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Grow your own talent

More employers are launching registered apprenticeship programs to build their workforce

By Joe St. Henry, Oakland County Michigan Works!



Williams International's Registered Apprenticeship Program features classroom work, mentoring and hands-on training.

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A resurgence in registered apprenticeship programs across the United States is underway, as more employers recognize the value of building a skilled workforce and training apprentices who earn while

they learn on the job.

According to recent data from the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Apprenticeship, the number of people participating in a Registered Apprenticeship Program nationwide has nearly doubled over the past decade, to more than 660,500.

In Michigan, there are 20,230 active apprentices in 865 registered programs. The Workforce Intelligence Network of Southeast Michigan says there are nearly 2,000 people in 74 Registered Apprenticeship Programs in Oakland County alone.



“Launching a Registered Apprenticeship Program provides an employer with a long-term solution to its workforce needs and talent gaps,” said Jennifer Llewellyn, manager, Oakland County Michigan Works! “Apprenticeships combine classroom study with paid, on-the-job training under the supervision of an industry

expert mentor.”

Building a talent pipeline

Williams International in Pontiac is a privately owned company that develops and manufactures jet engines for both military and commercial aircraft applications. It launched a two-year Registered Apprenticeship Program for CNC machinists in 2019. Last year, it started an apprenticeship for robotics technicians. To date, 12 people have successfully completed their apprenticeships, with eight currently in training.

“We recognized the skilled trades shortage in the local market and the growing demand for trained machinists in the advanced manufacturing sector,” said Colleen Schmerheim, Senior Vice President, People Development, Williams International. “We built our Registered Apprenticeship Program to establish a talent pipeline equipped to carry out the high-precision machining required in our manufacturing processes.”

It took six months to build the Williams International program. Schmerheim said the greatest challenge was finding the right balance between teaching apprentices the immediate skills needed to succeed, while incorporating training that developed skills for the future.

Six years later, Schmerheim says a key advantage of launching a Registered Apprenticeship Program versus informal on-the-job training is how knowledge is transferred through a structured process. The blend of classroom work, mentoring and hands-on training ensures both the company’s and apprentice’s needs are met.

“The employer invests time, money and resources to training the apprentice, while the apprentice

invests time and effort in order to earn a certification recognized by the industry and land a permanent role within the organization,” Schmerheim said. “It’s a win-win situation.”



Barron Industries employs Ryan Walther as a CNC machinist apprentice.

Barron Industries in Oxford, a manufacturer of precision metal castings and components, was faced with the retirement of many long-time employees and decided it made sense to attract new people to the field.

The company launched a four-year Registered Apprenticeship Program for CNC machinists in 2021. So far, one apprentice has completed the program with another in training now. Barron plans to add additional apprentices as it wins more aerospace and defense work. This will include new metal casting and welding apprentice positions.

"On-the-job training in an in-demand field, combined with paid college classes, are a strong incentive for young people," said Lissa Barron, communications director for the family-owned business. "Plus, it gives us an opportunity to mold them to succeed in our company."

Growth in non-traditional programs

Registered Apprenticeship Programs are expanding beyond the skilled trades and manufacturing, into other fast-growing industries, including healthcare and information technology, among others.

According to the State of Michigan, 25 percent of all Registered Apprenticeship Programs launched here since 2018 are in non-traditional industries.



Henry Ford Health manages multiple Registered Apprenticeship Programs to build its workforce from within.

Detroit-based Henry Ford Health is one such example. The premier academic medical institution and integrated health system has embraced the Registered Apprenticeship Program model. It currently operates 12-month apprenticeship programs for nursing assistants, pharmacy technicians and medical assistants – all launched over the past few years. The goal is to graduate 20 apprentices in each program annually.

The apprenticeships involve a combination of paid classroom instruction and significant onsite training. Once certified, the new full-time employees officially onboard and then are assigned to specific locations for additional unit training.

“There’s a known talent shortage in the healthcare industry, and these Registered Apprenticeship Programs give us another way to build our skilled workforce,” said Cheria Thomas, workforce development consultant for Henry Ford Health. “We have team members who want to advance within the medical field but may not think they have the means to do so. Our Registered Apprenticeship Programs open doors for them to grow their careers.”

Support from Oakland County Michigan Works!

A growing number of employers have worked with Oakland County Michigan Works! to develop their Registered Apprenticeship Programs.

According to Barron, Oakland County Michigan Works! helped the company ensure it met all of the federal criteria for a registered program, coordinated all of the paperwork needed and secured all necessary approvals.

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Jennifer Llewellyn, manager, Oakland County Michigan Works!

In addition to providing financial assistance to offset the cost of the Registered Apprenticeship Program, Oakland County also helped Barron, Henry Ford Health and other employers secure short-term training funds for the apprentices from the state's Going PRO Talent Fund program.

“Support from the State of Michigan and Oakland County is invaluable for a small business,” Barron said. “We would not be able to offer a Registered Apprenticeship Program without their guidance and assistance.”

[Oakland County Michigan Works!](#) also provides a range of supportive services to eligible apprentices including assistance with transportation, childcare, books and equipment, and more. The goal is to help eliminate barriers to the apprentice's success.

The greatest advice employers with existing registered apprenticeship programs can give to those who are considering such a move to address their talent needs?

“Don't wait to invest in your internal talent or potential new team members,” said Thomas from Henry Ford Health. “Engaging your first cohort of apprentices may have some hiccups, but you will make adjustments and refine the program over time and produce skilled workers.”

[Learn More About Registered Apprenticeship Programs](#)

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