
DISCUSSION GUIDE: NATIONAL INDUSTRY CONTRACTORS

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. My name is XX and I work for XX. As I explained in my email, I am part of a research team documenting the progress made by national contractors and state grantees under the U.S. Department of Labor's apprenticeship efforts. This conversation is part of a series of discussions we are having with the national industry and equity partners to understand the approaches being used to expand apprenticeship and increase diversity within apprenticeship programs, as well as the progress that has been made toward DOL's goals.

Our conversation today should take between 1.5 hours to 2 hours. I would like to record our conversation just to make sure my notes are complete; the recording will not be shared with the Department of Labor. Is that ok? If you would like to say anything off the record during our conversation, please let me know and I will stop recording. Do you have any questions before we begin?

I. Respondent background

1. Can you first tell me your title and role in your organization, and your role on the contract?

II. Industry and occupation focus

I would like to spend a few minutes learning about your approach to expanding apprenticeship programs in [your industry] over the past year].

2. What factors would you say have been the most critical for helping to grow apprenticeship in your industry of focus in the past year?
3. What have been the main barriers to establishing apprenticeship programs for occupations in this industry?

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III. Overview of the approach

4. What were your primary goals for this past year? How were these goals different from your goals in the first year of the contract?
5. Have the states and cities you are working in changed this past year? Why?
6. To what extent has your approach to this project changed in this last year? Have you changed the extent to which you are focusing on specific occupations versus employer-specific needs? Why?
7. Do you find that employers generally have an idea of where apprenticeship would make the most sense for their business?
 - What makes an occupation or position a good fit for apprenticeship? What characteristics or factors do you look for?
 - What process or criteria do you use to help an employer determine which positions to develop an apprenticeship program for?
8. What has been the role of your organization in establishing apprenticeships this year?
 - What activities are you responsible for? Can you walk me through an example of an apprenticeship program you have created with an employer and describe how it was done?
9. How many new apprenticeship programs had you planned on starting through this effort this year? Over the contract period [confirm if known]? How close are you to achieving these goals?
 - What would you say is your success rate, approximately, based on how many apprenticeships you have tried to create and how many have been created?
 - Of the programs that started the process and didn't complete, what do you feel were the challenges to getting a program started?
 - How many employers who were not previously sponsoring apprenticeship programs have become apprentice sponsors?
10. How many new apprentices had you planned to train through this effort this year? Over the contract period [confirm if known]? How close are you to achieving these goals?

IV. Employer identification

I'd like to talk about how you reach out to potential sponsors/employers on apprenticeships.

11. How many employers or other types of sponsors are you currently working with on this particular grant/initiative? What types of businesses or organizations are participating?

- How many of these are employers/sponsors you are working with for the first time in this past year?
12. What strategies have been most successful to reach out to potential employers/sponsors?
- (If an association) Do you have members that you reach out to?
 - Do you attend industry meetings or other events to recruit employers? How do you find out about these events, and who typically organizes them?
 - How many of your employers have been referred to you? Where do these referrals generally come from?
13. How has your staffing structure for this particular contract changed? Do you have staff dedicated to doing outreach or recruiting for apprenticeships, or to developing programs? What qualifications do you look for in hiring for outreach and recruitment positions, and for program development positions?

V. Recruitment/marketing of apprenticeship opportunities to employers

Now I would like to focus on how you market the apprenticeship opportunity to employers.

14. What is the best way to present apprenticeship opportunities to employers? What advantages of the apprenticeship model do you talk about, and what resonates with employers?
- What resources do you provide (brochures, factsheets, websites, etc.)?
 - Are there different approaches for different types or size of employers?
15. What types of incentives do you offer employers to develop an apprenticeship, both monetary and non-monetary? How effective are they?
16. How do you determine the amount of the financial incentive to offer to employers? Does the incentive vary? If so, based on what factors (e.g., type of business, number of apprentices)?
- Is there a minimum or maximum amount that you will fund? Does it involve a percentage of certain costs?
17. What do you feel are the key factors in converting interest from an employer into an actual commitment to develop a program? What marketing strategies are the most effective?

18. What challenges do employers typically cite as barriers to establishing apprenticeships? How do you address these challenges?

- *Probe: Do you help fund or attract funding for off-site/off-job courses or other related instruction? Do you help build or point to existing skill frameworks for the apprentice occupations? Do you assist in helping employers find the appropriate candidates for apprenticeships in the relevant occupations?*

VI. Apprenticeship design

I have a few questions about how the apprenticeships are designed.

19. In this past year, what types of apprenticeships were being developed under this contract – time-based, competency-based, or hybrid? Did it differ by employer or occupation and how is the approach determined?
 - If using a competency-based approach, who/what entity determines what skills need to be learned? How?
 - How do you determine how much of a program is on-the-job vs RTI (related technical instruction)?
 - How do you determine where the RTI occurs (worksite, classroom, etc.)?
 - What does the RTI usually look like – for example, how flexible is it, how much of a technology component exists?
 - Who typically provides the RTI? Are they internal or external to the employer? How much does it cost?
20. Can you describe how competency/skill frameworks or work process schedules are developed for each occupational apprenticeship?
 - Who develops the schedule and the description of the apprenticeship? (Probe: employers, your organization or other entities, such as community colleges)
 - If done by other entities, what was the process used to involve these entities in the development of the frameworks and other program features? Were they part of this contract? If not, what type of agreement – contractual or other—do you have with the entity and for what (and how procured, RFP, etc.)?
 - Are you using existing schedules, modifying existing schedules, or developing new ones?
21. Have there been any challenges in determining what competencies the apprentices are expected to learn or other aspects of the program design? Please explain.
22. Are you involved with tracking hours or measuring achievements in an apprenticeship?
 - If so, how do you track hours or measure achievement of competency? What system or infrastructure exists to do this? What are the challenges of doing this, and what solutions have you developed?
23. Is flexibility or accelerated learning a key focus of your apprenticeship programs, and, if so, what strategies have you used to address them?
24. Have you developed employer-ready standards or competency levels as part of your contract which are recognized by an official entity? If so, please describe.
 - What occupations are these standards for?
 - Have they been recognized by USDOL?
 - Have they been adopted by employers, and where?
 - What lessons did you learn from this process, in terms of challenges you faced and how you addressed them?
25. Have any of the apprenticeships you have helped develop led to post-secondary credit or industry-recognized credentials? What was different about the process for these apprenticeships? What particular challenges did you face?

26. Have you helped to develop any youth apprenticeship models? How are these different from traditional apprenticeships, and what are the unique challenges and benefits of youth apprenticeships?

VII. Registration

I'd like to spend a few minutes talking about registration.

27. What challenges have you faced in the registration process? How do the challenges differ for state and Federal processes?
- Are there aspects of the process that are particularly difficult for sponsors?
 - How have these challenges changed over the life of the contract?
28. Have there been any changes to state policies around apprenticeship that have made it easier or harder to create or register apprenticeships?
- What policies and how have they affected expanding apprenticeship?
 - What role do State Apprenticeship Agencies (SAAs) have in your efforts? Did you have any challenges working with SAAs? If so, how did you overcome those challenges and what are your recommendations moving forward?
29. What role has the federal Office of Apprenticeship (OA) had in your efforts in its capacity as an agency that registers apprenticeship programs, not in its capacity as your contracting agency?
- What assistance did OA provide in helping you develop your program? Did you experience any challenges working with OA? If so, what recommendations do you have moving forward?
30. Have you been able to leverage funding/work with states that received state expansion grants? In what ways? Have you been able to leverage WIOA funding?
31. What methods do you or the state use to keep track of employers and apprenticeships/apprentices? For example, is there a public/open access database?

VIII. Other partnerships and activities

32. Which organizations have you partnered with to expand apprenticeship in your industry/ies other than the ones we have already discussed? (Probe for WIOA, community colleges, schools.)
- How have they helped to facilitate the work that you are doing?
 - Have you been able to leverage funding or resources from these organizations? (Probe on specifics: funding or staff or other in-kind.)

33. Have you engaged in any efforts or provided assistance to sponsors or partners to increase interest in apprenticeships among job seekers? Please describe the activities and partners involved.
34. Have you engaged in particular efforts to increase diversity and inclusion in apprenticeship? Please describe those efforts and what outcomes you have experienced. What factors have supported diversity, and what strategies have you found to be effective?
 - What factors have supported diversity, and what strategies have you found to be effective?
 - Have you consulted with other organizations on how to promote diversity and inclusion in apprenticeships?

IX. Results, Lessons learned and next steps

I'd like to wrap up by getting your thoughts on what you have learned from this experience.

35. What have been the most critical factors in your initiative aimed at expanding apprenticeship in your industry?
36. What have you learned about engaging with state and federal apprenticeship leaders and other state and federal policymakers to advance apprenticeship as a model?
37. What recommendations do you have for other organizations that want to create new apprenticeship programs in this industry? In other industries?
38. Do you plan to continue working with employers to develop apprenticeship programs after your contract ends? If yes, what if anything will change about the work you are doing?
39. What long-term effects do you believe your efforts have made at least in your industry on the future of apprenticeship?

Thank you so much for your time.

Is there anything else you would like to mention beyond what we have discussed?

Thank you for taking the time to speak with us on this important topic.