

# Building the Youth Apprenticeship Landscape: Enabling Conditions of Youth Apprenticeship Intermediaries



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## Executive Summary

Youth apprenticeship programs offer a powerful means to integrate work-based and academic learning, providing a critical pathway to in-demand careers, particularly for historically marginalized populations. Collaboration across sectors and stakeholders is crucial for successful youth apprenticeship programs, but achieving alignment and coordination can be challenging. Youth apprenticeship intermediaries play a vital role in bridging the gaps between education and workforce systems, facilitating cohesive collaboration, setting high standards for career pathways, and advocating for systemic changes that ensure equitable opportunities and long-term success for all youth. These organizations serve as the connective tissue, uniting diverse stakeholders to design and implement effective programs while also working toward a future where youth apprenticeships are more accessible to a broader range of young people.

However, different environments at the state and local levels impact intermediaries' ability to advance and scale youth apprenticeship. To learn more about conditions that allow youth apprenticeship intermediaries to thrive, we sought to learn from six intermediary organizations across the country. After speaking with leaders of these organizations, five enabling conditions emerged.

1. A supportive policy environment;
2. Partner engagement and collaboration;
3. Existing data systems;
4. Funding availability and flexibility; and
5. The accessibility and connectivity of supportive services.

These conditions impact the strength of the youth apprenticeship movement, the collaboration between stakeholders across sectors, and the financial support that intermediaries and their partners receive to design, implement, and expand access to youth apprenticeship programs.

If leaders in government, education, and industry want to support the advancement of youth apprenticeship, they must recognize these conditions and actively build a landscape that supports the work of youth apprenticeship intermediaries, which are well positioned to carry this work forward. In the meantime, effective intermediaries are strategically maximizing their impact, navigating current challenges, and advocating for more supportive conditions.

# Building the Youth Apprenticeship Landscape: Enabling Conditions of Youth Apprenticeship Intermediaries

## Introduction

Integrating work-based and academic learning has been shown to positively impact participants' career trajectories. Youth apprenticeship, in particular, can be a tool to advance economic mobility for historically marginalized populations. This pipeline to in-demand jobs is important not only for students but also for employers seeking talent in an especially tight labor market.

Youth apprenticeship programs provide students between the ages of 16 and 24 with a pathway to a career by blending classroom-based instruction, paid on-the-job learning under professional mentors in the field, and ongoing assessments against relevant competencies and standards, all culminating in a portable industry-recognized credential and postsecondary credit. They offer young people the opportunity to gain career readiness skills and real-world experience in a specific industry or occupation while earning a wage and completing academic coursework related to their chosen field or pathway. Youth apprenticeship programs generally align with regional labor market and industry needs, making them important potential talent pipelines for employers.

While youth apprenticeships show promise in addressing equity gaps and providing learners with bridges to careers with family-sustaining wages, the youth apprenticeship landscape today is fragmented, and programs vary widely in their design and quality. Thus, the Partnership to Advance Youth Apprenticeship (PAYA) set out to define the quality characteristics of an effective youth apprenticeship program and develop a set of guiding principles for high-quality youth apprenticeship to provide clear and common direction to the field.

### PAYA's Principles for a High-Quality Youth Apprenticeship

- **Career-oriented:** Learning is structured around knowledge, skills, and competencies that lead to careers with family-supporting wages.
- **Equitable:** Learning is accessible to every student, with targeted supports for those adversely impacted by long-standing inequities in our education system and labor market.
- **Portable:** Learning leads to postsecondary credentials and transferable college credit that expand options for students.
- **Adaptable:** Learning is designed collaboratively to be recognized and valued across an industry or sector.
- **Accountable:** Student, employer, and program outcomes are monitored using transparent metrics to support improvement.

# Building the Youth Apprenticeship Landscape: Enabling Conditions of Youth Apprenticeship Intermediaries

To facilitate meaningful, high-quality youth apprenticeship programs that effectively combine career preparation and industry-specific training, employers and educators must collaborate closely. Unfortunately, formal avenues for connection and collaboration between these parties are hard to build. Even when employer-educator partnerships are established, maintaining these relationships and program operations can be difficult, and many challenges with coordination and implementation can arise.

To overcome these challenges, many education and employer partners have looked to intermediaries to step in. While roles and responsibilities of youth apprenticeship intermediaries vary, many help manage relationships, design and implement programs, and strengthen networks across the wider youth apprenticeship ecosystem. Intermediary models vary; they may be community-based organizations or may be embedded within a formal education partner and they may choose to focus on program implementation specifically or building the field broadly.<sup>3</sup> Regardless of their form and focus, intermediary organizations play a crucial role in bridging gaps between K-12, higher education, and workforce systems to launch and advance youth apprenticeship.<sup>4</sup> They also drive systemic change by elevating community voices, advocating for policy shifts, and expanding equitable opportunities for students.

However, several enabling or prohibitive conditions can impact intermediaries' efficacy. These conditions include policy environments, partner engagement and collaboration, existing statewide data systems, funding availability and flexibility, and access and connectivity of student supports and advancing equity. This report will unpack how these factors support or impede intermediaries' work and how these factors can change to better support youth apprenticeship and intermediaries. It will also highlight how some intermediaries are still advancing youth apprenticeship, even when conditions are not ideal.

## Methodology

To learn more about the enabling or prohibitive conditions that impact the work of youth apprenticeship intermediaries across the country, we spoke to six different intermediaries about the opportunities and the challenges they face in meeting student and employer needs and advancing youth apprenticeship in their state. We asked intermediary leaders about their vision and goals, partner relationships and ecosystem, data and impact evaluation, funding, equity, challenges and enabling conditions, and overall best practices. These intermediaries varied in size, geographic area, scope, and focus, with some concentrating on program implementation and others on field building.

# Building the Youth Apprenticeship Landscape: Enabling Conditions of Youth Apprenticeship Intermediaries

From these conversations, the following key themes emerged as critical conditions for the success of their work:

1. A supportive policy environment;
2. Partner engagement and collaboration;
3. Existing data systems;
4. Funding availability and flexibility; and
5. The accessibility and connectivity of supportive services.

These key themes highlight the essential conditions for the success of youth apprenticeship intermediaries. In the following sections, we will explore how these factors influence the effectiveness of intermediaries, provide insights into how a more supportive landscape could better facilitate the advancement of youth apprenticeship, and highlight cases of intermediaries navigating varying conditions to achieve meaningful outcomes.

## Supportive Policy Environment

Programs across the country vary widely in design, quality, and outcomes, and varying state policy environments contribute to the fragmentation of the youth apprenticeship landscape.<sup>5</sup> Given the promise of youth apprenticeship, some federal and state leaders have enacted policies and alleviated barriers to support its expansion. In some states, a lack of state support and a variety of barriers to student participation create challenges for intermediaries and the expansion of programs. States that effectively support the advancement of youth apprenticeship provide clear guidelines to stakeholders in the following policy and practice areas:

1. Definition and goals;
2. Vision;
3. Alignment of systems; and
4. Built governance structure.

The presence or absence of a statewide definition for youth apprenticeship significantly affects an intermediary's efforts to expand youth apprenticeship programs within their region or state. In this variable landscape, PAYA's definition of youth apprenticeship and quality principles set a high standard for youth apprenticeship programs and how they should serve and benefit students and industry.<sup>6</sup> However, as of 2018, only twenty states had established a formal statewide definition to distinguish it from other forms of work-based learning and Registered Apprenticeship (RA).<sup>7</sup> In states where youth apprenticeship is defined either by legislation or state agencies, stakeholders are more likely to have an understanding of youth apprenticeship, its requirements, and its benefits. Statewide

# Building the Youth Apprenticeship Landscape: Enabling Conditions of Youth Apprenticeship Intermediaries

definitions of youth apprenticeship also illustrate high-level support for youth apprenticeship and increase awareness among students, educators, workforce systems, and employers. Thus, for youth apprenticeship intermediaries, a formal statewide youth apprenticeship definition can ease friction in building an understanding of youth apprenticeship among education, workforce, and industry partners in their region. This shared understanding can facilitate intermediaries building networks of partners committed to advancing youth apprenticeship. It can also help intermediaries communicate the value and benefits of youth apprenticeship to various stakeholders and increase buy-in across the ecosystem. However, it is important to note that some agencies in the same state will define youth apprenticeship differently. This fragmentation and lack of alignment can be frustrating and confusing for intermediaries and other stakeholders, and intermediaries often carry the burden of accommodating various definitions of youth apprenticeship when working with different agencies in their state.

Alongside a defined framework for youth apprenticeship, a coherent statewide vision is crucial to building an understanding of youth apprenticeship, encouraging buy-in, and providing direction to stakeholders. State leaders can engage partners throughout the vision-setting process and set goals to measure progress toward that vision. This process can help partners, including intermediaries, focus on statewide priorities that youth apprenticeship may address, including credential of value attainment, talent pipeline gaps, or connectivity between high-level education or workforce goals. With a state-defined vision, youth apprenticeship intermediaries can more effectively unite stakeholders behind the state-supported goals and vision. In states without a defined framework and vision for youth apprenticeship, especially effective intermediaries are able to elevate a shared understanding of youth apprenticeship, rally stakeholders around their vision, and have the ability to define and codify partners' roles and responsibilities to advance youth apprenticeship.

## **Defining Youth Apprenticeship and Building Momentum in Texas**

Intermediaries in states without a formal statewide definition or vision of youth apprenticeship can struggle to engage partners around a shared understanding and goals around youth apprenticeship. Employers are particularly difficult to engage around youth apprenticeship because of potential misconceptions about youth's ability to contribute to the workplace, safety and liability concerns, the lift of training youth apprentices, and difficulty connecting the program to their own talent pipeline. However, in the absence of

# Building the Youth Apprenticeship Landscape: Enabling Conditions of Youth Apprenticeship Intermediaries

formal statewide definitions, vision, and goals, there are effective intermediaries that are able to create conditions that support alignment and investment in youth apprenticeship in their states.

In Texas, a state that does not have any formal statewide definition for youth apprenticeship, Career Connect Texas (CCTX) has been working to define youth apprenticeship for employers, build trust with the employer community, and build a strong network of employers and leaders in education and the workforce.<sup>8</sup> CCTX is a field-building intermediary embedded within Educate Texas, an educational initiative that focuses on developing and expanding work-based learning experiences to close equity gaps and help meet the talent needs of employers across the state.<sup>9</sup> Given the lack of a formal statewide definition of youth apprenticeship, CCTX has devoted time to providing its partners with learning opportunities to level-set expectations about youth apprenticeship programs and policies, dispel long-held myths about youth capacity to contribute to industry, and help stakeholders understand their role in strengthening the youth apprenticeship ecosystem.

In a state without a formal definition of youth apprenticeship, a field-building intermediary dedicated to elevating youth apprenticeship, building a shared understanding, and getting all stakeholders rowing in the same direction is critical to supporting program implementers and advancing youth apprenticeship.

In addition to establishing a definition and vision of youth apprenticeship, building an effective state governance structure for youth apprenticeship programs is important.<sup>10</sup> This includes the development of policies, regulations, infrastructure, and processes necessary to carry out key youth apprenticeship system functions: oversight and accountability; standards development; program development; program approval; and funding.<sup>11</sup> States differ in governance structures; some centralize the structure under one agency, while others spread responsibilities across multiple agencies, partners, or leaders. The autonomy of regional or local programs within state governance structures also varies. Regardless of form, an effective governance structure should be aligned with the state's youth apprenticeship and work-based learning goals and cultivate an ecosystem that supports and advances youth apprenticeship. If a state governance structure for youth apprenticeship does not exist or is not well-aligned across agencies or to state goals, it may lead to a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities, inefficient utilization of resources and services, and misalignment of programs and goals.<sup>12</sup>

Without a clear definition and vision and dedicated governance structure, policies that may prevent student participation and completion of youth apprenticeship are more likely to crop up and present challenges for intermediaries working in the state. Some

# Building the Youth Apprenticeship Landscape: Enabling Conditions of Youth Apprenticeship Intermediaries

common examples of policies that can inhibit student participation include seat-time requirements, graduation requirements, and attendance reporting. Time-based systems and the Carnegie unit still underpin how high school students traditionally receive credit and how schools receive funding.<sup>13</sup> However, some school systems across the country are moving toward mastery-based learning and more flexible requirements for students' time in the classroom, including states giving districts flexibility in what should count as "instructional time." Greater flexibility in student schedules and educational requirements can boost participation in work-based learning and youth apprenticeships and can make it easier for intermediaries to facilitate youth apprenticeship programs with students enrolled in public schools. In the face of these significant barriers, some intermediaries have developed an advocacy arm and engage with policymakers to influence policies that create a more favorable landscape for youth apprenticeship. By collaborating with intermediaries, policy leaders can remove barriers and strengthen the apprenticeship ecosystem.

## Youth Apprenticeship as a State Education Policy Consideration

Seat-time requirements and other education-based requirements and restrictions can impact whether students are able to participate in youth apprenticeships and whether school systems and intermediaries can provide them. Given the on-the-job training necessary for a high-quality youth apprenticeship, students often need the flexibility to earn credits outside of school and for work-based learning.

While many school systems across the country are considering shifting away from time-based systems to mastery-based learning, New Mexico recently increased the number of hours students are required to spend in school in an effort to address learning loss resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>14</sup> For students in grades 7 to 12, their annual minimum hours have increased from 1,080 to 1,140. Though districts will be held to the state standard, the seat-time policy offers some flexibility around how districts use the time and what time can count toward "instructional hours." While seat-time requirements and other time-based educational policies may aim to improve academic readiness, they may have unintended consequences, such as limiting students' ability to participate in work-based learning and youth apprenticeship.

For intermediary Future Focused Education (FFE), which supports school transformation, innovative assessment reform, educational equity, and work-based learning, among other efforts, the increased seat-time requirements have made it difficult to partner with most



# Building the Youth Apprenticeship Landscape: Enabling Conditions of Youth Apprenticeship Intermediaries

school districts to offer youth apprenticeship opportunities.<sup>15</sup> For students, particularly those who may be behind on earning credits or may need to fulfill English language hour requirements, this requirement poses a significant barrier to their participation in youth apprenticeship. Even with the flexibility offered in the new graduation requirements that can now include work-based learning aligned to content standards to count for English and math credits, FFE is opting to partner with certain innovative schools and districts for work-based learning opportunities that have been able to provide students with more flexible schedules and allow them to leave campus for their WBL activities. While New Mexico intermediaries struggle with increased seat-time requirements, the issue of student schedule flexibility is common nationwide, and intermediaries across different states have identified such policies as a challenge.

Some states are offering students more flexibility in how they access different educational opportunities. In 2018, the New Hampshire Legislature codified the Learn Everywhere Program, which gives the State Board of Education the ability to authorize educational programs outside of school buildings to provide part of students' education and grant credit.<sup>16</sup> One of the goals of this policy is to enable students to participate in educational experiences that a traditional public school may not be able to provide, including work-based learning or on-the-job training as part of an apprenticeship program. While schedule flexibility may still be a challenge for New Hampshire education partners, the Learn Everywhere Program gives schools and students more options for how credit requirements can be met, which is key to developing sustainable and scalable apprenticeship opportunities for youth in high school.

## Partner Engagement and Collaboration

Creating a supportive ecosystem for youth apprenticeship programs requires comprehensive engagement and commitment from leaders in education and industry, as well as robust systems and partnerships that facilitate collaboration and scalability. When there is a history of engagement in work-based learning and collaboration across sectors, intermediaries can leverage existing infrastructure and advance youth apprenticeship with the support of dedicated partners. Signs of an engaged, committed, and collaborative youth apprenticeship ecosystem include the following:

1. Leadership and commitment;
2. Prioritization of career-connected learning in K-12 systems; and
3. Employer engagement.

# Building the Youth Apprenticeship Landscape: Enabling Conditions of Youth Apprenticeship Intermediaries

A clear enabling condition for intermediary success is a solid foundation of commitment to youth apprenticeship and career readiness from leaders across education, industry, policy, and philanthropy. At a high level, leaders across sectors may express this support through elevating youth apprenticeship as a priority within their institutions, allocating resources and capacity to youth apprenticeship, sharing data and building shared systems, and demonstrating interest in collaborating across sectors to build strong pathways to careers. This existing commitment can facilitate an intermediary's work to bring together different stakeholders because they may already have shared goals, strong relationships, or shared systems and infrastructure for collaboration.

In addition to high-level leadership support and commitment, there are several conditions across K-12 and higher education systems that support youth apprenticeship and facilitate intermediaries' work. For one, local education agencies (LEAs) that prioritize career exploration, navigation, and readiness are more likely to have the tools and capacity to support quality work-based learning, including deeper experiences like youth apprenticeship. Furthermore, LEAs with clear goals for work-based learning, developed resources like work-based learning frameworks that outline quality criteria of a range of experiences, or existing Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs are more likely to embrace youth apprenticeship. LEAs may also demonstrate readiness for partnering with intermediaries through existing partnerships with higher education, including dual enrollment agreements and data sharing agreements. These higher education partnerships are important for ensuring that students can meet the coursework requirements of youth apprenticeships. Established partnerships between industry and education partners also provide intermediaries with a starting point for engaging employers interested in launching youth apprenticeship programs.

## Partnership and Commitment to Youth Apprenticeship in New York City

Reflective of a growing movement toward transforming high schools into centers of career-connected learning, New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) established its Office of Student Pathways (OSP) to oversee a variety of career pathways programs and initiatives that combine academic rigor with real-world experience and skills, giving students the opportunity to explore various in-demand careers, engage in work-based learning experiences, and earn college credit and industry recognized credentials.<sup>17</sup>

Launched in the 2022-2023 school year, Career Readiness and Modern Youth Apprenticeship (CRMYA) is a multi-year initiative created in collaboration with the NYC Jobs CEO Council and CareerWise New York.<sup>18</sup> CRMYA enables participating schools to provide students with a balanced integration of academic learning, advanced training, and paid work experience.

# Building the Youth Apprenticeship Landscape: Enabling Conditions of Youth Apprenticeship Intermediaries

Schools involved in CRMYA offer career readiness courses, opportunities to earn college credit, and apprenticeship programs to help students develop real-world, industry-aligned skills. As participants in CRMYA, students in ninth and tenth grade explore various in-demand career paths and take part in classes, workshops, and activities that prepare them to apply to youth apprenticeships in eleventh grade. Once students are accepted into a modern youth apprenticeship program with an employer, students split time between their on-campus classes and their job training on site, gaining real work experience.

Given the complexity of the program, CareerWise New York, as the intermediary partner, has a variety of roles in implementing CRMYA and supports industry, schools and industry, and students. CareerWise is responsible for engaging industry partners, training apprenticeship supervisors, and driving the recruitment and hiring process. To support educators and students, CareerWise brings together schools and employers to design career competencies, helps strategize scheduling, and prepares apprentices for the world of work.

NYCPS has built career-connected learning into their vision of the student experience. They have built up staff capacity to support not only CRMYA but also other career pathways models, like their CTE programs and the [FutureReadyNYC \(FRNYC\) initiative](#).<sup>19</sup> The education sector in New York City is committed to this effort, and this commitment can facilitate the work of intermediaries, like CareerWise New York, focused on advancing youth apprenticeship.

Employer engagement and participation is essential to any youth apprenticeship program, and it has long been a significant challenge for intermediaries. Employers often cite various barriers that preclude their ability to support youth apprenticeship programs, including cost, liability concerns, capacity for training internal staff and the apprentices, and paperwork requirements.<sup>20</sup> Employers also often do not initially see youth apprenticeship as a viable talent pipeline, though this is changing as youth apprenticeship becomes more widespread and industry becomes more knowledgeable about the practice. An engaged employer community reduces the capacity intermediaries have to devote to establishing relationships with employers. With this commitment, intermediaries can work with employers to overcome some of the barriers they may face in launching a youth apprenticeship program. However, even after establishing an employer partnership, it can be difficult for an employer to scale the number of apprentices they support. Therefore, a robust industry landscape with various opportunities for partnership and scaling would facilitate the establishment of sustainable youth apprenticeship programs, as intermediaries can then focus on deepening relationships with capable employers rather than constantly seeking new ones.

# Building the Youth Apprenticeship Landscape: Enabling Conditions of Youth Apprenticeship Intermediaries

## Existing Data Systems

Intermediaries often face the challenge of piecing together data from disparate systems that youth apprentices move through, such as K-12 education, higher education, and the workforce. An intermediary's position in between these systems makes them uniquely positioned to access, collect, and share cross-sector data to support the implementation and scaling of youth apprenticeship programs, but there are policies and practices that enable or limit their ability to do so, such as:

1. The intermediary's organization type and model;
2. State governance structure and policies;
3. Surrounding youth apprenticeship ecosystem; and
4. Internal capacity.

Intermediaries have varying levels of access to student data that can help drive their decision making. For example, an education partner, such as a school district, may have access to individual student data across various outcomes, such as attendance, persistence, and graduation. They may be more able to demonstrate the impact of youth apprenticeship programs on academic outcomes but may face limitations in how they can share individual-level data due to privacy regulations. Intermediaries that are community-based organizations or nonprofit organizations likely will not have the same sort of access to student-level academic data. Without a data-sharing agreement with an education partner, they generally must rely on student surveys to collect information about students' academic journeys. While student surveys are valuable for capturing student voices, they are not always the most effective means of gathering educational information.

Intermediaries may face different challenges in acquiring and sharing data because of their model, but intermediaries of all types often find it challenging to collect long-term data on student outcomes to demonstrate the impact of youth apprenticeships on economic mobility, career paths, and overall well-being. These barriers can make it difficult for intermediaries to measure and demonstrate their own impact and make data-driven decisions.

State governance structures and policies also significantly influence the data intermediaries collect, the access they have to this data, and their success in using it to expand youth apprenticeships. For instance, some states have implemented statewide definitions for youth apprenticeship and established standardized business rules and routines for data collection.<sup>21</sup> These policies clarify what intermediaries should measure and ensure the collection of critical data points as determined by the state. This not only provides intermediaries with a clear framework for identifying essential data but also enables state leaders to access standardized data that can be compared across youth apprenticeship programs within the state.

# Building the Youth Apprenticeship Landscape: Enabling Conditions of Youth Apprenticeship Intermediaries

Intermediaries that operate in states without policies that mandate the collection of certain data points are likely to use other resources, such as the [PAYA Youth Apprenticeship Data Framework](#), to guide their data collection processes.<sup>22</sup> Although the framework provides strong guidance for intermediaries, they are likely to collect different data points across the state. This variation makes it difficult for intermediary and state leaders to compare programs effectively or share consistent data with stakeholders.

## State Youth Apprenticeship Data Systems

Established statewide definitions of youth apprenticeship and clear data collection policies and practices facilitate intermediaries' ability to access and utilize youth apprenticeship data and build out their own data systems and infrastructure. Michigan is one of the states that has formally defined [Youth Registered Apprenticeship \(YRA\)](#) and is committed to expanding the number of YRAs and School-to-Registered Apprenticeship opportunities in the state.<sup>23</sup>

One way that Michigan tracks its progress in expanding and supporting local programs is by [collecting and sharing standardized statewide, regional, and occupational data](#) on YRAs and registered apprenticeships across the state.<sup>24</sup> Stakeholders can access this public data via the [Michigan Apprenticeship Dashboard](#), managed by the Michigan Center for Data and Analytics, which shares the number of participating apprentices and youth apprentices, demographic information, and the industries in which they are completing their apprenticeships.<sup>25</sup> Intermediaries can use this information to understand labor market demand and design aligned programs. The availability of this data is especially critical given the immense burden data collection can be for intermediary staff.

Where the state does not track statewide youth apprenticeship data or make it publicly accessible, intermediaries or research partners often take on this role. In Texas, Career Connect Texas has created the [Career Connect Texas Data Dashboard](#), which brings together state- and federal-level data on the labor market and education training.<sup>26</sup> Regional stakeholders, including other intermediaries and education partners, can use the dashboard to identify key labor market and education data to assess performance, evaluate initiatives, guide investments, and support improvements in work-based learning data practices.

# Building the Youth Apprenticeship Landscape: Enabling Conditions of Youth Apprenticeship Intermediaries

Another common challenge among intermediaries is creating, using, and scaling the platforms needed to record and track student and program data, often impacted by the presence of robust youth apprenticeship data systems and policies that promote data sharing among partners. Some states and regions have existing data systems, such as district and college student information systems, particularly ones that track internships and youth apprenticeships.<sup>27</sup> Intermediaries may be able to utilize and build off these systems instead of building out their own data infrastructure. However, intermediaries' ability to access these systems depends on privacy regulations. Intermediaries not embedded within an educational institution often establish data-sharing agreements.<sup>28</sup> These agreements formally specify the type of data to be shared, its format, and how frequently it will be exchanged. While intermediaries across the country establish data-sharing agreements with partners, this is easier to do in some states than others. Some states provide intermediaries with guidance around privacy regulations and templates for data-sharing agreements to keep stakeholders informed and facilitate collaboration amongst partners.

## Funding Availability and Flexibility

Youth apprenticeship programs are often a costly undertaking for intermediaries and partners, and securing funding is a significant challenge in sustaining and scaling these programs. Intermediaries often rely on limited-scope grants, which can hinder their ability to establish enduring partnerships and engage in long-term sustainability planning. Consequently, many intermediaries financially support themselves by braiding a mix of public and private funds, including federal and state resources, philanthropic grants, and program-generated revenue. Although combining these funds is a step toward a more sustainable funding model, the varying reporting requirements, restrictions, and timelines of these sources can be complex and time-consuming to manage. Therefore, state policies and philanthropic grant practices play a crucial role in how effectively youth apprenticeship intermediaries can access, navigate, secure, and maintain diverse funding streams and the capacity they need to undertake this work. Ultimately, various factors meaningfully impact intermediaries' ability to access and effectively utilize funding, including:

1. Funding availability at the local, state, and federal levels;
2. Philanthropic priorities and policies; and
3. Capacity to navigate reporting requirements.

The availability of resources is a main barrier to scaling youth apprenticeship programs, and governmental support is critical for many intermediaries and their partners. Various federal grants support youth apprenticeship programs including WIOA, the Youth Apprenticeship Readiness Grant (YARG), and the Strengthening Career and Technical

# Building the Youth Apprenticeship Landscape: Enabling Conditions of Youth Apprenticeship Intermediaries

Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V), among others.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) has renewed its commitment to youth apprenticeship in 2024 through its Apprenticeship Building America, Round 2 (ABA2) grants, aimed at expanding and diversifying the Registered Apprenticeship (RA) system by supporting partnerships that promote workforce development and align training with quality job opportunities.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to supporting the launch and maintenance of programs and intermediaries, USDOL's investments are also focused on building the future of youth apprenticeship infrastructure and increasing buy-in across stakeholders. The \$171 million investment in the Apprenticeship Building America Grants aims to modernize and build state youth apprenticeship programs, increase the accessibility of Registered Apprenticeship opportunities, expand equitable access to pathway programs, and establish Registered Apprenticeship Hubs to launch and scale apprenticeship programs in regions with emerging industries.<sup>31</sup> The USDOL's Apprentice Trailblazer Initiative strives to build the movement behind apprenticeship by creating a national network of diverse apprentices and graduates to share their stories, highlight the benefits of Registered Apprenticeships for underserved populations, and raise awareness among potential apprentices while partnering with the USDOL to expand, diversify, modernize, and strengthen Registered Apprenticeships nationwide.<sup>32</sup> The combination of these efforts is significant because they attempt to create the funding conditions necessary to support intermediaries and scale youth apprenticeship while building credibility for the programs and buy-in across stakeholders.

While federal support for youth apprenticeship is important, conditions at the state and local levels often more significantly impact intermediaries. Some states encourage youth apprenticeship through a variety of financial incentives and levers for students, education partners, employers, and intermediaries, including direct funding through grants and reimbursements, tax credits, and financial aid programs.<sup>33</sup> These incentives lower the cost barrier of participating in youth apprenticeship across these key groups. To address affordability concerns for students, most states have financial aid programs that cover workforce training or apprenticeship programs or may offer scholarships, like Indiana's Career Scholarship Account, or matching programs, like Colorado's CollegeInvest opportunity, to help students overcome other barriers to participation, including childcare costs, transportation, and access to appropriate clothing and equipment.<sup>34</sup> States also often incentivize the participation of education partners by establishing grants to increase the capacity of schools to administer youth apprenticeship programs and cover the wraparound supports required for equitable access to programs. To increase employer buy-in, they may offer tax credits or other forms of financial support for their participation.

# Building the Youth Apprenticeship Landscape: Enabling Conditions of Youth Apprenticeship Intermediaries

In addition, states often support youth apprenticeship through the funding of intermediaries themselves. For example, California has shown a keen interest in the apprenticeship and youth apprenticeship movement with the goal of reaching 500,000 apprentices by 2029. The state is actively investing in the growth and development of sectoral and regional intermediaries through various strategies, including the California Opportunity Youth Apprenticeship (COYA) Grant, managed by the Division of Apprenticeship Standards.<sup>35</sup> The grant supports organizations that develop pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs for "Opportunity Youth," or young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are disconnected or at risk of disconnection from the education system or employment. The COYA Grant is California's first legislation specifically targeting youth apprenticeship, with the potential to help intermediaries and other organizations develop innovative, high-quality pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs that would not be possible without this funding.<sup>36</sup>

States also might offer financial incentives to education partners and employers to encourage and support students to participate in work-based learning, including youth apprenticeships. For example, the Colorado Career Development Incentive Program (CDIP) offers financial incentives for school districts and charter schools based on the number of students that complete qualified industry credential programs, pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships, and internships.<sup>37</sup> Some states, like Missouri, provide employers with tax credits for apprentice wages in order to encourage employer engagement, and others have established tax credits for apprentice start-up costs.<sup>38</sup> While incentives can help intermediaries build relationships with education partners and employers, it is crucial that these partners see youth apprenticeships not merely as a means to secure additional funding, but as an essential process for the future success of students and employers alike.

Philanthropy likewise plays a significant role in funding youth apprenticeship intermediaries, both to implement programs and to build the youth apprenticeship field and ecosystem. Philanthropy may focus on establishing and expanding youth apprenticeship programs often by covering direct student and operational costs, including staffing, training, and increasing data capacity. Also, philanthropic partners often provide grant funding with fewer restrictions and reporting requirements than federal or state sources, which can reduce the administrative burden on intermediaries. This flexibility generally allows intermediaries more autonomy to allocate resources more efficiently and make adjustments to programs without being constrained by rigid guidelines, and philanthropy may be more inclined to fund innovative solutions and pilot programs. However, a common challenge in utilizing philanthropic funding is demonstrating the impact of the funding, particularly if intermediaries need to continually apply and reapply to retain what are often limited-scope grants or are using these funds to build their own



# Building the Youth Apprenticeship Landscape: Enabling Conditions of Youth Apprenticeship Intermediaries

capacity or build systems and networks. Despite this, philanthropic funding can offer intermediaries greater autonomy in implementing and adapting youth apprenticeship programs to meet specific needs and to strengthen the broader youth apprenticeship network.

Philanthropic institutions may also help lead and convene efforts around youth apprenticeship. For instance, after struggling to make progress in affecting educational and economic outcomes, several foundations invested in PAYA to support the advancement of youth apprenticeship as a tool to align the needs of young workers with employers and the workforce and move the needle on educational attainment across diverse populations<sup>39</sup>

## **Fairbanks Foundation's Investment in Youth Apprenticeship in Indiana**

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated a labor shortage across many communities in the United States. This trend holds true in the state of Indiana, where in 2023, there were 72 available workers per 100 jobs.<sup>40</sup> This labor shortage is expected to worsen in coming years, in part because Indiana's population is currently not projected to gain the postsecondary education or workforce training demanded by the labor market to fill open positions.<sup>41</sup> Just over half of Indiana high school graduates continue on to college, and about 2 in 3 Indiana college students complete a degree program in less than six years.<sup>42</sup> This means that most graduates of public K-12 institutions in Indiana will enter the workforce without a degree or credential, and talent shortages will persist.

In response to these talent shortages and educational and training trends, the movement behind youth apprenticeship has been growing in Indiana for years with the work of organizations and agencies across the state and the long-term investment of the Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation (Fairbanks Foundation).<sup>43</sup> Since 2017, the Fairbanks Foundation has supported learning and planning sessions around youth apprenticeship, statewide conferences, and peer-to-peer learning across states, and recently awarded a grant to support CEMETS iLab Indiana, a 10-month experience for business, education, and government leaders to come together and develop a statewide modern youth apprenticeship program.<sup>44</sup> The goal is to create a plan that expands access to modern youth apprenticeships in high-demand industries across the state, ensuring that all students and adult learners in Indiana have access to high-quality education and training opportunities by 2034.<sup>45</sup>

# Building the Youth Apprenticeship Landscape: Enabling Conditions of Youth Apprenticeship Intermediaries

The Fairbanks Foundation’s long-standing commitment and investment in youth apprenticeship and partnership with organizations such as Ascend Indiana and Horizons Education Alliance have been invaluable for the youth apprenticeship movement to gain momentum. Their work demonstrates the potential for philanthropy’s role in affecting systems-level change to support the advancement of youth apprenticeship when they are invested in funding innovative solutions and long-term outcomes.

## Accessibility of Support Services and Advancing Equity

One of the most important benefits of the youth apprenticeship model is its potential to create a more inclusive and equitable economy. Central to the model is the “learn and earn” concept, meaning that students are compensated for their labor as they develop knowledge and skills by completing their apprenticeship. However, payment for labor alone is not enough support for most students to be successful in their youth apprenticeship programs. Students often face a variety of barriers to participation and completion of any work-based learning. These barriers may include transportation, cost of participation, access to technology and the internet, language, access to child care, access to appropriate clothing, schedule flexibility due to other work or caregiving responsibilities, and food and housing insecurity.<sup>46</sup> Students may also face barriers related to academic policies and practices that determine their access to youth apprenticeship opportunities offered through their school, including GPA requirements and the availability of support for students with disabilities. Various factors may impact intermediaries’ ability to equitably advance youth apprenticeship, including:

1. Existing support systems from community partners;
2. Programmatic and academic supports; and
3. Industry buy-in.

Oftentimes, education partners, governmental agencies, and community organizations are the biggest providers of supportive services that young people need to participate in youth apprenticeship programs. This may include subsidizing uniforms or appropriate work clothing, providing free childcare, or covering transportation costs, among other services. The availability of supportive services in a school or community may impact a student’s ability to enroll, persist, and complete a youth apprenticeship program. It is also important that employers or other funders are willing to support competitive wages for youth apprentices. Otherwise, young people that cannot afford to pass up a higher wage may be discouraged from investing their time in a youth apprenticeship program.

# Building the Youth Apprenticeship Landscape: Enabling Conditions of Youth Apprenticeship Intermediaries

Academic and programmatic supports at the institution-level are also crucial to students' access to and success in youth apprenticeship programs. For example, an institution's prioritization of advising and the employment of trained career coaches or counselors can increase awareness among students of their different options, including youth apprenticeship. Districts and institutions can also be key partners for intermediaries in providing additional support to students with disabilities with their coursework and on-the-job training.

Industry partner buy-in is also crucial for the ability of intermediaries to equitably serve students. Employers must be committed to building inclusive youth apprenticeship experiences and must understand the services they may need to provide to help students successfully navigate their youth apprenticeship<sup>47</sup> Some employers, though, have limited experience working with youth and may need training to be able to effectively provide on-the-job training to their youth apprentices and create safe learning environments.

## Providing Critical Support in Minneapolis

Intermediaries are in a critical position to identify learners' needs and distribute resources and supportive services that can help them participate in and persist in youth apprenticeship programs. Through years of experience and the use of self-assessments, many intermediaries have developed systems to deploy services and resources to students, as opposed to providing occasional support to students who express need. Intermediaries may also assess partners to verify that they are committed to serving diverse populations and understand the barriers students may face as they progress through the youth apprenticeship program. If partners use shared metrics and disaggregate demographic and outcome data of youth apprentices, intermediaries may also be able to analyze data across partners to identify any equity gaps and barriers that may be impacting certain student groups.

Based in the Twin Cities, the Project for Pride in Living (PPL) supports communities through the provision of affordable housing and career readiness services and programs, including youth apprenticeships<sup>48</sup> Their programming aims to affect systems change, build pathways to financial security, and contribute to strong neighborhoods, and their emerging youth apprenticeship program will primarily serve Opportunity Youth in the Twin Cities region. The PPL team approaches this work with an understanding of the root causes that disconnect youth from education and employment in the first place and the conditions that support the individual success of youth apprentices in the program, including stable housing, food security, and support with navigating the justice system. This

# Building the Youth Apprenticeship Landscape: Enabling Conditions of Youth Apprenticeship Intermediaries

understanding comes from years of working in the community, relationships with community partners, and identifying apprentice needs through surveys and feedback from care coordinators who support apprentices throughout the program. In addition to supporting students, PPL ensures that their industry partners are dedicated to helping Opportunity Youth and are aware of the challenges these young people may encounter. Collaborating with employers to develop the cultural competency needed to support apprentices from diverse backgrounds is crucial for fostering a supportive and inclusive workplace where students feel valued and have a sense of belonging.<sup>49</sup>

## Conclusion

Youth apprenticeship intermediaries across the country juggle various responsibilities that are impacted by the environment in which they operate. Policy conditions, including leadership support, governmental infrastructure, and financial incentives all impact an intermediary's ability to secure and maintain funding for operations and secure buy-in and engagement from partners. Existing data systems and data policies play a critical role in intermediaries' success, either by creating barriers to accessing, sharing, and using data or by enabling these processes to run smoothly. Securing and combining funding for long-term sustainability is a significant challenge for intermediaries, making the flexibility and accessibility of funding a key factor in their success. Intermediaries that can effectively navigate the funding landscape, secure ongoing support, and have the flexibility to allocate funds as needed are often better positioned for long-term success and sustainability. Even when systems are aligned and policies support the execution of youth apprenticeship programs, supporting students throughout their experience and ensuring their basic needs are met so they persist is paramount to the advancement of youth apprenticeship as a tool for social mobility and more inclusive economies.

In an ideal world, the policy, data, and funding landscapes would fully support intermediaries' work in advancing youth apprenticeship. However, this is not yet a reality. Intermediaries and leaders are navigating these challenging conditions daily, striving to be as effective as possible while actively working to change conditions to better support their vision of the future of youth apprenticeship.

As leaders in government, education, and industry increasingly recognize the benefits of youth apprenticeship for both young people and employers, they must look to intermediaries as critical partners in scaling these programs. Intermediaries bring unique value in navigating the challenges of expanding youth apprenticeships, driving change, and

## Building the Youth Apprenticeship Landscape: Enabling Conditions of Youth Apprenticeship Intermediaries

ensuring quality implementation. As momentum builds behind youth apprenticeships, intermediaries will be at the forefront, employing strategic approaches to maximize their impact while advocating for more supportive policies, improved data systems, and more flexible and accessible funding streams.

To advance these efforts, state leaders must prioritize creating environments that support youth apprenticeships by enacting flexible policies, improving data access, and aligning funding to make these programs more accessible to all students. Employers also play a crucial role by collaborating with intermediaries to provide meaningful opportunities for young people, while simultaneously benefiting from a prepared and skilled future workforce. Together, these stakeholders can dismantle barriers, complement the work of intermediaries, and drive the expansion of youth apprenticeships, unlocking opportunity for the next generation.

# Building the Youth Apprenticeship Landscape: Enabling Conditions of Youth Apprenticeship Intermediaries

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# Building the Youth Apprenticeship Landscape: Enabling Conditions of Youth Apprenticeship Intermediaries



Led by New America, the **Partnership to Advance Youth Apprenticeship (PAYA)** is a multi-year, multi-stakeholder initiative that aims to assist innovative organizations around the country in developing high-quality youth apprenticeship programs that serve students, employers and communities alike. PAYA is comprised of seven National Partner organizations: Advance CTE, CareerWise Colorado, Charleston Regional Youth Apprenticeship, Education Strategy Group, JFF, the National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity, and the National Governors Association. PAYA is supported by funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Bloomberg Philanthropies, Carnegie Corporation of New York, JPMorgan Chase & Co., Siemens Foundation, Smidt Foundation, and the Walton Family Foundation. For more information, click [here](#).



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