



Further Your Youth Apprenticeship Program with an Online Communications Strategy

Digital Communications Toolkit

APRIL 2020

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Table of Contents

Goal of this Document	3
Why Have an Online Communications Strategy?	3
Step 1: Define Your Message	4
State Your Program Goals	4
Identify Your Audience(s)	4
Articulate Your Objectives and “Call to Action” for Each Audience Type	6
Decide Which Channels Will Reach Which Audiences	7
Step 2: Develop Communications Materials	9
Your Program Overview	9
Youth and Employer Profiles	9
Frequently Asked Questions	10
Step 3: Creating and Leveraging an Online Presence	10
Website	11
Social Media	12
Appendix: Messaging	17
What Is a Youth Apprenticeship?	17
Why Is Youth Apprenticeship Needed?	18
On Youth Apprenticeship—for General Use (All Audiences)	19
Supporting Messages by Audience	20

Goal of this Document

Across the United States, youth apprenticeship programs like yours ensure that youth can access greater life opportunities, and that businesses can train the fresh talent they need to grow and invest in the local economy.

Youth apprenticeship programs are community builders. Therefore, each one needs a strong strategy to communicate with their communities. Our goal is to help you support as many students and communities as possible!

This guide will help your youth apprenticeship program develop an online communications strategy to reach your program goals. You will learn how to identify your key audiences, messages, and channels, and how to use tools like a website and social media to achieve your aims.

Why Have an Online Communications Strategy?

As every one of us knows, when people have a question, they turn to the internet. Yet many youth apprenticeship programs don't have a strong online presence. Why? It can feel overwhelming or foreign to set up a website or a social media account for an organization. There are lots of other pressing programmatic tasks, and limited time and money.

Yet taking time to develop a website and social media presence is an investment that pays dividends. Both tools: can serve as a central hub of information, can be easily found by anyone; can be used as a way to announce application deadlines and events; and can provide the ability to connect with peer organizations. A web presence conveys credibility, stability, and reach.

You don't need a complicated, slick website or 15 social media accounts to make an impact. With the right digital communications strategy, you can choose exactly the right tools to reach your goals, and build and maintain them with a reasonable amount of effort. We'll describe how.

Step 1: Define Your Message

State Your Program Goals

Think about the top two or three objectives of your program. Do you focus on connecting youth with local career options to stimulate the regional economy? Does your program seek to improve life outcomes for a certain group of students (low income, students with disabilities, etc.)? Once you are clear on your top goals, you can determine who you must influence (your “audience”) and what you want them to do (your “call to action”).

Exercise #1: State Your Goals

Name one to three goals of your youth apprenticeship organization. These can be specific yearly goals (such as “increase student enrollment in our program”) or parts of your overall mission (such as “increase the talent pipeline for local industry X”)

Identify Your Audience(s)

Every person or group of people has their own motivations, desires, and goals. In communications, your goal is help people see that connecting with you will allow them to achieve their goals. To accomplish this, you need to understand what drives your different audience segments.

For example, your message to a young person who you want to bring into your program should be quite different from your message to a governor whom you want to pass favorable policies.

In the world of youth apprenticeship, there are several audience segments to choose from:

Audience	What They Want	What You Want From Them	Possible Messages
Youth	I want help navigating my options and determining my future	We want them to join our program	Learn how to do interesting jobs while earning a paycheck and avoiding student debt
Parents	I want opportunities for my children	We want their approval and encouragement for their child to apply to an apprenticeship	Your child will receive education <i>and</i> work experience, paving the way into well-paying careers in fields like IT, health care, advanced manufacturing, and business services
K-12 Teachers	I want to connect my students with post-school opportunities	We want to build apprenticeship programs into curriculum	Youth apprenticeship improves engagement and enhances learning by connecting students with real-world work experience
Higher Education	We want to provide educational opportunities that connect to the real world	We want to build apprenticeship programs into curriculum	Youth apprenticeship can reduce student loan debt and increase opportunities for career placement after graduation
Employers	We want well-trained, productive workers	We want to offer youth apprentices meaningful work experiences	Youth apprenticeship allows employers to access a sustainable pipeline of diverse talent with adaptable skills from the rising generation.
Policy-makers	We want to make policies that encourage economic growth and opportunities for constituents	We want policies that are friendly to youth apprenticeship programs	Youth apprenticeship is a strategy for building a workforce pipeline and energizing economic growth

Exercise #2: Identify Your Audience

Which one to three of the audiences listed above—or others!—are most critical to your organization’s goals? For example, if you need to increase student enrollment, students and K-12 teachers may be important; if you need a policy change in order to expand, policymakers may be key.

Audience: _____

Audience: _____

Audience: _____

Articulate Your Objectives and “Call to Action” for Each Audience Type

Now that you have identified your audiences, you need to define what you want them to do in order to move them toward taking the action you want them to take. This is your “objective” for them. You can start by articulating objectives at a high level. For example:

Key Goal: Keep youth in your region by connecting them with career options

Primary Audience: Youth

Objective: Join the program and be connected to career opportunities

Secondary Audiences: Employers, parents, schools

Objective: Support the program through partnerships and encourage youth to join

But how do you get your audience to start to act on their big objectives? In any piece of communication—whether it is a tweet, an email, or a flyer—you want to include a *call to action*. This should be a small step your audience can take to lead them closer to your desired outcome. At each step, you provide them with a little more information to help them make the decision you want.

For example, say you are starting outreach to an employer with the goal of having them bring on an apprentice. Their experience could be:

1. Email

- *Purpose:* Introduce them to your program and how it could be beneficial.
- *Call to Action:* Watch this video to see the experience of another employer.

2. Video

- *Purpose:* Highlight another employer's positive experience and ROI.
- *Call to Action:* Check out our website to learn more.

3. Website

- *Purpose:* Show more about the program and answer initial questions.
- *Call to Action:* Call our program director to discuss.

As you think through your goals, audience, and calls to action, you will begin to create ideas for what you need on your website, in social media, and through other online tools like newsletters and email outreach. Through this process, you can focus your efforts and resources on the most important activities.

Exercise #3: Articulate Your Call to Action

Choose one of your goals, and one of your audiences. Think about your high-level objective for them, and then break it down into one to three small, specific “calls to action”—things you need or want them to do—in order to move toward the goal.

Goal: _____

Audience: _____

Specific Calls to Action: _____

Decide Which Channels Will Reach Which Audiences

There are many online tools, from websites to social media to email. Of course, there are many offline communication channels as well. You will want to communicate with each audience in a channel that is most effective for reaching them. Youth, of course, are more likely to get their information online; but so do many parents and policymakers. Consider the recommendations below for which channels work well with which audiences:

Audience	Website	Social Media	Email	Word-of-Mouth	Events	Other
Youth	X	X		X (from peers or educators, parents)		
Parents	X	X			X	News outlets School-sponsored materials
K-12 Teachers	X	X	X			
Higher Education	X		X			
Employers	X		X	X		Meetings
Policy-makers	X		X			Site visits

Exercise #4: Decide on Channels

Think about the communications channels you currently use and your most important audiences. Which channels should you invest in in order to reach your audience where they are?

Audience: _____

Audience: _____

Audience: _____

Step 2: Develop Communications Materials

Your Program Overview

Once you have identified your program’s goals and key audiences, develop a few paragraphs that detail the “who, what, where, when, how, and why” of the program. This will allow you to consistently describe your program across all methods of communication.

Here is an example from [Wisconsin Youth Apprenticeship](#):

The beginnings of Wisconsin Youth Apprenticeship date back to 1991 with an innovative idea: a school-to-work initiative to prepare students for careers. Nearly 30 years later, we're opening the door to show over 450 high school students every year how Youth Apprenticeship can better their future.

Youth and Employer Profiles

Profiles of program participants and employers can go a long way toward encouraging others to engage with you. They not only highlight your successes, but also build a connection with readers who see themselves represented in the people you profile. They can be in written or in video format, and shared via social media, websites, or email.

In a profile, you should include the “who, what, where, when, how, and why” questions to provide the factual information that will give the reader context and allow them to understand how the program is operating. But you’ll also want to ask open-ended questions about the person’s thoughts, feelings, and experiences. The answers to these questions will help to build a “human connection,” allow readers to see themselves in the person’s experience, and inspire the reader to take the next step.

Here are some questions to consider when creating profiles of youth or employers:

Youth	Employers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your name? • How old are you? • What school do you attend? • How did you get involved in the program? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your company name? • Where are you based? • What do you do? • How did you get involved in the program?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where do you do your apprenticeship? • What is your role and what are some tasks you perform? • What do you like about the program? • What have you learned? • How do you think the program is helping you achieve your future dreams? • What would you tell other youth who are considering an apprenticeship? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What helped you decide to bring on youth apprentices? • What work do you have youth apprentices doing? • What is it like having a youth apprentice in the organization? How has your staff responded? • What benefits to your organization have you seen as a result? • What would you tell other employers who are considering bringing on youth apprentices? |
|--|--|

Frequently Asked Questions

You'll also want to develop materials that answer common questions about your program. This will not only free up staff time from answering the same questions again and again, but gives people a low-stakes way to begin to engage with and understand your program.

FAQs can be for a general audience (“What is youth apprenticeship?”) or a specific one (for parents: “What can youth apprenticeship do for my child?”). Create materials that cater to the key audiences you identified earlier, and consider what questions you would have in their shoes. Reflect on conversations you've had and the questions that come up the most.

And don't be afraid to build on materials that already exist! If another program or source has materials that speak to the questions you receive, include a link to them or—with permission—pull the text into a new material. Just be sure to credit the original source.

Step 3: Creating and Leveraging an Online Presence

With your communications strategy set (goals, audience, calls to action, preferred channels) and some basic content written, your program is ready to create and leverage an online presence. Some programs have a website as well as a social media presence. Others just have one of the two. It's important to remember that a website and each social media platform takes time and effort to maintain. Don't feel the need to be everywhere at once—it's more important that you

focus on just a few online activities that will provide you with the most visibility for your audience and help you reach your goals.

For example, do you want to have a place for parents, employers, teachers, or even youth to have all of their questions answered and learn more about the program? If yes, you should consider a website.

Or are you looking to more actively engage with your community? If so, one of the social media platforms would be an ideal option.

Website

Your website is where you bring your full community together. Employers, parents, youth, teachers, policymakers, and more will use your website to find out more about you, whether your program is something they want to get involved with, and how to connect with you. On a website, you can:

- Provide information on what your program is, how it works, and how it is supported.
- Include information about how to contact you and how to get involved.
- Post the collateral you developed that answers questions and inspires people to connect with your program.
- Highlight success stories and news articles.

Some programs have their own website, while others are built from the school or college they work with. Ask your primary sponsor if you can have a page on their site. If you decide to build your own, several platforms allow beginners to make a basic website cheaply and easily:

- WordPress.com
- Wix.com
- SquareSpace.com
- Websitebuilder.com

You can also often hire a contractor to design a basic website on one of these platforms, so that you can easily edit it in the future.

Inspiration

- [Northcentral Technical College](#) (nestled in college's site)
- [CESA 6](#) (standalone site)

Social Media

Social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, and more) are powerful tools for spreading your message, sharing impactful youth and employer profiles, and expanding your audience. Before you dive in, consider these high-level tips:

1. **Know your objective.** Social media should be part of your youth apprenticeship program's broader goals. Whether it's engaging with parents, connecting with local businesses, or appealing directly to youth, your social media use should feed into the larger objectives of your program.
2. **Focus on one or two platforms.** If your program is new to social media, select the one that is most relevant to your audience and objectives to start with, rather than diving into all of them at once.
3. **Commit to it.** Social media is all about presence. For it to be successful, your organization needs to be active on the preferred platform(s) at least once a week.
4. **Assign responsibility.** Whether it's one person or a larger team, your program's social media should be "owned" by someone who is in charge of maintaining it, engaging with others, and monitoring comments.
5. **Be social.** Social media is all about engaging with your communities. Whether it be liking or commenting on others' posts related to youth apprenticeship, sharing those posts, or engaging with those who comment on your own posts, be sure to interact with your partners, local schools and businesses, and other related accounts.

Below you can find basic background information on each of the main social media platforms.

Facebook

[Facebook](#) is a platform where users expect to connect on a more personal level with family, friends, and even businesses and organizations. Your program should consider becoming active on Facebook if you are looking to connect with the people who can help influence youth, such as their parents, teachers, and larger communities.

Every day, more than 2 billion people log into their Facebook accounts. And in the U.S., more than [220 million](#) people check their Facebook at least once a month.

Key Audience: Parents, families, teachers, and the general community.

What to Share:

- Personal stories about youth apprenticeship from apprentices, teachers, or businesses
- Information on any community events you are hosting or participating in

- Photos of events or apprentices at work
- Interesting facts on how youth apprenticeship benefits participants
- Live interviews with apprentices

Sample Post:

This post from [CESA 6](#) highlights a successful participant and uses their own voice—and that of their employer—to demonstrate the value of youth apprenticeship.

Inspiration:

- [CESA 6](#)
- [Manitowoc County Youth Apprenticeship](#)
- [St. Croix Valley Youth Apprenticeship](#)

Resources:

- [Facebook Business Pages](#): Facebook's official guide to Facebook Pages.
- [How to Create a Facebook Business Page in 7 Easy Steps](#): Get started with your Facebook Page by following these instructions from social media management platform Hootsuite.
- [14 Ways to Increase Your Facebook Page Engagement](#): Once your page is up, these tips can help you increase your likes and followers.

CESA 6 - CCR
December 2, 2019 · 🌐

Student Spotlight: Tannor Wittmus, Valders High School, is a Youth Apprenticeship student at WST Fab, LLC. Tannor will be moving into a Registered Apprenticeship after high school. CESA 6 #CESA6Lead Valders Area School District WST Fab Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development

Your future begins **NOW** with
YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP

“By participating in YA, it gives me a jump-start on my future by knowing more of what I want to do for a career. It is giving me real life situations outside of the classroom in the best learning environment while getting work experience.”

Tannor Wittmus
Class of 2020 | Valders High School

“Tannor has done an outstanding job. He has a great attitude and continues to succeed daily. YA has been a positive experience at WST Fab and has increased our skilled work force.”

Al Schuh
WST Fab

CESA 6 College & Career Readiness Center
CESA6.ORG / COLLEGE CAREER

13 1 Comment 5 Shares

Instagram

[Instagram](#) is all about images. If you're looking to connect directly with youth, this is a platform to focus on. The use of relevant hashtags is especially important on Instagram and will allow your posts to be found by the right audiences.

An important note on Instagram: You are only able to post from a smartphone. While you may post primarily photos, some businesses will also post graphics or other designed elements. You can create an image on your desktop, email it to yourself, save it to your phone, and then post it. It's a bit of a process, but worth it for the exposure you can receive with your target audience.

Key Audience: Youth.

What to Share:

- Photos of events or apprentices at work
- Photos that highlight personal stories or profiles
- Graphics that highlight interesting facts on how youth apprenticeship benefits participants
- Live interviews with apprentices

Sample Post:

[CareerWise Colorado](#) created a youth-oriented graphic for Instagram that played off of a well-known meme to announce an application deadline extension.



Inspiration:

- [Apprentice Learning](#)
- [#youthapprenticeship](#)
- [CareerWise Colorado](#)
- [Treehouse](#)

Resources:

- [Canva](#): Easily create graphics, layouts, and more with this free online design tool used by beginners and experts alike.
- [Instagram for Business](#): Everything you need to know for getting started on the platform.

LinkedIn

[LinkedIn](#) is a social media platform for professionals and businesses. If you're looking to connect with employers or funders, LinkedIn is where you want to be.

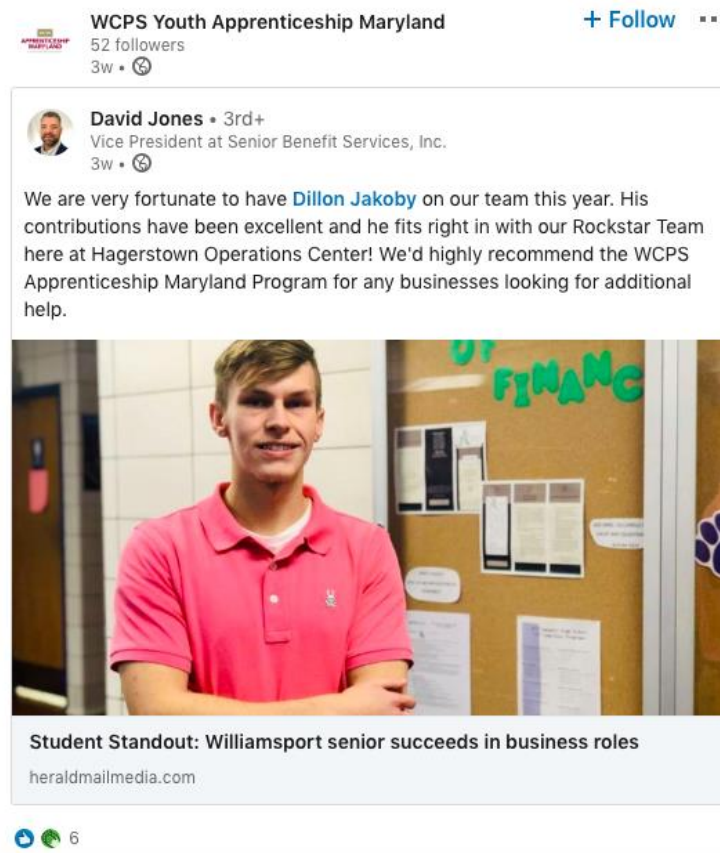
Audience: Local business professionals (industry, philanthropy).

What to Share:

- Interesting facts on how youth apprenticeship benefits participants
- Personal stories about youth apprenticeship from apprentices, teachers, or businesses
- Information on any community events you are hosting or participating in
- Photos of events or apprentices at work

Sample Post:

[WCPS Youth Apprenticeship Maryland](#) uses their LinkedIn page to spotlight their employer partners. This post was shared from one of their partners who posted about their youth apprentice from the program.



Inspiration:

- [WCPS Youth Apprenticeship Maryland](#)
- [CareerWise Colorado](#)

Resources:

- [The Ultimate Guide to LinkedIn Company Pages](#): This one-stop guide provides helpful step-by-step guidance on setting up a company page, best practices, and general information.

Twitter

Twitter is a fast-paced platform best suited for in-the-moment immediacy. This could include announcements, breaking news, or important messages.

Audience: General public.

What to Share:

- Announcements or important messages (enrollment deadlines, etc.)
- “Live tweets,” or posting tweets during an event as it’s happening
- Commentary or content on a current event (e.g., National Apprenticeship Week)

Sample Post:

Cybersecurity Youth Apprenticeship Initiative used their Twitter account to highlight their presence at the Workforce Development Institute in January.

Inspiration:

- [Cybersecurity Youth Apprenticeship Initiative](#)
- [ITA Youth](#)

Resources:

- [Twitter Guide for Beginners](#): Get started with a handle and understand the Twitter terminology.
- [What to Tweet](#): Straight from Twitter itself—how to increase engagement on your tweets.



Appendix: Messaging

All of the messaging and resources in this appendix were developed by the [Partnership to Advance Youth Apprenticeship \(PAYA\)](#). Use these messages as-is, or use them as a starting point to customize for your specific needs.

What Is a Youth Apprenticeship?

As defined by the United States Department of Labor, apprenticeship is a proven education and workforce strategy that combines paid, structured on-the-job training with related classroom learning. Youth apprenticeship is a program for high school students that combine academic and technical classroom instruction with work experience through a Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP). It provides the foundation for students to choose among multiple pathways after high school—to enroll in college, to enter an apprenticeship program, begin full-time employment, or a combination.

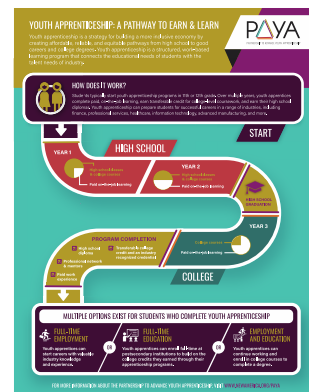
Download PAYA’s informational pamphlet on youth apprenticeship:

https://s3.amazonaws.com/newamericadotorg/documents/PAYA_11x17_v6b-pages3.pdf

Youth apprenticeship is a proven education and workforce strategy, but it can be difficult to explain succinctly how it “works”—especially to students, families, educators, and employers who are unfamiliar with the model. To help address this common challenge, PAYA has created an [informational pamphlet](#) and an [infographic](#). The infographic illustrates the components and sequence of a typical youth apprenticeship program—including the many options available to young people at the conclusion of the program.

Download the infographic:

https://s3.amazonaws.com/newamericadotorg/documents/PAYA_infographic_2019.pdf



Why Is Youth Apprenticeship Needed?

Excerpted from “Announcing the Partnership to Advance Youth Apprenticeship,” New America, October 2018, <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/announcing-partnership-advance-youth-apprenticeship/>

For generations, the promise of American opportunity has been rooted in a simple premise: work hard in high school, earn a diploma, and then move on to college or right into a job. In either case, most Americans who completed high school could reasonably expect to support themselves and their families, and those who finished college could expect a secure foothold in the middle class. But over the last three decades, the link between American education and economic mobility has grown increasingly fragile. A college degree is more important than ever to achieve financial security but also less of a guarantee—and more than twice as expensive as in the 1990s. Many young people enter adulthood burdened by college debt, and too often without a degree. Even as high school graduation and college-going rates are rising, income inequality and the racial wealth gap continue to grow.

High schools are struggling to prepare young people for today’s economy. Too many students are disengaged and have difficulty navigating their options after graduation. Students lack affordable postsecondary opportunities, and many graduates find that a degree alone is not enough to secure a good job with potential for career advancement. These challenges make the path to economic security difficult for young people, especially for those facing the persistent racial, gender, and other inequities present in the country today.

The weakening link between education and economic mobility is troubling, especially at a time when the American economy is creating well-paying jobs in fields like information technology, health care, advanced manufacturing, and business services, and employers are struggling to fill them. To compete and grow, employers need to build a sustainable pipeline of workers with adaptable skills. Our current approaches to educating young Americans provide few opportunities for employers to connect with a rising generation of diverse talent.

Youth apprenticeship allows students to complete high school, start their postsecondary education at no cost, get paid work experience alongside a mentor, and start along a path that broadens their options for the future. Youth apprenticeship is a cost-effective talent strategy for employers, as apprentices build skills to meet evolving business needs and develop into valued contributors to their employers’ bottom lines.

On Youth Apprenticeship—for General Use (All Audiences)

Shared Values

Lead with value messages meant to answer the questions: What do we value in common? What can we agree on? Why are we talking about this?

- For generations, the promise of American opportunity has been rooted in a simple premise: work hard in high school, earn a diploma and then move on to college or right into a job to build a solid future.
- Over the last three decades, the link between American education and economic mobility has grown increasingly fragile.
- To compete and grow, employers need to build a sustainable pipeline of workers with adaptable skills.
- Higher education should be accessible and affordable to students from all backgrounds.

Problems/Challenges

What are the problems and challenges we face?

- The weakening link between education and economic mobility is troubling, especially at a time when the American economy is creating well-paying jobs in fields like information technology, health care, advanced manufacturing, and business services, and employers are struggling to fill them.
- Too many students are disengaged and have difficulty navigating their options after graduation.
- Students who go straight to work have few opportunities for high-quality, hands-on career preparation while in high school.
- Many young people enter adulthood burdened by student loan debt, and too often without a degree.
- A college degree is more important than ever to achieve financial security but also less of a guarantee—and more than twice as expensive as in the 1990s.
- The path to economic security is difficult for some young people, especially those facing the persistent racial, gender, and other inequities present in the country today.
- Current approaches to educating young Americans provide few opportunities for employers to connect with a rising generation of diverse talent.

Solutions

How is youth apprenticeship a solution to those problems and challenges?

- Youth apprenticeship is a path to a promising future for skilled employment and educational opportunity with no-to-low debt.
- Youth apprenticeship can advance equity by increasing access to valuable, affordable postsecondary credentials, and by increasing the social capital and paid work experience that are especially important for underresourced youth.
- Youth apprenticeship is also a promising strategy to address employers' talent needs, and to build connections between schools, businesses, and the communities they serve.

Supporting Messages by Audience

Policymakers/Governors

- Youth apprenticeship connects the learning needs of students with the talent needs of industry.
- Youth apprenticeship keeps talent within the local economy by connecting young people with employers to jump-start their careers.
- Youth apprenticeship is a strategy for building a workforce pipeline and energizing economic growth.

Employers

- Youth apprenticeship allows employers to connect with a rising generation of diverse talent that will become a sustainable pipeline of workers with adaptable skills.
- Businesses can deepen employee engagement by engaging employees as mentors and teachers.
- Future-minded companies recognize that youth apprenticeship expands the pipeline of talent prepared to adapt to the rapidly changing needs of business.

Higher Education

- Students seek more affordable postsecondary opportunities, and many graduates find that a degree alone is not enough to secure a good job that has potential for career advancement.
- Youth apprenticeship is a promising strategy for improving student retention and increasing certificate and degree completion.
- Youth apprenticeship can reduce student loan debt and increase opportunities for career placement after graduation.

Youth

- Youth apprenticeship is a unique opportunity for students who want practical, hands-on work experience that leads to a promising career.
- You'll earn while you learn, get real skills, and build a résumé for a career you want.
- Youth apprenticeship is a pathway to and through college that enables young people to build a professional network and find high-quality career opportunities.
- While learning on the job and developing skills, you will work alongside experienced mentors who can help you find a career path.
- Youth apprenticeship allows you to build a future with no-to-low student debt.

Parents

- Youth apprenticeship provides students a chance to build their résumé and earn college credit by combining education and work.
- Youth apprenticeship is an option for your child to create a structured path through higher education and into well-paying careers in fields like information technology, health care, advanced manufacturing, and business services.
- Youth apprenticeship expands student options of college and career without the burden of student loan debt.

K-12 Education

- Youth apprenticeship improves student engagement in high school and helps students navigate their options after graduation.
- Youth apprenticeship alleviates the pressure students feel about choosing between work or college.
- Youth apprenticeship creates valuable opportunities for many students, especially those from underresourced communities.
- Youth apprenticeship improves engagement and enhances learning experiences by connecting student learning with real-world work experience.