Apprenticeships and Workers with Disabilities

August 20, 2025

EARN
Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability

1

Ellice Switzer

Senior Extension Associate

Development and Dissemination Team

Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability (EARN)

EARN

Today's Objectives

- Learn key insights about the prevalence of disability within the working-age population.

- Discover why you should consider partnering with a Registered Apprenticeship (RA) program.

- Discuss strategies to ensure apprentices with disabilities can be successful, including the benefits of reasonable accommodations.

- Find resources and partners to help build a pipeline of talent.

- Get tips on creating a workplace where people feel comfortable asking for support when needed.

EARN

What is a Registered Apprenticeship? (1)

- Combines classroom instruction with on-the-job training
- Leads to nationally recognized credentials
- Allows apprentices to earn while they learn and graduate with zero debt
- Helps to bridge skill gaps and bring new talent into the workplace
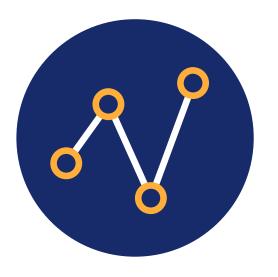
EARN

4

- Exists in "blue-collar" and "white collar" career fields such as traditional trade (carpentry, mechanics, etc.) and corporate positions (IT, energy, biomedical, etc.)

- Many military jobs are apprenticeships!

- Apprentices, upon graduation, earn over $84,000 annually

- 94% of apprentices who complete a Registered Apprenticeship retain employment[3]

EARN

Historic Growth in Apprenticeships

- The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) recently awarded $84 million to expand registered apprenticeships in many key industries including manufacturing, construction, and emerging sectors like technology and artificial intelligence[4]

- 88.5% growth in apprenticeship participation since 2015[2]

- 115% growth in apprentices under the age of 24 since 2015[2]

EARN

Apprenticeship + Disability Strategy = Talent Solution

- Expanding apprenticeships is good for business and solves critical talent shortages.

- People with disabilities are an untapped source of talent.

- Considering universal design can improve completion and job retention rates.

- Welcoming workplaces improve retention rates across the entire workforce.

EARN

Apprenticeship and Disability: Why Does it Matter?

➤ People with disabilities are roughly 11% of the working-age population.[5]

➤ Fewer people with disabilities attend college.[5]

➤ More than 944 thousand job seekers with disabilities are actively looking for work nationwide.[5]

➤ A study of students in Washington State found that nearly three-quarters (73%) of 12th graders with learning disabilities participated in career and technical education (CTE) programs.[7]

➤ More than 30% of youth with disabilities are not working and not in school.[6]

➤ Only 1.2% of apprentices reported having a disability in 2025, but 49% did not respond yes or no.[2]

EARN

New Technologies – New Opportunities

➢ Advances in technology are helping to make workplaces more accessible.

➢ A wide variety of occupations are "apprentice-able" and could be designed to include apprentices with all types of disabilities.

➢ Most people with disabilities require no or low-cost accommodations to perform at the same level as those without a disability.

➢ Proactive attention to accessibility and universal design will benefit all apprentices (and workers).

EARN

Universal Design:[1]

- Originates from the field of architecture
- Aims to create environments that are physically accessible for all
- Can be applied to training facilities and work environments

Universal Design for Learning:[1]

- Plans for learning differences
- Encourages educational content that differentiates instruction
- Considers cognitive and digital accessibility
- Allows flexibility in demonstrating skills and knowledge

EARN

Universal Design, Accessibility, and Accommodation

- Enhancing accessibility of the workplace has the potential to positively impact the experience and outcomes of all apprentices with disabilities (identified or unidentified).

- Implementing strategies that may have a positive effect on the success of the workforce is more likely to be sustained by programs and instructors.

- Universal design may help maximize the overall completion rate of registered apprenticeships.

- This could aid in successful job placement and retention.

EARN

Case Example: FALA Technologies

FALA Technologies: Manufacturing Career Opportunities

- Created out of a need for workers in an advanced manufacturing corporation

- Partnered with local disability focused agency to develop an apprenticeship pathway model

- Credits employing workers with disabilities for saving 100+ year old family business

EARN

State Vocational Rehabilitation

- Provides supportive services at different career stages to help people with disabilities find and keep jobs

- Partners with employers who want to recruit, hire, and retain disabled workers

- Works with students who are eligible for VR services to provide pre-employment services, including work-based learning experiences (pre-apprenticeships)

- Coordinates national business services via the National Employment Team (The NET)

EARN

American Job Centers (AJCs)

- Located in communities throughout the country
- Offer centralized employment and training services
- Offer programs and services that support employers and job seekers alike (WIOA, WOTC, TANF, etc.)

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E)

- Helps employers across the country fill workforce needs with pre-screened, job-ready disabled veterans

Community-Based Agencies

- Can be national, regional, or local
- Serves job seekers with disabilities
- Can provide additional support and assistance and business services

EARN

Tips for Recruiting

- Get involved with state and local workforce investment boards.

- Connect with people who assist the job-seeking population in the area where you need workers.

- Partner to develop competency models and pre-apprenticeship programs.

- Connect with your local Disabled Veteran Outreach Program representative at the local workforce center (AJC). If there is not one in your area, please contact the National Veterans Training Institute (NVTI) to be connected to one.

- Ensure your online presence is digitally accessible.

- Take a disability-informed approach when recruiting and hiring using artificial intelligence.

EARN

Think Beyond Training

- Create a plan to ensure apprenticeship graduates can also be successful in careers - **training is not the end**.

- Put supports in place for their transition from apprentice to journey person.

- Talk to them about a career ladder (e.g., master technician, trainer, etc.).

- Consider implementing a mentorship program that allows apprentices to shadow master tradespeople and benefit from their advice and experience.

EARN

Resources

- [Resources for Finding Candidates with Disabilities](#) (EARN)

- [Disability, Protected Characteristics: Hiring and Retaining Apprentices with Disabilities](#) (DOL Employment and Training Administration)

- [Webinar: Expanding Your Toolkit: Strategies to Support People with Mental Health Conditions in Workforce Programs](#) (National Center on Leadership for the Employment and Economic Advancement of People with Disabilities [LEAD Center])

- [Veterans Accommodations Toolkit](#) (DOL)

- [National Veterans Training Institute(NVTI)](#) (DOL VETS Technical Assistance and Training Center)

- [ApprenticeshipUSA](#) (DOL)

EARN

Citations

1. Almeqdad, Q. I., Alodat, A. M. Alquraan, M. F., Mohaidat, M. A., & Al-Makhzoomy, A.K. (2023). The effectiveness of universal design for learning: A systematic review of the literature and meta-analysis. *Cogent Education, 10*(1). https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/2331186X.2023.2218191

2. ApprenticeshipsUSA (n.d.). *Apprentices by state dashboard.* Retrieved July 7, 2025, from https://www.apprenticeship.gov/data-and-statistics/apprentices-by-state-dashboard

3. ApprenticeshipsUSA (March 2025) *Explore registered apprenticeship.* Retrieved July 23, 2025, from https://www.apprenticeship.gov/sites/default/files/DOL_IndFactsheet_Apprenticeship101_v31125.pdf

4. Employment and Training Administration. (2025, June 30). *News Release: Department of Labor awards nearly $84M in grants to expand Registered Apprenticeships.* U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. https://www.dol.gov/newsroom/releases/eta/eta20250630

5. Erickson, W., Lee, C., & von Schrader, S. (2025). *Disability statistics*. Cornell University Yang-Tan Institute (YTI). Retrieved July 7, 2025, from www.disabilitystatistics.org. Numbers calculated by EARN staff.

6. Mathematica. (2022, April 26). *Disability maps: Nonworking out-of-school youth and young adults.* https://www.mathematica.org/dataviz/nonworking-osy-disability-maps

7. Theobald, R. J., Goldhaber, D. D., Gratz, T. M., & Holden, K. L. (2019). Career and technical education, inclusion, and postsecondary outcomes for students with learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 52*(2), 109-119. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0022219418775121

EARN

Questions?

Please take a moment to [share feedback](#) on today's event:

EARN

EARN Funding Statement

EARN

Thank You!

Visit us at AskEARN.org

Follow us on Facebook, X, and LinkedIn

Please take a moment to share feedback on today's event:

EARN