

## Protocol: Virtual Employer Interviews

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### Opening Script

*Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and my colleague's name is \_\_\_\_\_. We work for The Urban Institute/Mathematica/Social Policy Research Associates in Washington, DC/New Jersey/ California. We're part of the research team that is conducting the Evaluation of Registered Apprenticeship Initiatives funded by the U.S. Department of Labor. The purpose of the evaluation is to build and share evidence about registered apprenticeship initiatives.*

*We have about 30 minutes for our discussion. To inform the evaluation study, it is very important for us to speak to employers directly. Today, our goal today is to learn about your experience with apprenticeships in general. We believe the risks of participating in this study are minimal. While there are no direct benefits to you, we hope that the findings from this study will benefit those involved in operating and expanding apprenticeship by learning more about your involvement, experiences, and perceptions of apprenticeships and apprentices.*

*Your participation in this interview is voluntary and you may choose not to answer some or any of our questions. If you don't know the answer to a question, just let us know and we can move on. We will do everything we can to secure the privacy of the information you provide but ask that you consider using headphones or finding a private space to talk so that other people cannot hear or see this conversation.*

*My colleague and I will be taking notes in order to document what we hear during our discussion. We do not share these notes with anyone outside of our research team. We will destroy these notes after the end of our project. We will combine this information together with similar conversations we are having with other employer partners. Information or any quotes we use from our conversation will not identify you or your company by name or in a way that you or your company could be identified. I know you are busy, and I appreciate you taking the time for this conversation.*

*Do you have any questions for me?*

*Do I have your permission to record this conversation for our notes? This recording will not be shared outside of the research team and is used to improve the accuracy of our notes.*

*Do we have your consent to proceed with the discussion? [collect verbal consent]*

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## Employer Background Information [all]

Prior to the interview, find out as much as you can about the respondent and their organization based on grant materials and background employer information provided by grantees. Quickly summarize the information with the asterisks at the beginning of the call to confirm its accuracy with the employer.

- Respondent name(s):
- Name of company:
- Title and role in company:
- Industry type:
- Occupations linked to apprenticeship program:
- \*Employer size (estimated number of employees):
- \*Years of experience with apprenticeship initiatives:
- Employer role related to apprenticeship on the ABA grant:
- Type of apprenticeship offered through the ABA grant (apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship, and/or youth apprenticeship):
- Apprenticeship program of focus suggested by grantee:

### A. Experience with apprenticeship, employer role and involvement in program

First, I'd like to better understand your company's experience with apprenticeship, including the types of work-based training you offer, your company's role, and how you became involved. This can include but is not limited to the experience you have because of your involvement in the ABA grant.

#### A.1. History of involvement in apprenticeship [select employers - that are newly involved in apprenticeship or were involved when initially deciding to engage in apprenticeship]

- Were you involved when your company first started participating in apprenticeship? [If the employer was not initially involved, proceed to section A.2.]
- Please tell me how you or your company first got involved with apprenticeship [for example, wanted to upskill incumbent workers, wanted to tailor training for new employees, had difficulty retaining workers, existing training wasn't sufficient, approached by grantee or sponsor and decided to try it, etc.]
  - o How did you first hear about [apprenticeship types offered]?
  - o How long has your company been involved with apprenticeship?
  - o How has your involvement changed over time, if at all?
- Why did your company choose to get involved with apprenticeship?
  - o How common is apprenticeship in your industry?
  - o Was there anything that made it easier for you to become involved? If yes, please describe.
  - o Did you face any challenges or barriers to becoming involved? If so, what challenges? How did you address these challenges?
    - Were there additional supports that could have helped you overcome those challenges? If so, please describe.

#### A.2. Employer role and apprenticeship involvement [all employers]

- What kind of apprenticeship or work-based training does your company have experience with? *Probe or the following: RA, union sponsored apprenticeships, internships, bootcamps.*
  - o [For each kind mentioned] Why did you decide to offer this type of work-based training? Are there any benefits to this offering? Are there any downsides to this offering?
  - o How, if at all, did your company's experience and involvement differ across these programs?
- [If employer represents an emerging industry] As an employer in an emerging industry, do you have different experiences across these types of training programs? For example, does one approach to work-based training work better than others? If so, why?
- Please tell me about your company's role(s) in any registered apprenticeship/pre-apprenticeship program(s) that you are involved in. *Probe for the following: designing and planning for new apprenticeship programs, identifying partners, developing RTI curriculum, developing work-based learning, developing eligibility criteria for apprentices, supportive services, identifying talent pipeline.*
  - o How did you get into these role(s)?
  - o Has your role changed over time? If so, why?
  - o To what extent are you satisfied with these role(s)? How, if at all, could your role be improved?
  - o [If operating a RA] Did you have a role in registering the program?
    - If so, what assistance did you receive and who provided assistance?

- What challenges, if any, did you experience designing your program?
- What types of incentives did you receive to assist you in these role(s)? For example, did you receive any financial incentives?
  - o Who provided these incentives (for example, federal grant, state grant or tax credit, local workforce board subsidized OJT or RTI)?
    - Was the incentive amount sufficient?
  - o [If incentives are mentioned] What type of incentive(s) have you received? Please describe each.
    - Were the incentives to help apprentices directly or an employer incentive?
    - What type of financial incentive was most important to your involvement?
  - o How do these incentives impact your apprenticeship role/program?
  - o Which of these incentives were most helpful? Why?
- Did you receive any other types of support, like technical assistance?
  - o Who provided these supports (for example, grantee, program sponsor, state or federal ATR, community college, etc.)?
  - o Are there any additional supports you didn't receive that would have been helpful?
- [If not already discussed] To what extent were you involved in the design, development, or implementation in [each program mentioned]?
  - o What, if any, challenges did you encounter during the design, development, or implementation of your program(s)?

## B. Employer experiences with pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship initiatives

### B1. Benefits and costs and participating in apprenticeship initiatives [select employers - with history of apprenticeship experience]

- How did your company expect to benefit from your involvement in apprenticeship (for example, retain staff, improve company culture, diversify staff, etc.)?
  - o How does it compare to how you have actually benefited from your involvement?
  - o What have been the biggest benefits of participating in apprenticeship initiatives?
  - o How do you measure/qualify benefits?
- What have been the biggest costs of participating in apprenticeship initiatives (for example, mentor time, RTI, recruitment, additional supports that are not offered to non-apprentice employees, etc.)?
  - o Have you implemented any strategies to mitigate the costs? If so, what types of strategies have been successful? What strategies have not been successful?
- What is the value of apprenticeship for your company and/or industry?
  - o Did/do you think your involvement in apprenticeship would/will be temporary or long-term? Why?
  - o How has your involvement in [apprenticeship type] strengthened your company?

## C. Employer Experience with Apprentices/Pre-Apprentices

Earlier you mentioned that your company has experience working directly with [apprentices (RA and/or non-RA), pre-apprentices, youth apprentices] or helping hire apprentices so I would like to discuss that experience in more detail.

### C1. Recruiting and hiring apprentices [select employers based on role and/or industry and number of apprentices]

- How do you recruit apprentices (for example, select incumbent workers, recruit from pre-apprenticeship program, sponsor identifies apprentices, referrals from other entities, etc.)?
  - o Do you hire new and/or incumbent workers as apprentices?
    - [If employer hires both] What percentage of apprentices are new vs. incumbent workers that you have hired?
  - o Do you hire from pre-apprenticeship programs?
    - How, if at all, do individuals from pre-apprenticeship programs differ from those hired using other approaches?
  - o How do most apprentices learn about your apprenticeship program/training?
- When identifying and hiring apprentices, how do you reach out to diverse applicant groups?
  - o What approaches do you use to increase diversity among your apprentices? *Probe for: specific approaches used when recruiting and/or hiring.*
  - o Are there promising approaches you have observed for promoting diversity among apprentices?
    - Are there promising approaches for promoting diversity among apprentices you have heard about but have not experienced?
- What challenges have you encountered recruiting apprentices?
  - o What strategies do you use to overcome these challenges?
- What challenges have you encountered hiring apprentices?
  - o What strategies do you use to overcome these challenges?

### C2. Relationship and involvement with apprentices [select employers based on role and/or industry]

- How are apprentices supervised and mentored at your company?
  - o What does supervision look like or entail?
    - How often do apprentices communicate and meet with their work supervisor one on one?
  - o [If they have experience with different types of apprentices] Does mentorship or supervision vary based on the type of apprentice (for example, pre-apprenticeships, youth apprenticeship, RA, non-RA)?
- How do apprentices interact with and communicate with other workers?
  - o How often do you communicate with apprentices?

- o What do you typically communicate with apprentices about?
  - o [If they have experience with different types of apprentices] Do interactions and communication vary based on the type of apprentice?
- How are apprentices integrated into the company?
  - o Do they work alongside non-apprentices conducting similar work?
  - o Are apprentices able to progress within the company?
    - How does the apprentices fit into your company's career pathway?  
[Probe for: train for entry-level positions, upskill incumbent workers for more senior position, train new workers for mid-level or higher position.]
    - What role does apprenticeship play in the promotion policy at your company?
- [If respondent has experience managing apprentices] Have you had any significant 'ahas' or lessons learned through your experience managing apprentices?

### C3. Overall experiences with apprentices [select employers based on role and/or industry]

- What is your company's experience or overall perception of the apprentices you have experience with?
  - o Are you able to successfully retain apprentices in your company's program(s)?  
Do apprentices typically complete your company's program(s)?
  - o Does it vary based on apprenticeship type, occupation, or age?
  - o [If they have experience with different types of apprentices] What do you see as the main difference between [registered apprentices//non-registered apprentices/youth apprentices/pre-apprentices]?
    - How do apprentices who completed a pre-apprenticeship program compare to those who did not enroll in a pre-apprenticeship program?  
[Probe for more diverse, better retention, more potential barriers]
  - o Do apprentices often lack any knowledge or skills when entering your program?
    - If so, what additional preparation could apprentices benefit from?
- What, if any, challenges have you had working with apprentices?
  - o [If they have experience with different types of apprentices] Do these challenges vary based on apprenticeship type or occupation?
    - What strategies do you use to overcome these challenges?
  - o [If they have experience with youth apprentices] Are any challenges unique to youth apprentices? If so, how?
    - What strategies do you use to overcome these challenges?

- o If apprentices don't complete/persist in your program, what are the reasons?  
[Probe: didn't like occupation, found a different job, personal or family challenges, or went to school full time.]
- What are common challenges apprentices face when participating in your apprenticeship program?
  - o [If they have experience with different types of apprentices] Do these challenges vary based on apprenticeship type or occupation?
  - o [If they have experience with youth apprentices] Are any challenges unique to youth apprentices? If so, how?
  - o How have you handled these challenges? Probe about whether they offer or provide any supportive services.

#### D. Conclusion questions [all employers]

- Do you have any suggestions for involving more employers and employer groups in apprenticeship?
  - o In what ways can employers be better involved or engaged in apprenticeship initiatives?
  - o Do you have ideas on how to get more employers involved in apprenticeship initiatives?
  - o Do you have suggestions on how barriers could be reduced?
  - o [If employer represents an emerging industry] In what ways can employers become more involved in expanding apprenticeship in [industry]?
- What important factors do employers consider when deciding to sustain or maintain apprenticeship programs?
  - o Do you have plans to continue your role/involvement in apprenticeship?
    - If yes/no, why? Probe for funding considerations.
- What resources or incentives are needed to continue your involvement in apprenticeship?
- Is there anything we have not discussed you think would be helpful for us to know?