

Strengthening the Apprenticeship Pipeline:

State Strategies for Expanding Pre-Apprenticeship

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Executive Summary

States across the country are using pre-apprenticeship to strengthen the apprenticeship pipeline, expand access to training opportunities, and create clearer pathways into Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs) and other employment for both adults and youth. As pre-apprenticeship has grown beyond its early roots in the building trades and spread across industry sectors, state apprenticeship leaders are adopting strategies to define and support quality programs that meet employer needs and prepare participants for successful transitions to employment.

This resource summarizes findings from a nationwide survey of state and territory apprenticeship offices and presents two in-depth state case studies of Pennsylvania and South Carolina to illustrate how states are operationalizing their pre-apprenticeship strategies. Together, the survey and case studies provide a snapshot of current pre-apprenticeship practices, highlight common approaches and variations across states, and offer practical insights for policymakers and practitioners seeking to strengthen pre-apprenticeship as part of the apprenticeship ecosystem.

Key Takeaways

- **States consider pre-apprenticeship to be an important strategy for strengthening apprenticeship systems** and expanding access to career pathways for individuals and worker pipelines for employers.
- **States are moving toward clear definitions and quality expectations for pre-apprenticeship programs**, with particular emphasis on alignment to employer demand and strong connections to RAPs.
- **Approaches to pre-apprenticeship vary across states**, reflecting differences in governance structures, policy environments, and capacity to provide support and oversight for pre-apprenticeship programs.
- **Pre-apprenticeship implementation is supported by strong infrastructure**, including dedicated staffing, reliable funding strategies, and practical methods to support pre-apprenticeship providers and track programs and participants.
- **Partnerships across state apprenticeship offices, education systems, employers and industry organizations, labor unions, and non-profit and community organizations are central** to growing pre-apprenticeship programs.
- **States are using pre-apprenticeship to prepare youth for successful transitions to RAPs and employment**, and growing youth-focused pre-apprenticeship programs through various engagement and partnership strategies with the secondary school system.

By sharing information about the national pre-apprenticeship landscape and providing detailed examples from two states, this resource identifies promising strategies states can adapt to expand access to and strengthen the quality of pre-apprenticeship programs.

Introduction

States across the country are taking a wide range of actions to expand pre-apprenticeship programs as an important part of their efforts to grow state apprenticeship systems. Pre-apprenticeships combine hands-on training, career and supportive services, and other program elements, and prepare individuals to enter and succeed in Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs) or other employment opportunities. Recognizing the value of pre-apprenticeship for employers and participants, states are developing new partnerships, leveraging federal and state funding, and implementing policies and procedures to grow and strengthen pre-apprenticeship programs.

While state practices for RAPs are generally well-understood after more than a decade of federal investments and research, state strategies for pre-apprenticeship have not been extensively examined. To better understand pre-apprenticeship efforts, the American Institutes for Research (AIR), in partnership with Britebound, undertook a research project to learn how states are defining and supporting pre-apprenticeship programs and how the pre-apprenticeship model is incorporated into states' apprenticeship systems. Britebound provided financial support for AIR to conduct a nationwide survey of state approaches to pre-apprenticeship and develop case studies of two states that have robust pre-apprenticeship efforts—Pennsylvania and South Carolina.

National and state policymakers and apprenticeship practitioners can use this resource to understand the national pre-apprenticeship landscape and learn about promising practices to support the expansion of quality pre-apprenticeship programs. The following sections of this resource include background on the pre-apprenticeship program model, findings from the nationwide survey of state approaches to pre-apprenticeship, and the in-depth case studies on Pennsylvania and South Carolina.

Pre-Apprenticeship Program Model

Pre-apprenticeships are generally short programs, typically lasting a few weeks to a few months¹, designed to prepare individuals to enter and succeed in RAPs or other employment opportunities. While there is no national standard for pre-apprenticeship programs, they typically include program elements such as hands-on training, connections to RAPs, and industry-aligned curricula. The Department of Labor's Office of Apprenticeship identifies the following six elements of quality pre-apprenticeship programs²:

- **Approved Curriculum:** Training that is based on industry standards and approved by an RAP partner.

¹ Apprenticeship.gov. (n.d.). What is Pre-Apprenticeship?, <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/help/what-pre-apprenticeship>

² Apprenticeship.gov. (n.d.). Explore Pre-Apprenticeship, <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/employers/explore-pre-apprenticeship>

- **Simulated Experience:** Hands-on training or volunteer opportunities that do not displace paid employees.
- **Facilitated Entry:** Agreements with RAP sponsors that allow program participants to enter directly into a RAP.
- **Increased Access:** Recruitment and preparation of a large number of apprentices for a robust workforce.
- **Supportive Services:** Wrap-around services or referrals to help participants complete the program (e.g., childcare, transportation).
- **Sustainable Partnerships:** Collaborative promotion of Registered Apprenticeship to other employers.

In an effort to establish consistency and quality for pre-apprenticeship programs, many states have established definitions or quality elements of pre-apprenticeship programs. While there are variations across states, as discussed in the next section, state-defined quality elements generally align to and often expand upon the quality elements listed above.

While the use of pre-apprenticeship programs began primarily in the construction industry,³ the use of this model has expanded, and there are now pre-apprenticeships in every industry,⁴ including advanced manufacturing, education, healthcare, information technology (IT), transportation and logistics, and other sectors. Many pre-apprenticeship programs support individuals who face barriers to employment, such as women, veterans, people with disabilities, justice-involved individuals, and displaced workers. Pre-apprenticeship programs serve participants of all ages, with many pre-apprenticeships specifically designed for youth ages 16–24.

Both employers and individuals benefit from pre-apprenticeship programs. For employers, pre-apprenticeships provide a way to recruit and screen qualified, job-ready employees for RAPs or other employment. Pre-apprenticeship programs have been shown to be helpful in recruiting a broader pipeline of potential apprentices and expanding apprenticeship to populations with increased barriers to employment.⁵ For individuals, pre-apprenticeships can serve as a bridge to careers, particularly for those who may need career exploration, foundational skills preparation, or additional supports to be

³ North America's Building Trades Unions. (n.d.). *The history of the building trades apprenticeship readiness programs*. <https://nabtu.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/History-of-NABTU-Apprenticeship-Readiness-Programs.pdf>

⁴ U.S. Department of Labor. (n.d.). *Preparing for apprenticeship: Pre-apprenticeship programs as a pathway to Registered Apprenticeship and pre-apprentice experiences in them*. <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/sites/default/files/aai-infographics-pre-apprentices-11-11-22.pdf>

⁵ Butrica, B. A., Jones, E., Rosenberg, L., Sattar, S., & Sotelo, V. (2023, August). *A review of the literature on Registered Apprenticeships: Evaluating Registered Apprenticeship initiatives*. Urban Institute. https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/publications/ETAOP_2023_17_ERAI_Literature_Review_Final.pdf

successful. Pre-apprenticeships have been shown to help program completers build skills, attain credentials, and increase earnings.⁶

Survey Findings: The Pre-Apprenticeship Landscape

To increase understanding about the pre-apprenticeship landscape in the United States, AIR conducted a nationwide survey of state approaches to pre-apprenticeship. AIR sent the survey to the state apprenticeship offices in 55 states and territories, and 41 states and territories responded (hereinafter referred to as “states”). The survey was designed to yield information about how states are shaping and supporting pre-apprenticeship programs and covered a broad range of topics, including characteristics of pre-apprenticeships, program registration or certification, state legislation and policy, funding mechanisms, data collection, and pre-apprenticeship programs serving youth.

Survey responses indicate strong momentum across states to expand and strengthen pre-apprenticeship as an on-ramp to RAPs and other employment opportunities. Many states have adopted clear expectations for what constitutes a quality pre-apprenticeship, including strong alignment with industry demand and intentional connections to RAPs. Responses also suggest that implementation capacity is a key differentiator: states vary in the extent to which they have dedicated staff time, pre-apprenticeship funding approaches, capacity to provide technical assistance, and strong mechanisms to track programs and outcomes. Overall, the findings point to a field that is evolving from exploration and initial implementation to improvement and expansion, with states focused on strengthening the strategies and structures that support growth and quality of pre-apprenticeship programs.

A National Look at Pre-Apprenticeship

- The 41 states responding to the survey reported a total of **2,209 pre-apprenticeship programs**, with an average of 54 programs per state.
- States have **pre-apprenticeship programs across all industry sectors**, with programs most common in construction/building trades (88% of states), followed by advanced manufacturing (59%), healthcare (59%), education (51%), and IT (49%).
- States have **many different types of organizations as pre-apprenticeship program providers**, with the most common being secondary schools (71% of states), nonprofit and community organizations (71%), employers (66%), industry associations or business organizations (63%), community or technical colleges (59%), and labor unions (54%).

⁶ Butrica, B. A., Jones, E., Rosenberg, L., Sattar, S., & Sotelo, V. (2023, August). *A review of the literature on Registered Apprenticeships: Evaluating Registered Apprenticeship initiatives*. Urban Institute.

https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/publications/ETAOP_2023_17 ERAI Literature Review Final.pdf

Defining Pre-Apprenticeship Program Quality

Thirty states have identified a set of elements that define a quality pre-apprenticeship program. These elements cover a range of factors that ensure pre-apprenticeship programs meet the needs of participants and RAP employers. The most common elements are connection to a RAP, hands-on experience for participants, and curriculum aligned to industry needs. The high number of states with quality frameworks suggests a strong focus on defining the pre-apprenticeship model and ensuring that programs have positive results for participants, RAPs, and employers.

Quality Element	% of States
Connection to RAPs Direct connection to at least one RAP, such as formal sponsorship, established partnership, or other alignment (e.g., curriculum alignment)	100%
Hands-On Experience Hands-on, meaningful learning activities that are connected to education and training activities	87%
Industry-Aligned Curriculum Training and curriculum that align with industry standards or the skill needs of employers	83%
Supportive Services Access to supportive or wraparound services to help participants succeed (e.g., transportation, childcare, tools, career counseling)	60%
Increased Pre-Apprenticeship Access Strategies that increase recruitment of and opportunities for underserved populations	53%
Transparent Entry, Success, and/or Exit Requirements Clear outline of the minimum requirements for pre-apprenticeship eligibility, success, and/or the conditions under which a pre-apprentice may discontinue their relationship with the program	47%
Credential Attainment Pre-apprenticeship culminates in meeting the requirements to obtain an industry-recognized credential such as a certification; license; or portable, stackable credential	43%
Safety Training Training to equip pre-apprentices with the knowledge and skills needed to be safe on the job	40%

Formalizing Pre-Apprenticeship through Policy and Legislation

Many states are using legislation and policies to provide structure to and support for pre-apprenticeship programs. Eighteen states have legislation and/or policies in place related to pre-apprenticeship, and an additional 13 states have efforts underway to enact legislation or policies.

- **18 states** have legislation or policy related to pre-apprenticeship.
- **13 states** are pursuing pre-apprenticeship legislation or policy.

Nine states shared additional details on their legislation and/or policies, providing deeper insights into pre-apprenticeship legislation and policies in a small number of states. These states use formal mechanisms—including statute, administrative code, agency rules, and apprenticeship council policy—to define and oversee the following aspects of pre-apprenticeship programs:

- Definition of pre-apprenticeship programs and pre-apprentices (8 states)
- Pre-apprenticeship program requirements (6 states)
- Pre-apprenticeship program registration, certification, or approval process (6 states)
- Pre-apprenticeship quality elements (3 states)

While the specific mechanisms vary among states, the survey responses suggest clear state interest in incorporating pre-apprenticeship into legislation or policy to formalize the use of this model.

Registering or Certifying Pre-Apprenticeship Programs

Nineteen states register or certify pre-apprenticeship programs, and an additional 11 states have some other process for reviewing or approving programs. States that register or certify pre-apprenticeship programs point to several benefits, including establishing a structure for pathways into RAPs (90%), ensuring the quality of pre-apprenticeships (84%), collecting information on pre-apprenticeship programs and participants (74%), and identifying pre-apprenticeships eligible for federal or state government funding opportunities (58%). Approval of the registration or certification of pre-apprenticeship programs is performed by the state apprenticeship director (16 states), the state apprenticeship council (3 states), and others (in 3 states, approval is performed by the state apprenticeship deputy director or an intermediary or consultant), with multiple approvers in some states. The number of states using pre-apprenticeship registration or certification processes suggests that states view these processes as key mechanisms for supporting and overseeing program quality.

- **19 states** register or certify pre-apprenticeship programs.
- **11 states** have other processes for reviewing or approving pre-apprenticeships programs.

Funding Pre-Apprenticeship Efforts

States use several different sources of funding to support pre-apprenticeship programs. The most common source of funding is U.S. Department of Labor grants for apprenticeship (e.g., State Apprenticeship Expansion grants and Apprenticeship Building American grants), with 71% of states using this funding for pre-apprenticeships. Other funding sources include state funding (56%), Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act funding (44%), and Perkins V Career and Technical Education funding (12%). In states that provide state funding for pre-apprenticeship, these funds are primarily provided through grants, with a few states providing funds through incentives and tax credits. The survey responses from states suggest that most states are leveraging a mix of federal and state funding sources to support pre-apprenticeship activities

- **71% of states** use U.S. Department of Labor apprenticeship grant funds to support pre-apprenticeship.
- **56% of states** are providing state funding to support pre-apprenticeship.

Dedicating Staff Time to Pre-Apprenticeship

Some states are dedicating staff time to support pre-apprenticeship program activities. Seventeen states have dedicated staff and/or staff time for pre-apprenticeship activities. Of those states that provided details on their pre-apprenticeship staffing:

- **17 states** have dedicated staff or staff time to pre-apprenticeship activities.

- Eight states have a staffing approach where some individuals are dedicated full-time to pre-apprenticeship, most ranging from 1 to 3 full-time staff members, with one state indicating 20 full-time staff.
- Nine states have staff that focus part-time on pre-apprenticeship as part of their role, ranging from 1 to 15 part-time staff members.
- Two states have a combination of full-time and part-time staff working on pre-apprenticeship.

The number of states directing staff time to pre-apprenticeship, whether in the state apprenticeship office or more broadly across state agencies and systems, suggests that states view staffing capacity as an important driver of pre-apprenticeship expansion.

Collecting Pre-Apprenticeship Data

Twenty-six states collect data related to pre-apprenticeship. The most common data elements collected are the number of pre-apprenticeship programs, number of pre-apprentices, and program completion. States use a wide variety of mechanisms to collect data on pre-apprenticeship programs, including the state system used for RAPs, online survey or form platforms, and Excel spreadsheets or other documents sent by email. The survey suggests that while many states are collecting pre-apprenticeship data, limitations in data collection methods—and data that are sometimes limited to grant-funded

programs—can constrain states' ability to aggregate, analyze, and use these data for program management.

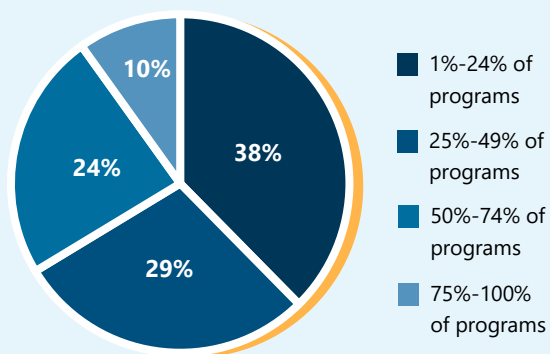
Data Element Collected	% of States
Number of pre-apprentices	89%
Number of pre-apprenticeship programs	85%
Completion of pre-apprenticeship program	85%
Entry into a RAP	73%
Demographic information for pre-apprentices	62%
Credential attainment	42%
Entry into employment (not a RAP)	31%

Serving Youth through Pre-Apprenticeship Programs

Twenty-one states have pre-apprenticeship programs that specifically serve youth ages 16 to 24. The percentage of pre-apprenticeship programs that are youth-focused varies considerably across states.

Among states with pre-apprenticeship programs that serve youth, nearly all states (91%) have youth-serving pre-apprenticeships that take place in secondary schools. Other common settings include community or technical colleges (52% of states with pre-apprenticeship serving youth) and nonprofit or community organizations (43%). A few states also have pre-apprenticeships serving youth that take place in youth juvenile justice systems (10% of states with pre-apprenticeships serving youth), business or labor organizations (10%), 4-year colleges (5%), and career and technical education centers (5%).

Proportion of Pre-Apprenticeship Programs in the State Serving Youth



States use various strategies to grow and support pre-apprenticeship programs serving youth:

- **Examples of outreach and engagement strategies** include strengthening partnerships with the state education agency and local school systems, making presentations to high school teachers and administrators about pre-apprenticeship, advertising through newsletters and communications to schools, and conducting outreach and recruitment through youth-serving community-based organizations.
- **Examples of integration into the secondary school system** include aligning with career and technical education programs of study, creating pre-apprenticeships in the school system to be used as an alternative to graduation, establishing pre-apprenticeships for high school seniors that result in direct entry into RAPs upon graduation, and including pre-apprenticeships in the state education agency's career exploration dashboard to motivate more schools to participate.

The survey responses suggest that states are placing a strong focus on serving youth through pre-apprenticeship programs by expanding opportunities and using multiple strategies to partner with and integrate pre-apprenticeships into state secondary school systems.

A Look at SAA Versus OA States

Of the 41 states responding to the survey, 26 are states that register apprenticeship programs (referred to as State Apprenticeship Agency [SAA] states) and 15 are states for which the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Apprenticeship (OA) registers apprenticeship programs (referred to as OA states). Some differences emerged between SAA and OA states related to pre-apprenticeship programs:

- **SAA states have a higher average number of pre-apprenticeship programs** (68 pre-apprenticeships on average for SAA states versus 30 for OA states).
- **SAA states are more likely to register or certify pre-apprenticeship programs** (58% of SAA states versus 27% of OA states).
- **SAA states are more likely to have identified a set of quality elements for pre-apprenticeship** (77% of SAA states versus 67% of OA states).
- **SAA states are more likely to have dedicated staff or staff time for pre-apprenticeship** (58% of SAA states versus 13% of OA states).
- **OA states are more likely to offer technical assistance to providers of pre-apprenticeship programs** (80% of OA states versus 65% of SAA states).
- **OA states are more likely to offer grants or other forms of funding to support pre-apprenticeship programs** (73% of OA states versus 58% of SAA states).

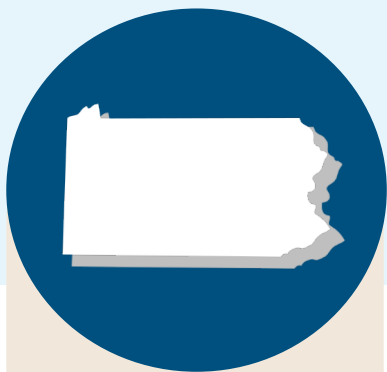
While OA states are more likely to offer funding and technical assistance for pre-apprenticeship, SAA states have far greater numbers of pre-apprenticeship programs and are more likely to have put in place foundational aspects of pre-apprenticeship infrastructure including registration or certification processes, identified quality elements, and dedicated staff time.

State Case Studies: Advancing Quality Pre-Apprenticeship

As captured through the nationwide survey, states are taking important steps to grow pre-apprenticeship and strengthen pre-apprenticeship programs. To provide a more in-depth look at state strategies, AIR developed case studies of two states that have made notable strides in advancing pre-apprenticeship programs—Pennsylvania and South Carolina. The case studies were developed through a series of interviews with state apprenticeship leaders and staff and a review of materials related to pre-apprenticeship activity in the state.

- **Pennsylvania**—Beginning in 2018, but with a focused effort over the last three years, Pennsylvania has undertaken efforts to strengthen pre-apprenticeship programs and incorporate pre-apprenticeship as an integral part of the state's apprenticeship system. Key strategies include establishing a dedicated pre-apprenticeship team, improving the pre-apprenticeship registration process, providing focused technical assistance to organizations sponsoring pre-apprenticeship programs, and increasing pre-apprenticeship opportunities for youth through alignment with the education system.
- **South Carolina**—Since 2019, South Carolina has built pre-apprenticeship as a core workforce strategy within its broader apprenticeship ecosystem using clear standards and sustained staff engagement to strengthen provider capacity and talent pipelines. Key strategies include adopting statewide quality elements and a formal certification process, embedding expectations for alignment with employer and RAP demand into program design, providing high-touch technical assistance from dedicated Apprenticeship Carolina staff, and expanding pre-apprenticeship opportunities for youth through partnerships with secondary schools.

Each case study documents the key strategies the state is using to grow and strengthen pre-apprenticeship, outlines lessons learned, provides pre-apprenticeship program examples, and shares links to the state's pre-apprenticeship resources. These state profiles provide ideas and examples for advancing quality pre-apprenticeship programs that policymakers and practitioners can apply in the context of their state's apprenticeship system.



State Profile

Number of Active Pre-Apprenticeship Programs: 155 (as of April 2026)

Number of Active Pre-Apprentices: 3,306 (as of April 2026)

Date Pre-Apprenticeship Registration Began: 2018

Pre-Apprenticeship Program Industries:

Agriculture, building trades, education, healthcare, hospitality, manufacturing, technology, and transportation

State Apprenticeship Structure:

State Apprenticeship Agency

Funding Sources for Pre-Apprenticeship:

U.S. Department of Labor grants (State Apprenticeship Expansion, Apprenticeship Building America); state funding (PAsmart, Schools-to-Work Program, annual allocation for Registered Apprenticeship)

Pennsylvania

Background

Over the last three years, Pennsylvania has strengthened the infrastructure for pre-apprenticeship programs and undertaken strategies to embed pre-apprenticeship as an integral part of the apprenticeship ecosystem in the state. These efforts are led by the Apprenticeship and Training Office (ATO) in the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry (L&I), with support from L&I leadership and the governor's office. ATO is responsible for guiding and promoting the expansion and compliance of all Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs) and pre-apprenticeship programs across the state.

In April 2026, Pennsylvania had 155 registered pre-apprenticeship programs and 3,306 active pre-apprentices, and the state achieved an increase of 35 programs in 2025.⁷ The industry focus of pre-apprenticeships spans the economy, with most programs in building trades and manufacturing and other programs in technology, healthcare, education, agriculture, hospitality, and transportation. A wide range of organizations sponsor pre-apprenticeship programs including secondary schools; community and technical colleges; four-year colleges and universities; nonprofit or community organizations; labor unions; and employers, industry associations, or business organizations. ATO makes [a list of registered pre-apprenticeship programs](#) publicly available.

Pennsylvania points to a combination of strategies that have contributed to the growth of pre-apprenticeship programs in the state, including establishing a dedicated pre-apprenticeship team within ATO, strengthening the pre-apprenticeship registration process and support for organizations sponsoring programs, and increasing pre-apprenticeship opportunities for youth. ATO leverages multiple funding sources to support pre-apprenticeship, including State Apprenticeship Expansion and Apprenticeship Building America grants from the U.S. Department of Labor. Pennsylvania also makes significant

⁷ Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. (n.d.). *Registered Apprenticeship*. Pennsylvania CareerLink. <https://www.pacareerlink.pa.gov/jponline/Common/Apprenticeships>; Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry. (2025). *Annual Pennsylvania apprenticeship system report 2025*. <https://maestro.pa.gov/list/attachment/download/2025%20PA%20Apprenticeship%20System%20Report.pdf?j=260318B&a=2e6n8owmp44ayf3m20yhtkdpc3h6gltxfwogqylbm40njrpn>

Pennsylvania

state funding available, either specifically for pre-apprenticeship or as part of an investment in RAPs, through state programs such as PAsmart;⁸ the state annual allocation for RAPs, which has been used to fund industry-specific grants for manufacturing, agriculture, IT, and healthcare;⁹ and the Schools-to-Work Program.¹⁰

Pre-Apprenticeship Strategies

In Pennsylvania, pre-apprenticeship is considered to be an integral part of the state's apprenticeship ecosystem. For employers and sponsors of RAPs, ATO promotes pre-apprenticeship as a way to recruit and pre-screen qualified, job-ready apprentices. For individuals, ATO promotes pre-apprenticeship as a way to explore and learn about careers; benefit from classroom and technology-based training; build the literacy, math, English, and work-readiness skills that employers desire; and meet the minimum standards to be selected for a RAP. ATO recognizes pre-apprenticeship as a bridge to career opportunities for students and workers, and a particularly effective strategy for preparing underserved populations for high-quality employment.

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“Pre-apprenticeship is an essential part of the apprenticeship ecosystem—we need pre-apprenticeship to have a fully successful Registered Apprenticeship system. Pre-apprenticeship is also imperative for populations who have historically been underserved in Registered Apprenticeship Programs.”

- Tara Loew, Director, Apprenticeship and Training Office

Several key strategies contribute to strengthening and growing pre-apprenticeship in the state. ATO's dedicated pre-apprenticeship team provides the capacity to conduct outreach, build partnerships, and support and register pre-apprenticeship programs. Technical assistance for organizations sponsoring pre-apprenticeships and the program registration process focuses on ensuring program quality, including connections to RAPs. Efforts to increase alignment with the secondary education system are growing pre-apprenticeship opportunities for youth.

⁸ Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. (n.d.). *PAsmart*. <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/education/programs-and-services/schools/grants-and-funding/school-grants/pasmart>; Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. (n.d.). *PAsmart Career & Technical Education Pre-Apprenticeships Grant Program*. <https://www.pa.gov/grants/search/grant-details/dli/4>

⁹ Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. (n.d.). *Grants*. Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry. <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/dli/programs-services/workforce-development-home/grant-opportunities>

¹⁰ Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. (n.d.). *Apply for a Schools-to-Work Program grant*. Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry. <https://www.pa.gov/services/dli/apply-for-a-schools-to-work-program--stwp--grant>

Pennsylvania

Dedicated Pre-Apprenticeship Division

ATO leadership realized that to get traction on growing pre-apprenticeship programs in the state that additional capacity was needed in the form of dedicated staff time for pre-apprenticeship. Therefore, as part of staffing increases and organizational restructuring that occurred during 2023 and 2024, ATO created a distinct team focused on pre-apprenticeship programs.

The Pre-Apprenticeship Division consists of a pre-apprenticeship supervisor and two pre-apprenticeship and training representatives (Pre-ATRs). This team enables ATO to conduct the outreach and partnership-building necessary to increase understanding of and interest in pre-apprenticeship, while also having staff to perform the on-the-ground work of helping organizations develop and register pre-apprenticeship programs.

ATO has been working to increase coordination between the Pre-Apprenticeship Division and the apprenticeship and training representatives (ATRs) who focus on RAPs. ATRs are encouraged to talk about pre-apprenticeship with their RAP sponsors, and when they have a sponsor interested in pre-apprenticeship, they make an introduction to the pre-ATRs. Since pre-apprenticeships are required to have a strong connection to RAPs, pre-ATRs use their ATR colleagues as a resource to find out more information about affiliated RAPs. Pre-ATRs also join their ATR colleagues at outreach and training events to raise awareness about pre-apprenticeship. For example, ATO provides training workshops on apprenticeship for staff within Pennsylvania CareerLink (the state's workforce development system), and the pre-ATRs have been integrated into that effort by providing pre-apprenticeship content and joining trainings as capacity allows.

The Pre-Apprenticeship Division Includes:

- **A pre-apprenticeship supervisor**, who is the main representative for pre-apprenticeship in the state and primarily focuses on conducting outreach activities and building partnerships to advance pre-apprenticeship.
- **Two pre-apprenticeship and training representatives**, who primarily focus on providing technical assistance to pre-apprenticeship program sponsors and supporting them through the program development and registration process.

Pre-Apprenticeship Registration Process

ATO points to two primary benefits of registering pre-apprenticeship programs. First, the formal recognition of pre-apprenticeships through registration establishes clear and recognized pathways into RAPs and other high-quality training and employment. Second, the registration process provides a structure for working with pre-apprenticeship sponsors to design their programs and ensure that pre-

Pennsylvania

apprenticeships are of high quality. ATO defines quality pre-apprenticeship programs as incorporating the following five elements: (1) connection to existing RAPs into which successful pre-apprentices will advance, (2) approved training and curriculum, (3) hands-on learning with a career focus, (4) opportunity to earn an industry-recognized credential, and (5) access to supportive services and career counseling.

Elements of Quality Pre-Apprenticeship Programs in Pennsylvania:

- Connection to RAPs
- Training and curriculum
- Hands-on learning
- Industry-recognized credential
- Support services and career counseling

ATO began registering pre-apprenticeship programs in 2018. While this was an important initial step for pre-apprenticeship in the state, ATO requested limited information from pre-apprenticeship program sponsors at that time, resulting in a lack of information about programs, particularly connections to RAPs. ATO recognized the need to reconsider pre-apprenticeship requirements and the registration process. As a result, ATO revised the pre-apprenticeship registration requirements and put a robust new process in place in January 2023. The [Pre-Apprenticeship Registration Packet](#) completed by program sponsors consists of Standards of Registered Pre-Apprenticeship, Appendix A: Program Description, Appendix B: Pre-Apprentice Agreement, Appendix C: Curriculum and Hands-on Learning Overview, and Appendix D: Letters of Support.

The five quality elements are reflected in the pre-apprenticeship registration packet by asking sponsors to provide program details related to those areas. ATO has particularly focused on strengthening connections to RAPs. Pre-apprenticeship programs must partner with at least one RAP into which successful pre-apprentices will have the opportunity to enter. In the registration packet, the pre-apprenticeship sponsor identifies the affiliated RAP(s), describes how the program will connect pre-apprentices to RAPs, discusses how the curriculum and hands-on learning align with the related instruction of the RAP and employer needs, and provides a letter of support from the RAP sponsor. ATO also helps pre-apprenticeship sponsors identify how to facilitate entry into the affiliated RAP, such as guaranteed interviews or providing credit toward the RAP for pre-apprentice completers, and other ways to engage the RAP sponsor in the pre-apprenticeship program.

The registration packet also reflects ATO's focus on access to programs and the success of pre-apprentices. One section focuses on the target population for the program and outreach and recruitment strategies, including methods to attract women and people of color. Pre-apprenticeship program sponsors also provide details on which supportive services will be made available to participants and how these services will be offered. In addition, they provide information on the career counseling that will be provided, expected outcomes for pre-apprenticeship graduates, and follow-up activities to support pre-apprentices' employment goals.

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To improve pre-apprenticeship program registration, ATO is working to integrate the process into the Commonwealth Workforce Development System (CWDS, the state's data management and reporting system for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and other programs), which is already used for RAP participants who are grant-funded. Currently, pre-apprenticeship sponsors develop their registration packet using fillable PDF documents. The forms can be difficult for some sponsors to work with and create inefficiency in the back-and-forth review and revision of the materials between pre-ATRs and sponsors. With CWDS, sponsors will use this centralized, web-based platform to complete their registration paperwork, receive feedback from pre-ATRs, and track progress, which will increase efficiency for both sponsors and ATO staff. In addition, after program registration, pre-apprenticeship sponsors will use CWDS to report program and participant information, which is currently collected using a survey platform.



Program Spotlight: Trade Institute of Pittsburgh

The Trade Institute of Pittsburgh (TIP) has an [Introduction to Masonry](#) pre-apprenticeship program that provides trade and life skills to participants. TIP seeks to provide not only career placement but a path toward upward mobility for individuals with significant barriers to employment. The 10-week program consists of hand-guided, competency-based masonry fundamentals delivered by qualified industry professionals. To provide holistic support and skills-building for participants, TIP also provides education in math for the trades, financial literacy training, driver's license preparation, individual life coaching, and support from a case manager. Pathways from the pre-apprenticeship include joining TIP's Carpentry Program for advanced skills training, joining an affiliated RAP, or entering other employment in the construction trades.

Pre-Apprenticeship Sponsor Engagement and Technical Assistance

ATO's Pre-Apprenticeship Division has a hands-on approach to supporting pre-apprenticeship sponsors with program development and registration and considers this engagement essential to ensuring that sponsors design quality programs and understand all requirements. The Pre-Apprenticeship Division has a structured process for working with organizations from initial interest through registration, as well as continuing support for program sponsors. An internal database is used to track organizations' progress in the registration process.

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- When an organization expresses interest in learning more about pre-apprenticeship or readiness to start a program, the first step is for the organization to fill out the [Pre-Apprenticeship Information Request Form](#), which is sent to the pre-ATRs.
- The organization is then invited to attend a virtual orientation session provided by the pre-ATRs, which covers the five elements of quality pre-apprenticeships, the role of pre-apprenticeship sponsors, connections to RAPs, developing and launching programs, and the registration process.
- After the orientation session, one of the pre-ATRs sends a follow-up communication to the organization providing resources, including [Registering a Pre-Apprenticeship Program in Pennsylvania: A Guide for Sponsors](#) and the fillable templates for the registration packet.
- The pre-ATR works closely with the organization as they design their program and develop the registration packet, including reviewing drafts, asking questions to clarify and strengthen program elements, and holding working calls to discuss feedback. Standing office hours are held every Friday and are open to any organization that has started the registration process and has questions.
- Once finalized, the registration packet is reviewed by the Pre-Apprenticeship Division Supervisor and then sent to the ATO Director, who approves pre-apprenticeship programs in the state.

Pre-ATRs are available for technical assistance to organizations throughout the process of developing and registering programs. Some common areas for technical assistance support include clearly defining program startup and ending, delivery of supportive services, working with RAP sponsors on articulation agreements for advanced credit, and integrating certificates or credentials earned by participants. Pre-ATRs also help organizations clearly and fully communicate the details of their program in the registration packet, which facilitates review and approval at the final steps in the registration process.

In addition to supporting organizations during program development and registration, the Pre-Apprenticeship Division continues to engage with pre-apprenticeship program sponsors following registration. The standing weekly office hours have been opened to current pre-apprenticeship sponsors as a chance for them to ask questions or raise any issues. The Pre-Apprenticeship Division also holds quarterly meetings for all registered pre-apprenticeship sponsors, facilitating the opportunity for organizations to share strategies and program highlights. Additionally, registered pre-apprenticeship sponsors can use the [Pre-Apprenticeship Change Request Form](#) to notify the Pre-Apprenticeship Division about significant changes to their programs.

Pre-Apprenticeship Opportunities for Youth

The growth of pre-apprenticeship in Pennsylvania has had a strong focus on creating opportunities for youth. This youth focus for pre-apprenticeship aligns with the state's attention toward facilitating multiple pathways for students after secondary school, as well as benefiting schools and employers. For

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schools, pre-apprenticeships are a valuable way to create pathways to employment for students and formalize relationships with RAPs. For employers and RAP sponsors, pre-apprenticeships are a way to recruit new and diverse populations and create pipelines for their programs.

The value of pre-apprenticeship for secondary school students received formal recognition through state legislation called Act 158.¹¹ Implemented in the 2022–2023 school year, Act 158 established completion of a registered pre-apprenticeship program as a pathway to high school graduation and an alternative to passing state exams.¹² By establishing pre-apprenticeship as a graduation pathway, Act 158 has increased awareness about the value of pre-apprenticeship for youth, particularly within the secondary school system. Pre-apprenticeship provides an option for students who may be facing difficulties with state exams, while also increasing students' employment opportunities after high school graduation.

To expand pre-apprenticeship opportunities for youth, Pennsylvania recognized the opportunity to connect pre-apprenticeship with the career and technical education (CTE) system in the state. CTE programs already provide industry-focused education to students, and the pre-apprenticeship program model allows CTE programs to establish stronger connections with employers and clearer pathways into RAPs for students.

Since 2024, ATO has been working closely with the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) on strategies and tools that enable CTE programs of study to evolve to integrate all the elements of quality pre-apprenticeship and become registered pre-apprenticeship programs. Under the Aligning Pre-Apprenticeship and Career and Technical Education Initiative, examples of key ATO and PDE activities include:

- Releasing a [supplementary guide](#) for career and technical educators about how to effectively build and register pre-apprenticeships within the CTE system
- Holding quarterly community of practice virtual meetings for Career and Technical Centers that are interested in developing pre-apprenticeship pathways

State Investment in Pre-Apprenticeship and CTE

In 2024, Pennsylvania awarded \$3,900,000 in state funding for the [PAsmart Career & Technical Education Pre-apprenticeships Grant Program](#), with the goal of building a more robust school-to-workforce pipeline through the expansion of pre-apprenticeship programs within traditional CTE structures.

¹¹ Public School Code of 1949 – Keystone Exams, Pub. L. 1146, 24 Pennsylvania Unconsolidated Statute No. 158 (2018).

<https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/li/uconsCheck.cfm?yr=2018&sessInd=0&act=158>

¹² Pennsylvania Department of Education. (n.d.). *Graduation requirements guidance*. Standards Aligned System.

<https://pdesas.org/Page/Viewer/ViewPage/73?SectionPageItemId=3339&ItemContainer=sortableItemContainer3349>

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- Launching the Summer Series in 2026, which consists of five regional convenings intended to bring apprenticeship, workforce development, and CTE professionals together to strengthen their regional apprenticeship ecosystem
- Cross-walking CTE program of study competency task lists to RAP work process schedules to inform the development of pre-apprenticeships that are connected to those RAPs

As another youth-focused pre-apprenticeship strategy, ATO is partnering with the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services' Bureau of Juvenile Justice Services (BJJS) to use pre-apprenticeship to create pathways for youth in the juvenile justice system. BJJS was already providing similar activities for youth, and this collaboration focused on harnessing the pre-apprenticeship model and quality elements to strengthen programs and increase opportunities for justice-involved youth. As a result, in October 2025, BJJS launched a registered pre-apprenticeship program in one of the state-run youth development centers that prepares youth participants to enter a RAP in advanced manufacturing. ATO and BJJS are using their experience with this pre-apprenticeship to share lessons learned through the Pennsylvania Academic, Career, and Technical Training (PACTT) Alliance, a statewide network of organizations supporting justice-involved youth.



Program Spotlight: Philadelphia Academies Early Childhood Education

Philadelphia Academies, Inc., has an [early child education \(ECE\) CTE pre-apprenticeship program](#). Students who are enrolled in the 12th Grade ECE CTE program are currently eligible, with plans to expand the program to 10th and 11th grades. Participants have the opportunity to earn a Child Development Associate credential and some college credits upon graduation, and the program is linked to a RAP in ECE as a potential pathway after high school graduation. To earn the credential, students complete 120 classroom hours and 480 hours of hands-on work at a childcare center, which can occur during summer internships, school-year internships, and/or afterschool work.

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Key Lessons Learned

- **Elevate Pre-Apprenticeship within the Apprenticeship System.** In Pennsylvania, pre-apprenticeship is not approached separately, but is integrated into the state's strategies, resources, and communications focused on growing RAPs. As one example, pre-apprenticeship accomplishments are highlighted alongside RAPs. The number of pre-apprenticeship programs and pre-apprentices are featured on the [website tracking apprenticeship growth in the state](#), and, as part of ATO's awards program for apprenticeship, awards are given for Outstanding Registered Pre-Apprenticeship Sponsor and Outstanding Registered Pre-Apprentice.
- **Dedicate Staff Time to Pre-Apprenticeship.** ATO credits establishing staff dedicated to pre-apprenticeship programs as one of the main drivers of pre-apprenticeship growth in the state. This dedicated staffing has enabled ATO to develop expertise on the pre-apprenticeship program model, provided a clear touchpoint for organizations interested in exploring and starting pre-apprenticeships, and increased capacity for pre-apprenticeship program sponsor technical assistance and registration.
- **Integrate Technical Assistance into the Registration Process.** ATO has an intentional approach to technical assistance for pre-apprenticeship program sponsors that emphasizes thoughtful development of quality programs. Pre-ATRs build positive working relationships with organizations seeking to start and register programs. They work closely with each organization to help them understand the pre-apprenticeship model and develop details of their program, and then support them through the registration process. In addition to the hands-on support described in more detail above, ATO has developed multiple resources, including a [detailed technical assistance guide](#), a [quick guide on the registration process](#), and a [quick guide on pre-apprenticeship partners and roles](#).
- **Combine Leadership and Staff Buy-in.** ATO points to an important dynamic that has helped advance progress related to pre-apprenticeship and CTE—the combination of leadership support and staff knowledge and buy-in. From the top, leadership in the governor's office, L&I, and PDE has supported the goal of closer alignment between pre-apprenticeship and CTE. At the same time, ATO and PDE have been educating those working on the ground with pre-apprenticeship and CTE and providing the tools and knowledge needed to embed the pre-apprenticeship program model within the CTE system.

Interested in Learning More?

- Visit Pennsylvania's [pre-apprenticeship program webpage](#).
- Read [Registering a Pre-Apprenticeship Program in Pennsylvania: A Guide for Sponsors](#).
- Contact Danielle Demirovic, Pre-Apprenticeship Supervisor, Apprenticeship and Training Office, at DDemirovic@pa.gov.



State Profile

Number of Active Pre-Apprenticeship Programs:

29 (as of February 2026)

Number of Active Pre-Apprentices:

34 (as of February 2026)

Date Pre-Apprenticeship Certification Began:

2021

Pre-Apprenticeship Program Industries:

Advanced manufacturing, construction/ building trades, healthcare, hospitality, information technology

State Apprenticeship Structure:

Office of Apprenticeship

Funding Sources for Pre-Apprenticeship:

U.S. Department of Labor grants (State Apprenticeship Expansion Formula [SAEF], State Apprenticeship Expansion, Equity and Innovation [SAEEI], Youth Apprenticeship Readiness Grant [YARG]), Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, Perkins V Career and Technical Education

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Background

In South Carolina, pre-apprenticeship programs have been an integral part of the state's apprenticeship ecosystem since 2019. Pre-apprenticeships in South Carolina are a strategy both to build a robust pipeline of candidates for Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs) and employers, as well as to enable individuals to launch careers in in-demand occupations. Apprenticeship Carolina™, a division within the South Carolina Technical College System, supports employers and partners in designing and launching pre-apprenticeship programs, along with RAPs for youth and adult apprentices. Apprenticeship Carolina is responsible for promoting and certifying pre-apprenticeship programs in the state and supporting pre-apprenticeship providers in successfully implementing their programs.

South Carolina has launched and expanded pre-apprenticeship by treating it as a core workforce strategy supported by clear standards, a structured certification process, and sustained staff engagement. The state established a shared definition of quality through statewide standards and a formal certification process and embedded employer alignment and RAP transition expectations into program design. Apprenticeship Carolina staff members support pre-apprenticeship providers from initial planning through implementation and continuous improvement, which leads to stronger program consistency and outcomes. South Carolina intentionally supports pre-apprenticeship as a youth career exploration and skill development opportunity, preparing young people for strong connections to employment and RAPs.

In February 2026, South Carolina had 29 certified pre-apprenticeship programs in the healthcare, manufacturing, hospitality, construction, and information technology industries. These programs are operated by 13 pre-apprenticeship providers including five technical and community colleges, two secondary schools, two nonprofit organizations, one adult education center, the state vocational rehabilitation agency, a regional housing authority, and Apprenticeship Carolina itself.

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A list of pre-apprenticeship providers and industry pathways is available on [Apprenticeship Carolina's website](#). Since 2019, South Carolina's pre-apprenticeship programs have served more than 750 individuals. A wide range of individuals have participated in the state's pre-apprenticeship programs: 14% of pre-apprentices began the program as youth ages 14-15, 60% of pre-apprentices began their program as youth ages 16-24, and 26% of pre-apprentices began at age 25 or older.

South Carolina Pre-Apprentice Ages at Program Entry

- Age 14-15: 106 (14%)
- Age 16-24: 455 (60%)
- Age 25+: 196 (26%)

Pre-Apprenticeship Strategies

South Carolina began exploring pre-apprenticeship in 2017, inspired by the U.S. Department of Labor's promotion of this model to prepare individuals to enter and succeed in RAPs. Apprenticeship Carolina's leaders recognized the value of pre-apprenticeship as a strategy to strengthen the structure and purpose of the apprenticeship model; pre-apprenticeship builds a robust pipeline of job-ready workers who can meet employers' hiring needs and helps individuals obtain valuable skills and credentials that prepare them for success. Apprenticeship Carolina quickly learned that similar programs already existed in the state and began developing a framework for high-quality pre-apprenticeships in South Carolina to ensure program consistency and quality. As a result, South Carolina adopted [pre-apprenticeship quality elements](#) in 2019 and developed a certification process for pre-apprenticeships in 2021.

From the beginning, South Carolina intentionally positioned pre-apprenticeship as an integral component of its broader apprenticeship and workforce development ecosystem. Apprenticeship Carolina's leaders designed pre-apprenticeship as a key strategy to develop a pipeline of qualified candidates for jobs or apprenticeship programs; employers and RAP sponsors can hire pre-apprenticeship completers knowing that they are ready for a job or an apprenticeship program on day one. Apprenticeship Carolina also positions pre-apprenticeship as a way for individuals to explore careers in key sectors, gain job-relevant skills, and earn industry-recognized credentials that prepare them for careers. In addition, Apprenticeship Carolina embedded pre-apprenticeship within the same organizational structure, staffing model, and employer engagement approach it uses for RAPs. As a result,

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“For us, the primary measure of success for pre-apprenticeship is preparing an individual for employment; we hope their employment includes going into a Registered Apprenticeship Program, but it may not. Pre-apprenticeship creates a solid pipeline of talent for employers and RAP sponsors to hire from, individuals who already have some skills or training and understand what the job is.”

- Amanda Richardson, Vice President,
Apprenticeship Carolina

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South Carolina employers and partners view pre-apprenticeship as a workforce solution rather than a preparatory program. They recognize pre-apprenticeship as a vital talent development tool that complements both apprenticeships and traditional hiring approaches.

Several key strategies have enabled South Carolina's growth and expansion of pre-apprenticeship. Standards for pre-apprenticeship program quality and a robust certification process ensure that programs across the state are consistent and high quality. High-touch engagement and support from the Apprenticeship Carolina team strengthen connections with employers and streamline program development and implementation. Pre-apprenticeships for youth support early career exploration and successful transitions into employment and apprenticeships.

Defining Quality: Standards and Certification for Pre-Apprenticeship

South Carolina began its work to support quality pre-apprenticeship programs in 2019 by adopting quality elements for pre-apprenticeship programs operating in the state. Apprenticeship Carolina drew from several national resources as it developed these state-level quality standards. The team began with the required components of Registered Apprenticeship standards and identified similar requirements that would be relevant for pre-apprenticeships. Apprenticeship Carolina also reviewed the U.S. Department of Labor's definition of pre-apprenticeship, issued in 2012 via [Training and Employment Notice 13-12](#), as well as a [model framework for high-quality pre-apprenticeship](#) developed in 2019 by Jobs for the Future.

South Carolina's Essential Elements of High-Quality Pre-Apprenticeship

- Transparent entry requirements
- Skills alignment with local employers and apprenticeship programs
- Industry-recognized credentials
- Hands-on learning
- Academic, career exploration, and wrap-around supports
- Transition into an apprenticeship program

Incorporating elements of all these models, Apprenticeship Carolina developed its six essential elements of a high-quality pre-apprenticeship program: 1) transparent entry and success requirements; 2) alignment with skills sought by local employers and high-quality apprenticeship programs; 3) culmination in one or more industry-recognized credentials; 4) development of skills through hands-on activities and work-based learning; 5) offering academic, career exploration, and wrap-around supports; and 6) transition into a Registered Apprenticeship or other high-quality apprenticeship program. When these elements were introduced in 2019, they served as a design template for pre-apprenticeship programs to follow so they knew what a high-quality program would look like.

South Carolina took the next step in strengthening the state's pre-apprenticeship program quality and consistency in 2021 with the launch of a pre-apprenticeship program certification process. Apprenticeship Carolina received apprenticeship expansion grants from the U.S. Department of Labor

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that could also be used to support pre-apprenticeships, and the state recognized the value of creating a structured process to vet pre-apprenticeship programs to ensure that grant funds were supporting high-quality programs.

Apprenticeship Carolina's pre-apprenticeship certification materials and process mirror the state's Registered Apprenticeship registration materials and process, in an effort to underscore pre-apprenticeship's connection to RAPs and make processes consistent across the overall apprenticeship ecosystem.

Prospective pre-apprenticeship providers must submit program standards, a pre-apprenticeship outline similar to the RAP Appendix A, and letters that document employer connections. Attachment D, the Review Request Form, serves as the program's formal request for review; this document is also where providers

describe the need for the pre-apprenticeship program, alignment to industry demand, the anticipated number of participants and graduates each year, connections to employers and RAPs, plans for marketing and outreach, and sustainability plans.

Providers have the option to submit letters that document connections with partner organizations, if relevant to the structure of their program. In addition, providers must document each of the six essential program elements in their application materials. Each provider's certification packet is reviewed by Apprenticeship Carolina's Pre-Apprenticeship Review Committee, which is made up of Apprenticeship Carolina leadership staff who represent the development, implementation, grant, and partnership functions of the division. The Review Committee makes a recommendation to Apprenticeship Carolina's Vice President, who makes the ultimate determination on whether to certify a pre-apprenticeship program.

In 2023, after two years of certifying pre-apprenticeship programs, Apprenticeship Carolina launched a pre-apprenticeship program audit to improve the quality and consistency of programs across the state and to understand why fewer pre-apprentices were transitioning into RAPs than expected. The audit identified a need for consistency in design and implementation supports provided by Apprenticeship Carolina staff; increased support in building quantity of employer connections and quality of relationships for making the transition from pre-apprenticeship to RAPs; longer timeline for measuring outcomes; and greater awareness of pre-apprenticeship within the state's technical college, K-12 education, and workforce development systems, as well as employers.

Components of South Carolina's Pre-Apprenticeship Certification Packet:

- Pre-apprenticeship Standards
- Attachment PA1A: Pre-Apprenticeship Program Outline
- Attachment PA1B: Employer Connection Letter
- Attachment PA1C: Partner Connection Letter (optional)
- Attachment D: Pre-Apprenticeship Provider Review Request Form

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As a result, Apprenticeship Carolina introduced changes to its pre-apprenticeship certification process in 2025. To support clear transitions to employment, the state's revised pre-apprenticeship certification process requires providers to document how the program aligns to industry demand and to include letters of commitment from employers or RAP sponsors to interview and consider pre-apprenticeship program completers for relevant positions they have available. Providers must estimate the number of pre-apprentices they expect to enroll each year; for every four anticipated pre-apprentices, the provider must include one letter of support from a RAP sponsor, to ensure the number of program completers aligns with anticipated hiring needs and available apprenticeship opportunities.

Apprenticeship Carolina also introduced a one-year provisional status for newly certified programs, aligning with another component of the RAP registration process. This one-year provisional status serves as a trial period, during which Apprenticeship Carolina monitors program performance and offers technical assistance to providers. At the end of the first year, Apprenticeship Carolina reviews program outcomes, including the number of program completers and the number of completers who enter RAPs. Programs with at least 50% of completers entering RAPs receive full certification, while programs that do not meet this threshold stay in provisional status and receive additional support from Apprenticeship Carolina. If after two years a program still does not meet the minimum 50% entry threshold for program completers entering RAPs, its provisional certification may be canceled.

Technical Assistance Available During Provisional Status Year:

- Outreach and marketing
- Strengthening employer connections
- Integrating required program elements
- Data and participant tracking

South Carolina's pre-apprenticeship quality elements and certification process create a shared understanding of pre-apprenticeship across the state's technical colleges, employers, secondary schools, community organizations, and other partners. Clear standards and a formal program approval process help new providers design strong programs from the start and provide a structure that supports consistency in program quality and participant outcomes. Finally, Apprenticeship Carolina's commitment to continuous improvement and data-informed program design have allowed the division to refine its processes to strengthen program outcomes over time.

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Program Spotlight: Florence One Adult Education

Florence One Adult Education's [pre-apprenticeship program](#) prepares individuals to enter a career in healthcare. The 30-hour, six-week program begins with career counseling and exploration to confirm participants' interest in healthcare. Participants then complete a mix of virtual and in-person activities that build both job readiness and foundational healthcare skills. Pre-apprentices complete stackable healthcare certificates including CPR and first aid, practice healthcare-focused math and reading skills, and earn WIN Work Readiness and Essential Soft Skills credentials. Finally, pre-apprentices receive hands-on support with resumes, interview preparation, and workplace expectations such as attendance, communication, and professionalism. Program staff connect completers to local employers and RAPs for interviews. By combining career navigation, work-readiness credentials, and direct employer connections, the program prepares individuals for direct entry into healthcare jobs and Registered Apprenticeships.

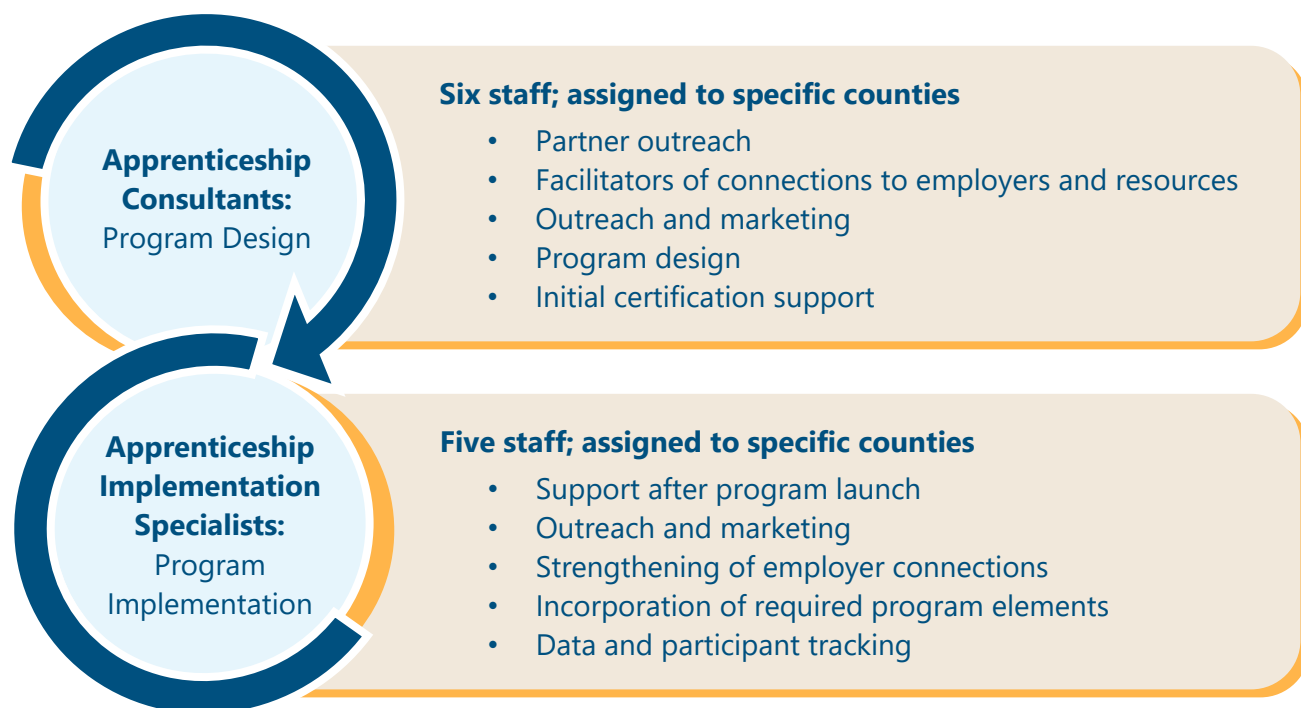
Sustaining Quality: The Role of Apprenticeship Carolina Staff

A defining feature of South Carolina's pre-apprenticeship approach is that it has dedicated staff members who support providers to design and implement quality pre-apprenticeship programs. Apprenticeship Carolina's staff members play clear roles across the program development lifecycle: six apprenticeship consultants support partner outreach, program design, and initial certification, and five implementation specialists provide ongoing technical assistance once programs launch. These staff members are each assigned to a geographic region within the state, which enables them to build a deep understanding of the local labor market as well as strong relationships with technical colleges, employers, secondary schools, and other partners in the region. Within their region, apprenticeship consultants and implementation specialists support all of South Carolina's apprenticeship offerings, including certified pre-apprenticeships and Registered Apprenticeships for youth and adults. They actively promote and support these models as they work with employers and partners, raising awareness of the full apprenticeship ecosystem and helping each organization determine the training and hiring models that meet their needs.

Apprenticeship consultants serve as the initial point of contact for organizations considering a pre-apprenticeship program as a strategy to prepare individuals to enter and succeed in a RAP or another form of employment. In South Carolina, current certified pre-apprenticeship providers are technical

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colleges, secondary schools, or nonprofits organizations; employers typically do not serve as pre-apprenticeship providers.



Employers partner with the pre-apprenticeship provider to engage in pre-apprenticeship as a pre-hiring tool. As a result, a key role of the apprenticeship consultant is helping the pre-apprenticeship provider ensure the program prepares participants for employment in the community. This includes connecting the provider with employers and RAPs in the area that commit to interviewing or hiring pre-apprenticeship completers and designing a training and work-based learning curriculum that equips pre-apprentices with the training and skills they need to enter a RAP or other job in the industry. The apprenticeship consultant supports the provider in completion of all required components of the pre-apprenticeship certification packet, which is then submitted to Apprenticeship Carolina for review by the Pre-Apprenticeship Certification Review Committee.

Once a pre-apprenticeship program is certified, an apprenticeship implementation specialist begins working with the provider and its partners to support program launch. Apprenticeship implementation specialists help pre-apprenticeship providers connect with other employers and RAPs in the region by marketing pre-apprenticeships to newly registered RAP sponsors. They also share information with pre-apprenticeship providers about grants, supportive services, and other resources for pre-apprentices. Apprenticeship implementation specialists provide this technical assistance to newly certified pre-

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apprenticeship programs within their one-year provisional status, and they also provide these services upon request to certified pre-apprenticeship providers.

Apprenticeship Carolina's staffing model demonstrates that dedicated, well-defined staff roles are essential to the effectiveness and sustainability of pre-apprenticeship programs. By providing continuous support from initial program design and certification through launch and ongoing improvement, Apprenticeship consultants and Apprenticeship implementation specialists ensure that pre-apprenticeship programs remain employer-informed, aligned with Registered Apprenticeship, and responsive to local workforce needs. This hands-on approach strengthens provider capacity, deepens employer engagement, and strengthens pre-apprentices' successful transitions into RAPs or employment, making staff capacity a core driver of the South Carolina pre-apprenticeship system's quality, consistency, and long-term impact.

Expanding Pathways for Youth Through Pre-Apprenticeship

Pre-apprenticeship programs in South Carolina play an important role in serving youth ages 16–24, including high school students and young adults, as part of the state's broader apprenticeship and workforce development strategy. About 60% of pre-apprentices across the state began their program between the ages of 16 and 24, and many pre-apprenticeship programs are intentionally designed to align with secondary and postsecondary educational pathways. Pre-apprenticeship is commonly used to support young people's early career exploration, skill development, and entry into employment or RAPs.

Program Spotlight: Building Occupational Opportunities in the Midlands

Midlands Technical College's Building Occupational Opportunities in the Midlands (BOOM) certified pre-apprenticeship program prepares high school students with disabilities for employment in construction or industrial occupations. Midlands Technical College partners with five surrounding school districts to operate the program. Students take 2 courses on the college campus during the 16-week program—an expanded Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) 10 course and a general construction helper course—and earn an OSHA certification at program completion. Through these courses, BOOM pre-apprentices learn about proper use of tools and equipment, measurement skills, and safety on a job site. Midlands Technical College partners with the Midlands Education Business Alliance, which provides pre-apprentices with career services including résumé and interview preparation and job fairs. Since its launch in 2019, BOOM has served 61 pre-apprentices, many of whom have entered construction or industrial jobs or continued on to Midlands Technical College's associate degree program in building construction.

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South Carolina's earliest certified pre-apprenticeship programs were led by secondary schools, so a focus on youth has been part of the state's pre-apprenticeship ecosystem from the beginning. Richland County School District One and Richland County School District Two School developed certified pre-apprenticeships in 2021 by building on their existing career and technical education and work-based learning models; Apprenticeship Carolina helped the school districts strengthen employer connections and clarify pre-apprentices' pathways into RAPs and employment. Pre-apprenticeship programs offered through high schools are designed to be completed by a student's senior year and are frequently aligned with dual enrollment and Registered Apprenticeship opportunities for youth.

Beyond these high school-based programs, all of South Carolina's other certified pre-apprenticeship programs serve youth ages 16–24, including programs operated by technical colleges, adult education providers, and community-based organizations. Through partnerships with school districts and other community organizations, pre-apprenticeship program providers recruit youth to participate in pre-apprenticeship programs and prepare them for employment opportunities. South Carolina's pre-apprenticeship programs provide youth with an opportunity to explore career paths, determine job activities they do and do not like, gain hands-on experience working in a specific industry, and obtain industry-recognized credentials. This structure enables youth to learn about in-demand industries while developing foundational skills that support informed career decision-making.

Key Lessons Learned

- Dedicated staff capacity is central to program quality and sustainability.**
 South Carolina's experience illustrates that pre-apprenticeship programs are strongest when supported by staff with clearly defined roles and ongoing capacity to engage providers. Apprenticeship consultants and apprenticeship implementation specialists support programs across the full lifecycle, from design and certification through implementation and improvement. This sustained, hands-on engagement reduces barriers for providers, promotes consistency in program design, and supports strong alignment with employer and RAP sponsor needs.
- Statewide standards and certification establish a shared understanding of quality.**
 By adopting clear quality standards and a formal certification process, South Carolina created a consistent definition of pre-apprenticeship across education, workforce, and employer partners. The standards provide a common framework for program design while the certification process reinforces expectations related to employer alignment and participant outcomes. Together, standards and certification support program consistency, strengthen initial design decisions, and create a structured entry point for technical assistance and continuous improvement.
- Employer engagement is most effective when required and supported by staff.**
 South Carolina's approach demonstrates the importance of embedding employer engagement

South Carolina

directly into pre-apprenticeship program requirements. Requiring evidence of hiring demand from employers or RAP sponsors ensures programs are aligned with real workforce needs. Apprenticeship Carolina staff play a key role in supporting providers in establishing and maintaining these connections, helping translate employer input into relevant training experiences and clearer pathways into employment or apprenticeship opportunities.

- **Strong partnerships help providers meet pre-apprentices' needs.**

Many of South Carolina's pre-apprenticeship programs rely on multi-stakeholder partnerships that help providers deliver required program elements and connect participants to needed supports. Partners often provide services such as tutoring, mentorship, and coaching that strengthen participant engagement during the program and support their success after completion.

- **Continuous improvement strengthens alignment and outcomes over time.**

Treating pre-apprenticeship as an evolving system rather than a static program has allowed South Carolina to refine its approach over time. A program audit and data reviews informed updates to certification requirements, staff support strategies, and expectations for provider performance. These adjustments have strengthened participants' transitions into RAPs and employment, reinforced program accountability, and ensured that the pre-apprenticeship system remains responsive to provider capacity, participant needs, and labor market demand.

Interested in Learning More?

- Visit South Carolina's [pre-apprenticeship program webpage](#).
- Contact Amanda Richardson, Vice President, Apprenticeship Carolina, at richardsonam@sctechsystem.edu to ask questions or request copies of pre-apprenticeship certification materials.

Conclusion

The nationwide survey and the Pennsylvania and South Carolina case studies illustrate how states are using pre-apprenticeship to strengthen apprenticeship systems, expand individuals' pathways into RAPs and employment, and grow employers' talent pipelines. While there is some variation in approaches across states, a clear theme emerges: growing and strengthening pre-apprenticeship depends on setting and supporting quality expectations and investing in the partnerships, staffing, and processes needed to support pre-apprenticeship program development and implementation. This resource highlights actionable strategies that policymakers and practitioners can adapt to advance quality pre-apprenticeship in their states.



Interested in learning more about this project?

Visit air.org/project/strengthening-apprenticeship-pipeline-state-strategies-expanding-pre-apprenticeship

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