

Governors Continue Exploring Innovative Methods to Scale Youth Apprenticeship

Today's persistently tight labor market has prompted policymakers and employers across all 55 states and territories to make concerted efforts to engage youth and young adults in the workforce. According to the [St. Louis Federal Reserve Bank](#) just 36.6% of 16–19-year-olds participated in the labor force in February 2024, down from 52.2% in February 2000. Youth apprenticeship programs have become an [increasingly popular tool for Governors](#) as they seek to offer training opportunities that prepare young people for good careers.

Youth apprenticeships include paid, on-the-job learning, related classroom instruction, and culminate in an industry-recognized credential and postsecondary credit. Governors are serious about expanding youth apprenticeship to deliver a skilled workforce to employers and provide young residents with a career development opportunity that can jumpstart their professional journey.

"Today's high school students are tomorrow's workforce. Youth apprenticeship programs will provide students with an opportunity to learn valuable skills while getting on-the-job training. Our top-tier workforce is the reason North Carolina is ranked the best state for business for two years in a row and we need to ensure they graduate with the necessary skills to be successful in our growing economy." – [North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper](#)

The NGA Center for Best Practices has served as a national partner in the Partnership to Advance Youth Apprenticeship since its inception in 2018 and has supported the [six states selected to participate in the Policy Academy to Advance Youth Apprenticeship](#) in collaboration with New America since July 2023. Each state's effort has been unique to their economy and governance structure, and their ability to innovate and be responsive to industry needs has proven to be paramount to their success.

Since July 2023, the NGA Center for Best Practices has supported state teams from Alabama, Colorado, Indiana, Kansas, North Carolina, and Utah through the [Policy Academy to Advance Youth Apprenticeship](#).

State Innovation in Youth Apprenticeship

Utah:

In March 2024, Utah Governor Spencer Cox signed a bill that will jumpstart Utah's efforts to scale youth apprenticeship opportunities. [Senate Bill 122](#) establishes a coalition of key stakeholders to design a framework for expanding youth apprenticeships – with considerations for increasing student and employer participation, identifying success metrics, and more. This effort, which will culminate with official recommendations in May 2025, provides Utah policymakers the opportunity to develop and solidify a youth apprenticeship system that meets the specific needs of Utah's students and employers. Governor Cox, as other Governors have done, recognized the need for Utah's youth apprenticeship system to be tailored to the state's unique policy and economic landscape, and this legislation will help propel the state forward in a coordinated manner.

California:

The [California Opportunity Youth Apprenticeship \(COYA\) Grant](#) Program funds organizations to develop or scale pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs that serve opportunity youth (16–24-year-olds who are disconnected or at risk of disconnection from the education and workforce systems) and drives the education and workforce systems towards the goals outlined in California Governor Gavin Newsom's "Freedom to Succeed" [executive order](#). The \$31,000,000 COYA Grant is designed to pioneer innovative practices that increase the participation of opportunity youth in these career-connected learning opportunities. The program includes both a planning grant and implementation grant to offer organizations that successfully serve opportunity youth a bridge to expand their work into apprenticeships. California has prioritized grantees whose participants span a diverse range of backgrounds, with a focus on opportunity youth and youth facing adverse circumstances, including but not limited to foster care youth, youth who are eligible under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, and youth with disabilities. In addition to the grant, the Division of Apprenticeship Standards is hiring a program team to support the development of youth apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs and align systems along the educational pathway. Governor Newsom's strategic investments will strengthen California's career connected learning ecosystem and enable the state to expand innovative programs that reach and serve today's youth.

Indiana:

In Indiana, Governor Eric Holcomb [enacted a definition](#) for Modern Youth Apprenticeship in May 2023. Youth apprentices in Indiana complete at least two semesters of related academic instruction and 650 hours of on-the-job training, are paid for their work, earn postsecondary credit and obtain an industry-recognized credential upon completion. Through their participation in the Policy Academy, Indiana policymakers have convened agency partners and other key stakeholders to determine the road ahead for implementation – including the establishment of metrics that illustrate whether youth apprentices have been successfully served by programs, as well as if the apprenticeships speak to the needs of employers and align with the state's goal of increasing work-based learning experiences. By setting a youth apprenticeship definition that aligns with the goals of the state's education and workforce systems, Governor Holcomb has set the table for Modern Youth Apprenticeship to successfully serve students and employers alike.

The Federal Landscape

Federal policymakers are also focused on offering career-connected learning opportunities to today's youth. Most recently, in January 2024, the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) issued a [Notice of Proposed Rulemaking](#) that leaves youth apprenticeship undefined at the federal level but would establish a new apprenticeship model called "CTE Apprenticeship." This proposed model, which would be distinct from youth apprenticeship programs currently offered in states, would not be limited to high- school-aged youth and would require participants to complete 540 hours of classroom instruction, 900 hours of on-the-job training, and culminate in CTE apprentices earning postsecondary credit and a certification of completion. However, a CTE apprenticeship would not necessarily lead to a job upon completion.

If USDOL adopts CTE Apprenticeship as currently proposed, Governors would be able to choose whether to implement this new model – which may be an appealing pathway for youth and young adults given it takes less time to complete than Registered Apprenticeship and can align with secondary or postsecondary coursework. However, given the steady momentum behind youth apprenticeship among Governors, it is unclear the extent to which CTE Apprenticeship would be taken up in states.

Conclusion

With employers in virtually every economic sector in desperate need of talent, Governors are looking to youth apprenticeship programs to provide young residents with a high-quality pathway into the workforce. To date, Governors' ability to shape these offerings and develop a system that best suits their state is partly a result of a federal policy landscape that allows for this kind of innovation. As state youth apprenticeship systems continue to develop, it is imperative that Governors continue to have the flexibility to innovate so programs like those in Utah, California and Indiana can continue to be developed and scaled.