

ENGAGING APPRENTICE VOICE: A STRATEGY FOR PROMOTING MORE EQUITABLE PROGRAMS FOR YOUTH



WHAT IS YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP?

Youth apprenticeship is a proven education and workforce strategy that combines paid, structured on-the-job learning with related, classroom based learning. Designed well, youth apprenticeship can advance equity by increasing access to valuable, affordable postsecondary credentials and by increasing the social capital and paid work experience that are especially important for under-resourced youth.

Programs must guard against inequities that unfairly limit access and opportunity by gender, income, disability, and race. Doing so requires programs to recognize inequities embedded within their educational and workforce systems and to develop programmatic interventions to address them, including student recruitment strategies, advising, and on-the-job support from employee mentors. Strategies to engage apprentices' perspectives in the design and delivery of youth apprenticeship programs can also ensure youth apprenticeship programs cater to the specific needs and interests of participants.

WHY SHOULD WE ENGAGE APPRENTICE VOICE?

The goal of effectively engaging the "voice" of any stakeholder group is to develop a system where they are valued and "seen", not just in rhetoric, but through daily and institutionalized practices. When apprentice voice

is engaged effectively, the results are improved culture building, community support, and greater accountability for apprentices and institutions, all of which can help programs provide more equitable opportunities and outcomes for their apprentices.

To engage apprentice voice is to provide pathways for apprentices to express their needs and guide decision making that affects their or their fellow apprentices' success. The key to authentic engagement of apprentice voice is creating the conditions in which apprentices can be as honest as possible about their learning and work experiences, without fear of punishment from their institutions. Program leaders and partners also need to consider the different aspects of various apprentice backgrounds and how culture plays a role in how each apprentice responds to efforts to engage their voice. Program leaders must acknowledge that every person has their own opinion, everyone's voice should matter, and every apprentice's voice should be heard.

It is essential that apprentices feel their voices are being heard and can see the difference their voices make. Program leaders must make sure that what is being said is put into action. When organizations can demonstrate that apprentice voice is incorporated in making positive changes, apprentices develop ownership and investment in their success and that of their place of employment and in their youth apprentice experience as a whole.

WHAT CAN ENGAGING APPRENTICE VOICE LOOK LIKE IN ACTION?

Moving from a place of understanding the importance of apprentice voice to taking direct action can feel like a big leap. Below are a few strategies to get youth apprenticeship program leaders started.

1. Apprentices should be paid for all of their time including time outside of the apprenticeship including on any committees or advisory boards they may serve on; they should also be offered technology and transportation support. These components provide apprentices with the resources they need to effectively amplify their voice in the field.
2. Apprentices can participate in the co-creation of the apprenticeship model by participating on advisory councils, helping to build curriculum, and improving workplace engagement strategies.
3. Apprentices can have access to regular “apprentice-only” meetings to foster a sense of belonging with their peers.
4. Apprentices can facilitate professional development offerings and workshop sessions on topics that are important to them to address equity issues within the workforce.
5. Apprentices can participate in regular feedback sessions with program leaders to directly inform upcoming apprentice cohort experiences.
6. Apprentices can become paid presenters at community events and conferences to share their apprentice experience and help recruit future participants and partners.

WHAT IS CURRENTLY WORKING IN THE FIELD?

CareerWise Colorado Apprentice Advisory Council
CareerWise Colorado (CWC) seeks to create opportunities for youth across Colorado through a business-led and student-centered youth apprenticeship model, ensuring relevant training and a valuable experience for both employer and apprentice. CWC keeps students at the

center of its youth apprenticeship program through its Apprentice Advisory Council, made up of graduated and current apprentices. The council meets regularly to discuss and provide feedback on program design, outreach, and delivery. CWC also supplements the council’s work by sending out an annual apprentice survey to get tangible feedback from youth on their experiences.

Partnership to Advance Youth Apprenticeship: Apprentice Voice Design Sprint

To support programs’ efforts to engage youth voice in the design of youth apprenticeship, [New America’s Partnership to Advance Youth Apprenticeship \(PAYA\)](#), launched the Youth Apprentice Voice Design Sprint, in cooperation with teams from three work-based learning partnerships, in Summer 2021. Each team included a mix of adult and youth participants, who worked together over 10-weeks to improve recruitment strategies with the goal of more intentionally recruiting students of color and special populations to apprenticeship and work-based learning programs.

As part of the co-design process, youth team members from GPS Education Partners, one of the three participating teams, conducted interviews with partner organizations, educators, employers, and other youth to better define needs in their community and to test ideas for new recruitment strategies with their target audiences. Youth-informed changes recommended by the team included more inclusive messages in recruitment materials, and the development of interactive presentation strategies for employers to pitch their apprenticeship and career opportunities to diverse populations of young adults.

RESOURCES

- [NAPE’s Partnership for Youth Apprenticeship website](#)
- [NAPE’s PAYA Toolkit](#)
- [NAPE’s Equity Values for Youth Apprenticeship](#)
- [About The Partnership to Advance Youth Apprenticeship](#)