



Making Youth Apprenticeships Work for Illinois' Young Adults

**Community Recommendations
on Youth Apprenticeships**

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YOUNG  INVINCIBLES

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About Young Invincibles

Young Invincibles is a non-partisan, non-profit organization that works to expand economic opportunity for young adults through policy analysis, consumer education, and advocacy. With offices in six major cities across the country, its research and organizing experts elevate the voices of young adults in top policy debates and provide solutions to major economic challenges for the next generation.

Executive Summary

In the spring of 2017, Young Invincibles convened three roundtables across Illinois to gather feedback on how the state should design youth apprenticeships. The roundtables brought together 125 young adults and service providers who support young adults, with an emphasis on reaching populations currently underserved by apprenticeship opportunities, such as justice-involved youth and young adults in the foster care system. While we found overwhelming support for youth apprenticeships, young adults and staff called out several barriers that could prevent people from underserved communities from benefiting from work-based training programs: young adults are often unprepared for youth apprenticeship opportunities, workplaces can intimidate young adults, and outreach often does not reach or inspire young adults. In light of those barriers, we recommend four key sets of solutions to address these challenges including providing the wraparound services young adults need to participate in the programs, providing entry-level training that sets young adults up for success, building work environments that foster growth, and providing consumer-friendly marketing materials.

Introduction

Apprenticeships can address a two-fold challenge facing Illinois – a persistently high youth unemployment rate and a shortage of skilled personnel in key employment sectors. Apprentices receive on-the-job training and classroom instruction, often while receiving pay, to learn the skills employers need.¹ However for apprenticeships to successfully reach diverse young adult populations, individuals starting in apprenticeship tracks often need initial support in overcoming critical barriers. Youth apprenticeships, when done right, can prepare young adults to succeed in earn-in-learn programs.

Illinois is primed to benefit from apprenticeships. The state has the second highest youth unemployment rate in the country with over 14 percent of 16 to 24-year-olds facing unemployment. Of those working, many struggle to secure a well-paying job or to balance working with earning a degree. Meanwhile, some of Illinois' leading sectors such as manufacturing and construction face a "grey tsunami" where an aging workforce means companies must rapidly fill positions that open up as staff retire. There is also a middle skills gap: 53 percent of jobs in Illinois require more training than a high school degree but less than a college degree, yet only 43 percent of the workforce is trained at that level. Apprenticeships are one of the few strategies that have proven effective at training people to the middle skills level.

Recognizing the urgency of connecting young people with career pathways, the Illinois Workforce Innovation Board developed the Illinois Apprenticeship Plus framework in 2016. This framework is part of Illinois' efforts to increase the number of people receiving industry-recognized credentials, particularly with populations facing several barriers to employment. Apprenticeship Plus is a comprehensive framework that leverages the value of several apprenticeship models ranging from youth apprenticeships (YA), pre-apprenticeships, and registered apprenticeships (RA), to other work-based training programs that result in industry recognized credentials.

This comprehensive framework creates several entry points for work-based training programs, with opportunities designed for young adults, people requiring training before a RA program, and people ready for a registered apprenticeship. Both YA and RA programs combine classroom and on-the-job training in order to prepare participants for a career. In Illinois, YA programs are intended for young adults between the ages of 16 and 24. Participants learn in-demand skills, earn industry recognized credentials, and explore various positions so that they learn about a range of career trajectories. Unlike programs in some other states, youth apprenticeships in Illinois may take place outside of a high school setting, and youth apprentices are not guaranteed pay for time spent in work-based training. Pre-apprenticeships serve as boot camps that train participants on the skills they need from day one in other apprenticeship opportunities. RA programs are administered by the Department of Labor, and participants are paid for their work-based training, receive incremental wage increases as their skills improve, and earn nationally-recognized industry credentials. While both pre-apprenticeships and YA programs prepare participants for RA programs, pre-apprenticeships often have a formal enrollment agreement with RA programs and are not designed to facilitate career exploration. We find that in order for youth apprenticeships to prepare participants from underserved communities for RA programs, many young adults will need training

¹Most apprenticeship programs, including registered apprenticeships, require that participants are paid for their time on the job. Because this paper focuses on Illinois' youth apprenticeship program, we used phrasing that recognizes that Illinois' youth apprenticeship program does not require that apprentices are paid for their time on the job.

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in advance of starting YA programs or YA programs will have to provide training at the start of the program that builds apprentices' soft and technical skills.

Illinois is launching two pilot apprenticeship programs in the summer of 2017. The youth pilot program creates up to 10 YA and pre-apprenticeship programs for young adults between the ages of 16 and 24 who come from disadvantaged circumstances such as living with poverty, long-term unemployment, and disabilities, or transitioning out of the foster care system. This paper focuses specifically on research on this pilot program, and focuses on YA over pre-apprenticeship programs, because the state has emphasized that the YA program is the priority within the youth pilot. The second adult program creates up to five registered apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships for people of any age and background, though preference is given to projects serving high-need populations such as veterans and single parents. These pilot programs will create work-based training opportunities in the fields of health care, information technology (IT), construction, manufacturing, and transportation, distribution and logistics (TDL).

As the state sets out to define a comprehensive vision, community input is critical to ensure that the framework meets the needs of residents from many walks of life. To that end, Young Invincibles (YI) held three roundtables in the spring of 2017 on behalf of the Illinois Governor's Cabinet on Children and Youth. The roundtables convened 125 young adults and staff serving young adults to explore how Illinois should design youth apprenticeships. This report summarizes our findings, outlining participants' feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of YA programs and providing concrete recommendations on how Illinois can address the barriers participants identified. The report combines qualitative feedback from the 125 participants and the results of 80 post-roundtable surveys.

The first section provides background on why youth apprenticeships and broader work-based training models matter, including information about the benefits of apprenticeships and initial research about young adults' perspectives on earn-and-learn opportunities.² The second section shares community input from the roundtables on the benefits of YA programs and the challenges the programs will face in engaging young adults. Young people and staff alike cautioned that without comprehensive supports, adequate preparatory training, welcoming workplaces, and compelling, widespread marketing campaigns, YA programs would fail many of the young adults Illinois is targeting. Finally, we share the solutions we recommend following findings from the community input process. These strategies would help young adults, including those who often struggle to secure employment and apprenticeship opportunities, gain access to career pathways. We recommend concrete actions for Illinois to consider with both the current pilot programs and with future efforts to expand youth apprenticeships across the state.

Previous Research

Although the general public knows little about apprenticeships, this work-based training model is a longstanding practice in the United States and abroad. Congress defined apprenticeships in 1937 through the National Apprenticeship Act. There are over 500,000 apprentices in RA programs nationwide; Illinois currently has over 13,000 apprentices working in one of the state's 480 programs. Thirty-five states provide work-based training through state policy; 14 states support pre-apprenticeships or YA programs, and 11 states support work-based learning for high school students.

²Apprenticeships are one type of "earn-and-learn" opportunity.

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Apprenticeships are a widespread strategy because they are a winning model for workers, employers, and the economy. Apprentices are trained in high-demand skills, typically in sectors that are growing and seeking talent. Over their careers, those who complete an apprenticeship earn an average of \$300,000 more in compensation, once benefits are factored in, than people with similar characteristics that do not complete such a program. Employers using the apprenticeship model likewise reap significant benefits, a critical finding given that apprenticeships are an employer-driven model. A survey of employers hosting apprentices found that nearly 90 percent of respondents would strongly recommend the model to other employers.³ Another Department of Labor Study assessed and quantified the monetary return of apprenticeships to businesses. For the two companies examined in-depth, the internal return on investment was between 40 and 50 percent. Overall, regional and state economies flourish as personnel receive training that results in career and wage growth, and businesses hire talent better trained for their needs than staff hired through traditional channels.

While apprenticeships have widespread benefits, the programs often largely serve white males and leave behind women, young adults, and people of color. Participants in Illinois' RA programs are 70 percent white males, four percent women, and 29 percent young adults between the ages of 16 and 24. This trend has played out in states across the country, signaling the need to create programs that attract and meet the needs of populations traditionally left out of apprenticeships.

Youth apprenticeships are a key strategy for diversifying RA programs, benefiting both young adults and employers. Though relatively new, there are YA programs in several states including Wisconsin, Georgia, Kentucky, and South Carolina. Apprentices often receive classroom and work-based training that simultaneously result in academic credit hours and applied skill development on key competencies for the workplace. States like Georgia describe YA programs as a tool for diversifying workplaces, building underrepresented populations' interest in a range of fields and expanding their capacity to pursue atypical positions. Youth apprenticeships create space for young adults to explore various career pathways, helping underrepresented populations like women test out working in fields like IT, construction, and manufacturing. The training builds participants' skillsets and confidence that they can succeed on the job. Employers also benefit as more young adults become interested in careers they may know little about. This is critical in Illinois where the sectors facing a grey tsunami, including construction and manufacturing, are also fields young adults know little about. Employers gain access to a larger, more diverse pool of young adults prepared for RA programs. As young adults try different skills and identities, employers also train and attract potential employees.

Despite apprenticeships' strong potential to benefit both employers and workers, misconceptions about apprenticeships are rampant among young adults. Last year, YI explored young adults' understanding of apprenticeships and what they need from earn-and-learn opportunities. After surveying 200 young adults and holding roundtable discussions with another 75 people, all from the Chicagoland region, we found three key misunderstandings: participants largely thought apprenticeships do not currently exist in their communities, often believed apprenticeships were unpaid opportunities like internships, and thought participating in an apprenticeship meant they could not earn a college degree.

YI's 2016 research project also resulted in three recommendations for youth-oriented marketing

³The survey contacted a random sample of 90 percent of eligible companies and 70 percent responded. The study was conducted in 2007.

of apprenticeship programs. First, we recommended that marketing materials explicitly state that apprenticeships pay. Our survey found wages are a top employment consideration for young adults, yet only one third of those YI surveyed thought apprenticeships always pay. Second, we recommended using online and social media platforms to advertise apprenticeship job openings. Young adults primarily rely on online research and word of mouth to connect with employment opportunities. Unless apprenticeships are advertised through online and social media platforms, businesses will miss young adults on the platforms they already use and trust. Finally, we advise having peers and near-peers educate young adults on apprenticeships, reflecting our participants' feedback that they wanted the opportunity to "speak with someone in their field of interest" in their own communities. A peer outreach approach allows young adults to learn about career opportunities from individuals they identify with.

This research affirms Illinois is on the right track. Apprenticeships are a powerful strategy for boosting employment and helping employers hire personnel with in-demand skills. However, this research also illustrates that apprenticeships may continue to leave out women, young adults, and other underrepresented populations unless the state understands and meets these populations' needs. Our roundtables explored how to design YA programs in Illinois so that a wide range of young adults, especially those typically left out of apprenticeships, learn about and benefit from the programming.

Community Perspectives

Roundtables

On behalf of the Illinois Governor's Cabinet on Children and Youth, YI convened three roundtables that gathered feedback from young adults and staff that support disadvantaged young adults on how Illinois should design the YA programs funded by Illinois' youth pilot program. The pilot program provides 2017-2018 funding for YA programs for youth facing barriers to employment (such as teen parents, young adults from low-income families, and young adults transitioning out of the juvenile justice and foster care systems) in Western and Southern Cook County, the Peoria/Bloomington/Normal region, and the Mt. Vernon and Marion area. Through small group discussions and surveys, we explored what makes youth apprenticeships exciting, what could keep the programs from being successful, solutions to likely challenges, and how Illinois should market these opportunities.

The participants were well-positioned to comment on YA programs, with strong representation of young adults from the diverse backgrounds and the specific communities prioritized in the Illinois pilot. The 125 participants came from community colleges, foster care, the juvenile justice system, teen parent programs, apprenticeship worksites, workforce development programs, and agencies (including the Department of Employment Security, the Department of Human Services, the Department of Children and Family Services, and the Community College Board). Approximately 50 of the participants were young adults between the ages of 16 and 24. The young adults largely matched the target populations described in the youth pilot program – 65 percent were people of color, 40 percent were female, 31 percent were in high school, and roughly 20 percent were disconnected from school and work. To create a safe space for young adults and staff to share freely, we held separate small group discussions for young adults and for staff members.

"Programs like this create hope. They help us identify career pathways and put the career within reach."

- Young Adult at Peoria Roundtable

Young Adult Perspectives

Young adults shared what they liked about YA programs and concerns they had about the proposed work-based training program. The features of youth apprenticeships that caught young adults' attention, such as being paid to learn in-demand skills, are benefits marketing materials should highlight. The concerns forecast issues that may prevent some young adults from enrolling and others from completing these programs.

Young adults were overwhelmingly interested in youth apprenticeships. On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being very interested, the average young adult level of interest in apprenticeships was 9.2. Young adults described apprenticeships as programs that create hope, allowing participants to work towards their future, gain high-demand skills, and access a career without college. Through post-roundtable surveys, we asked young adults to rank their interest in different aspects of YA programs. Their top motivations were:

1. Developing in-demand skills, particularly through work-based learning that allows first-hand exposure to the skills.
2. Connecting with a career, especially one that aligns with their career goals.
3. Earning wages, both while receiving training and by securing a career with job security.

Key Benefits in Young Adults' Words

career experience
being in an environment I can grow
Career
job security
Paid training
Pay
Skill development
getting a job
Learning cool things
gaining experience in field of choice
chance for hands on learning

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While young adults were overwhelmingly interested in YA programs, many were also intimidated and held fears that could prevent them from even applying for a program. Their top concerns as measured through post-roundtable surveys were:

1. **Transportation:** Over 50 percent of the young adults listed transportation as a barrier. Small group discussions on the topic revealed two themes related to transportation: many questioned whether programs were intended for them if the position was located far from their community, while others had limited or no access to a car or the public transportation necessary to arrive at the worksite.
2. **Ability to succeed:** Many were not sure they would excel as a youth apprentice, questioning whether they held the necessary skills. They wanted upfront information on the position requirements, critical skill sets, and the discipline process. They also urged ready access to a point of contact at the worksite who could field questions and guide their skill development.
3. **Finding and understanding youth apprenticeship job listings:** Young adults were concerned about finding job listings advertising YA opportunities, noting they were unaware of apprenticeships that were currently available nearby. If there were able to find apprenticeship job listings, they anticipated their peers would not understand the term "apprenticeship."
4. **Culture Fit:** Young adults wanted to fit in, preferring an environment that is collaborative, welcoming, and inclusive. Young adults also wanted the opportunity to influence their job goals, responsibilities, and the expectations for the position.

Other frequent concerns included balancing the program with other life responsibilities, accessing child care, staying motivated, and overcoming challenges at home. Young adults in the foster care system mentioned the need for stable housing; those in the juvenile justice system questioned whether people with a criminal record could participate; and young adults with disabilities requested appropriate accommodations. While young adults were enthusiastic about the opportunity, they were also forthcoming about these challenges, questioning whether the opportunity was really designed for them or intended for their better-connected peers.

Service Providers

Service providers working with a wide range of young adults, from those in foster care to students in community college, also explored the benefits and challenges of YA programs, echoing many of the themes young adults discussed.

We asked service providers to rank how interested they were in participating in Illinois' YA pilot on a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being very interested. Service providers' average level of interest in participating was a 9.5. Through post-roundtable surveys, service providers said the top benefits for the young adults they serve were:

1. Boosting young adults access to employment and career pathways, especially for populations with several barriers to employment.

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2. Skill development that sets young adults up to access and succeed in careers.
3. Creating an opportunity to learn outside school, a setting that can feel disconnected from skills needed in workplaces.

Service providers were concerned about whether YA programs would actually help the young people they serve, noting that while they were excited about the possibility to reach young adults with several barriers to employment, a variety of supports are needed to make YA programs truly accessible. Key barriers raised by service providers include:

1. Access to funding: Illinois' ongoing budget impasse has resulted in most service providers operating with fewer resources than normal, raising concerns about their ability to participate in YA programs unless the state provides long-term, stable funding. Without a long-term commitment from the state, many providers expressed skepticism that they would be able to dedicate resources to starting and maintaining a YA program.
2. Ability to succeed: Service providers cautioned that young people, especially those targeted by the youth pilot, may lack the soft, life, and technical skills to interview for the positions and succeed once on the job. Soft skills may include processing feedback and meeting expectations such as showing up on time. Life skills may include budgeting and time management. Technical gaps could include mathematical and literacy skills.
3. Keeping young people engaged and motivated: Service providers noted that many of the young adults they work with need early and regular encouragement (e.g., verbal praise or leadership opportunities) to feel motivated and confident that they can succeed in the program. Attendees noted that many workforce development and education programs delay when young adults receive recognition for their efforts, sometimes waiting until evaluations to note progress, which disincentives continued engagement.
4. Accommodations: Young adults with children, criminal records, disabilities, limited transportation options, or unstable housing, the same populations the state is targeting, cannot participate in YA programs unless arrangements are made to provide these populations the accommodations and supports they need to participate.
5. Recruitment and marketing: Service providers also questioned how employers would advertise YA opportunities, noting that young adults should be able to find YA job openings easily through channels they already use to search for jobs, such as high school career boards. The group was frustrated that they had not known about apprenticeships already available in their own communities and worried this problem would continue with YA programs. They also feared YA job postings would not interest young adults, because most do not understand the term "apprenticeship."

While apprenticeships have significant potential to boost employment among young adults often left out of the system, Illinois' youth pilot program will likely struggle to boost employment among the state's target populations unless training and supports for basic needs are integrated into the apprenticeship framework.

Addressing Key Challenges

Based on conversations with both young adults and service providers, we identified three main barriers that Illinois needs to address as the state rolls out YA programs: young adults are often unprepared for YA opportunities, workplaces can be intimidating and not immediately engaging, and outreach often does not reach or inspire young adults. We used these challenges to frame four sets of priority solutions for the state to emphasize: providing the wraparound services young adults need to participate in the programs, providing entry-level training that sets young adults up for success from day one, building work cultures that encourages growth, and providing consumer-friendly recruitment and marketing materials. The program sponsor, the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, can incorporate “near-term” solutions with the pilot programs launching in the summer of 2017 and the “long-term” solutions with future YA programs.

The ultimate goal, cutting across these barriers and solutions, is creating a program that provides young adults a pathway to career success. Young adults want to learn critical skills, earn credentials that employers trust and demand, and ultimately have better access to exciting, stable careers that pay well. In the near-term, this means using the pilot program to learn what does and does not work with YA programs. This determination should be informed by program data on key metrics such as demographics of participants (including race, ethnicity, gender, and income), attrition, and post-program outcomes (such as joining a registered apprenticeship program, employment with the company, and enrollment in a postsecondary degree or credential program). In the long-term, Illinois should set program goals for participants served (including women, young parents, people of color, and disconnected youth) and outcomes (including rates for completing and securing employment, joining RA programs, or enrolling in postsecondary programs).

Solution One – Provide wraparound services

Young adults have a wide range of needs that could prevent them from enrolling in and completing YA programs. Young adults targeted by the youth pilot program may face hunger and unstable housing or need access to transportation, child care, and health care, barriers that would prevent apprentices from thriving in a workplace setting. Wraparound services would help provide young adults with the life circumstances necessary to succeed.

Near-Term Solutions

- Facilitate YA pilot programs providing a range of services: For pilot programs launching in the summer of 2017, the state should not only recommend programs provide the services young adults may need but also issue guidance on the services to provide and available resources to draw from. Services should include offering the clothing needed for work (e.g. work boots), staggering the workplace schedule to complement child care needs, and arranging transportation. To meet transportation needs, roundtable participants suggested programs organize car pools, pay for taxis or Lyft rides, or use existing resources such as church buses.
- Connect youth apprentices to existing social services: The public sector and community

partners already provide a wide range of services that can help apprentices meet their basic needs, with supports addressing child care, transportation, hunger, and housing. The state should develop partnerships between providers that already offer these services and YA programs so that program staff can readily leverage existing services.

Long-Term Solution

- Create youth apprenticeship communities that provide a range of critical wraparound services: Providers working with youth in the foster care and juvenile justice systems recommended creating housing complexes that would meet apprentices' basic needs, providing housing, food, and transportation. The communities could also provide supports on critical skills for the YA programs through additional training and tutoring services.

Solution Two – Provide training that sets young adults up for success

Young adults were committed to excelling in work-based training programs, yet were concerned about their ability to meet expectations. They feared they might not have the skills required to thrive in a YA program. Service providers reinforced this theme, noting that many young adults would struggle to interview well for the positions and meet expectations without additional training. They anticipated young adults would need coaching on career goals, interviewing, social-emotional skills such as processing feedback and time management, and core competencies such as math and literacy. Because YA programs are critical to making sure that young adults are prepared to eventually thrive in RA programs, it's especially important that Illinois catches and addresses preparation gaps early on through the YA framework.

Near-Term Solution

- Advise YA pilot programs to provide a range of trainings: For pilot programs launching the summer of 2017, the state should recommend programs include trainings that prepare apprentices to interview and succeed in the programs and in future RA opportunities. The state should identify the types of trainings that programs should consider providing and provide guidance on trusted training curricula.

Long-Term Solutions

- Build a workforce development pipeline that scaffolds young adult skills: Illinois has not yet determined the skill level we expect youth apprentices to bring into YA positions and the amount and type of training we expect employers to provide. While YA programs can play many roles, it may prove impractical for YA programs to aim to meet some of young adults' needs. Once the state has further defined expectations for YA programs, the Department of Commerce and the State Board of Education should determine what trainings and experiences young adults need to have both prior to starting and during a YA program. The Integrated Career and Academic Preparation System (ICAPS) is one model to review. There participants work towards a high school equivalency while enrolled in postsecondary Career and Technical Education courses. Along the way, teachers, basic skills instructors, and career counselors provide supportive services that develop participants' basic life skills and support their transitions through the program.

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- Begin career exploration early: Many young adults receive only limited exposure to their career options. Experiences such as school-based career counseling, tours of workplaces, and panel discussions with experts are necessary to help young people make informed decisions on the sectors that align with their career goals. Some service providers advised starting career exploration as early as middle school.

Solution Three – Creating welcoming workplaces

Young adults and service providers recommended that workplaces provide clear expectations and a welcoming environment from day one. This recommendation is backed by research: when dealing with young adults who have faced trauma, have limited professional networks or experience, or have emotional and behavioral challenges, best practices include providing positive behavioral supports. Positive behavioral supports include preventing problematic behavior before it occurs by clearly setting expectations, regularly recognizing excellent work, and transparently tracking positive and problematic behavior so data informs feedback.

Near-Term Solutions

- Train program providers on best practices in supporting young adult skill development: The state should provide mentors and instructors at new YA programs at least one training on best practices in working with young adults. Key themes should include providing regular feedback, creating a formal welcoming process where apprentices meet peers and other employees, and clearly outlining expectations (e.g., goals and corrective action plan).
- Require programs have work-based mentors: Mentors play a critical role, guiding apprentices' skill development and acting as the primary contact for questions and concerns. All apprenticeship programs should have highly skilled staff in this role who have gone through a training on best practices on working with young adults.

Long-Term Solution

- Create a formal support system for mentors: The state should provide supports similar to those provided to teachers, helping mentors continually grow in their role. This could include an annual summit with trainings and space for mentors to learn from one another.

Solution Four – Build a consumer-friendly recruitment and marketing campaign

Roundtable participants raised two themes related to recruitment and marketing: the need to widely advertise YA openings so that young adults are aware of opportunities, and the need to present the information in a consumer-friendly format. Illinois must launch a proactive educational campaign to overcome the public's limited knowledge of apprenticeships. YI's apprenticeship report has supplemental recommendations on marketing apprenticeships, including explicitly stating that apprenticeships pay, having near-peer ambassadors educate young adults on opportunities, and using creative online and social media strategies.

Near-Term Solutions

- Require pilot programs list openings on the Illinois Worknet Apprenticeship Page: The Illinois Apprenticeship Plus website is a one-stop shop for information on apprenticeships in Illinois. This page should list all opportunities related to the Illinois Apprenticeship Plus framework, ensuring there is at least place tracking apprenticeship openings in Illinois. The webpage will best serve young adults if there is a landing page specifically for them, with information that plainly and compellingly explains YA programs.
- Require pilot programs distribute YA job announcements to key community stakeholders: Pilot programs should put job listings into the hands of young people by contacting stakeholders who work with young adults. Key partners include high schools, colleges, service providers who are directly partnering with agencies, and community institutions such as churches.
- Provide programs with outreach toolkits: The state should share best practices for outreach with YA programs, particularly programs in fields young adults know little about such as construction, manufacturing, and TDL. This should include sample outreach materials, such as social media posts and messaging guidance on the benefits of apprenticeships, and guidance on potential activities such as company tours and presentations at schools for parents and students.

Long-Term Solutions

- Educate and partner with career guides: Teachers, school counselors, principals, parents, parole officers, foster care providers, social workers, and many others guide young adults as they explore their career options. Unless these guides see the value of YA programs, they are unlikely to steer young adults towards these pathways. Illinois should educate these guides on YA programs and should conduct joint events that raise young adults' awareness of apprenticeships.
- Enhance state websites and social media outreach: All state websites aiming to steer the general population towards apprenticeships should provide content that highlights apprenticeships as an exciting career pathway. Young adults are interested in first-hand testimonials, data or stories on outcomes such as job placement, and viewing shareable digital content on platforms they use and trust such as Facebook, Snapchat and Twitter.

Concluding Thoughts

By investing in youth apprenticeships and the other work-based training programs in the Illinois Apprenticeship Plus framework, Illinois is on the right track to boost young adult employment and provide employers talented, committed personnel. Yet the state risks continuing to leave behind women, people of color, and other underrepresented populations, unless the Apprenticeship Plus Framework is designed to attract and support a wide range of people. As the gateway to the apprenticeship system, building youth apprenticeships that successfully engage and train young adults from diverse backgrounds is critical to building diversity in the system as a whole. Wraparound services and trainings can provide young adults the life circumstances and skills necessary to enroll and succeed in YA programs, while supportive, welcoming workplaces will foster the skill development needed to enable young adults to learn the skills employers demand. Through recruitment and marketing, youth apprenticeships can become a widely known, popular pathway. The strategies outlined above will put Illinois on the path to becoming a regional leader in connecting diverse young adults with careers.

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