a books and supplies stipend.

In cases where GI Bill-eligible apprentices are required to pay for their related instruction, an apprentice may also be able to use his or her GI Bill benefits to cover tuition and fees associated with related instruction.

Federal Student Aid

In some circumstances, individual apprentices may be able to access federal student aid (FSA) funds such as Pell Grants or subsidized student loans. Eligibility for FSA funds is largely contingent on whether the apprenticeship (or a component of the apprenticeship, such as the related instruction component) is an academic program that is eligible for federal student aid.⁷³ Notably, registration of an apprenticeship program does not necessarily qualify it for federal student aid, and it is possible that there are apprenticeship programs that are not registered by a registration agency but are eligible for FSA funds.

Apprenticeship programs (or components thereof) that are eligible for federal student aid must (1) lead to a degree, diploma, certificate, or other recognized credential; (2) be provided by an eligible institution; and (3) meet program length requirements in terms of credit hours or clock hours.⁷⁴ For need-based FSA, a student must also meet the financial criteria for a given program.⁷⁵

The FSA eligibility criteria can be applied separately to the on-the-job training and related instruction portions of an apprenticeship. For example, the related instruction portion of a program may be eligible while the on-the-job training portion is not. The on-the-job training portion of an apprenticeship program can be eligible for FSA if the on-the-job training portion of the program is for qualified credit from an FSA-eligible institution. Guidance specifies that there are no federal limits on the percentage of a qualified program that may consist of on-the-job

⁷¹ For more information on the Post-9/11 GI Bill, see CRS Report R42755, *The Post-9/11 GI Bill: A Primer*.

⁷² See Department of Veterans' Affairs "On-The-Job Training and Apprenticeship," https://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/onthejob_apprenticeship.asp.

⁷³ More details on FSA in the context of apprenticeship is available in Department of Education Dear Colleague Letter GEN-14-22, "Apprenticeships and Federal Student Aid Programs," issued December 18, 2014, <https://fsapartners.ed.gov/knowledge-center/library/dear-colleague-letters/2014-12-18/gen-14-22-subject-apprenticeships-and-federal-student-aid-programs>.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁷⁵ A student's eligibility for need-based aid is determined by the program's cost of attendance and the student's Student Aid Index (SAI). The SAI is calculated on the basis of information provided by the student and applicable family members on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

training, so long as the training is provided by the institution of higher education. Using these criteria, on-the-job training that is either not for credit or is provided by an entity other than an eligible institution (such as an employer) would not qualify for FSA.⁷⁶

In limited cases, institutions may choose to use Federal Work Study (FWS) funding to cover a portion of an apprentice's wages during on-the-job training.⁷⁷ If an institution chooses to include apprenticeship employment as part of its FWS program, selected eligible students may receive FWS wages for employment in the apprenticeship, even if the apprenticeship is not part of the student's educational program.⁷⁸

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⁷⁶ In some cases, an institution of higher education may contract out a portion of the on-the-job training to an outside entity. If an entity other than the institution of higher education provides a portion the on-the-job training, that portion must be 25% or less of the program. With permission of the accrediting agency of the institution of higher education, the outside entity may provide more than 25%, but less than 50%, of the program.

⁷⁷ Unlike some other forms of aid, FWS funds are allocated to institutions of higher education, not individual students. The institutions are responsible for allocating the funds to qualified programs and students.

⁷⁸ For more information on potential uses of FWS funds for apprenticeship, see the aforementioned Dear Colleague Letter GEN-14-22.