

APPRENTICESHIP

Access for All: How Apprenticeships are a Bridge to the Middle Class



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It has become increasingly clear that entering the middle class means breaking through barriers that for many feels insurmountable. The working poor cannot afford college and the huge debt that is attached in order to earn a bachelor's degree. The hope for the American dream gets replaced with long working hours, horrible commutes and families struggling to pay the rent just to keep the lights on and put food on the table. Many people of color and women are disproportionately the casualties to this reality.

Apprenticeship is a bridge to the middle class. It allows workers to earn a decent wage while attending school that is directly related to their future profession. As apprentices progress through the program, they receive raises as new skills are acquired. Apprenticeship programs range from one to five years, and upon completion workers have a skill-set that allows them to earn a higher wage and have no outstanding college debt.

California law requires the Division of Apprenticeship Standards (DAS) to encourage apprenticeship sponsors and employers to develop and implement recruiting strategies that increase participation for women, ethnic minorities and the disabled in apprenticeship programs. Currently, Latinos make up 55% of the registered apprentices, followed by Caucasian at 31%, African American at 7.7% and Asian at 4.9%. Women make up about 7% of all active apprentices. It is clear from these numbers that apprenticeship is working for those who need it.

The average graduating apprentice earns \$75,000 per year. Apprenticeships have been largely associated with the construction industry. However, DAS has been developing programs in other industries including health care, information technology, financial services, manufacturing, logistics, sales, marketing and public sector employment. We still have a lot of work to do, but apprenticeship is the answer to moving people out of poverty.