

Enhancing Registered Apprenticeship Initiatives

Apprenticeship Building America Program
Apprentices and Pre-Apprentices Focus Group Guide

INTRODUCTION

I am/we are researchers with The Urban Institute/Mathematica/Social Policy Research, private research organizations based in Washington, DC/California which conduct policy-related research on a variety of social welfare and economic issues.

This project is being conducted under contract to the U.S. Department of Labor. Our discussion here today is part of the Enhancing Registered Apprenticeship Initiatives project, a national study sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor. The study will learn how apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs can help improve the skills and employment outcomes of American workers. We are here today to learn about your experiences in the [apprenticeship program name]. In addition to you, we are also conducting interviews with program staff and program partners.

We want to let you know that you may choose not to answer certain questions. You may also choose to leave the discussion at any time. Whatever you decide will not impact your participation or experience in the apprenticeship/pre-apprenticeship program. You will receive a \$50 gift card in appreciation of your participation in the focus group. We expect this discussion to last about 90 minutes. [Put up slide with privacy statement]

Privacy Statement: We consider what you say in this focus group as private and will do everything we can to secure the privacy of the information you provide. Although we will be taking notes, when we report information from the discussion, we will not include your name. Information from this discussion may be included in a public report, but it will not identify you. While we can assure you that no one on the research team will share what you say today outside of this conversation, we cannot control what other people in this group will do with the information they hear. Because of that, we encourage all participants to think about whether they would be upset if someone repeated what they said outside of this conversation when deciding to share something with the group. We also encourage each of you to be respectful of one another and treat the information you hear today as private. We believe the risks of participating in this study are minimal. Although there are no direct benefits to you, we believe that the findings from this study will benefit similar efforts to expand and modernize apprenticeships. [Verbally ask for consent of each participant]

Finally, to help us accurately capture the information you share, we would like to audio-only record this conversation. The recording is just a back-up for our notes and will be kept securely within our small research team. The recording will be deleted once we have developed a full set of notes from the interview.

[Verbally ask for consent from each participant]

Introductions

Once again, we appreciate the time you have taken today to talk about your experiences in the [name of program]. We learned from [organization or employer overseeing the program] that the training you are receiving is an apprenticeship [or pre-apprenticeship program]. An apprenticeship combines classroom learning with on-the-job training and provides a credential upon completion. People who participate in these programs are typically called apprentices. [A pre-apprenticeship program is designed to prepare individuals for entry into an apprenticeship program or, in some cases, into other job opportunities.]

Ask each person to introduce themselves, give the occupation for which they are training, describe what stages of the program they are in –pre-apprenticeship, apprenticeship classroom training, or apprenticeship on-the-job, and whether they were employed by their current employer prior to the apprenticeship. Remind people they do not have to provide this or any other information.

Questions

1. Were you ever previously enrolled in a pre-apprenticeship?
2. Were you employed by the business sponsoring your program prior to participating in [name of the program]?
3. Was the program connected in any way with career and technical education at your school? If so, how?
4. How did you first come to hear about [name of the program]?
5. How did you get recruited for [name of the program]?
6. Why were you interested in [name of the program]? What did you hope to get out of [name of the program]?
7. What steps did you take leading up to participating in [name of the program]? [Probe for application, interview, assessment, or test]
8. Apprenticeships have training that occurs on the job and that you get from your supervisor on the job. What has the on-the-job training been like? [Probe for: hours a week, interaction with supervisor/mentor, what they learn on a day-to-day basis, ease/difficulty]
9. Apprenticeships also have some instruction or courses provided in a classroom, online, or somewhere else separate from the job. What has this instruction been like? [Probe for: hours a week, format of instruction, what they learn on a day-to-day basis, ease/difficulty]
10. What kind of supports are available to help you complete [name of program]? Were these supports helpful? If so, how? Are there supports you needed but were not available?
11. How prepared do you feel for your job or for a new job in the same field based on your apprenticeship experience?

12. If you were in a pre-apprenticeship program, have you since enrolled in an apprenticeship program, or are planning to do so? If you are already in an apprenticeship, did the pre-apprenticeship prepare you for the apprenticeship?

13. Did you experience any challenges to staying in the program and completing your program?

14. What aspects of the program did you like best?

Thank you so much for participating in our discussion today. We appreciate your time.