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Three Stories: How Apprenticeships Are Thriving Across America



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Workers have every right to be dizzy. The 21st century economy is marked by massive change: jobs and industries are rising and falling, and the skills needed to succeed in those jobs are shifting. For workers to have a real opportunity to earn in this environment, we need to reinvent postsecondary education and skills. That's where apprenticeships come in.

To give millions more people the opportunity to thrive in the digital era, Third Way has called for the creation of [Apprenticeship America](#)—a national network for apprenticeships as robust as our four-year public colleges. The backbone of this network would be 50 flagship Apprenticeship Institutes dotting the country. These institutes would be modeled after the successful *intermediary* model: a hub that brings together employers, educators, and workers.

The best way to understand how the Apprenticeship Institutes would work as hubs for apprentices is to study the stories of today's standout apprenticeship intermediaries. This report highlights three organizations— Resilient Coders, Chicago Women in Trade, and Apprenti—which are demonstrating day-to-day just what practices must be scaled up to make apprenticeships thrive in America.

Resilient Coders (Boston, MA)

Boston, the land of universities, is ranked number one in a Brookings study of US cities with the highest income inequality.¹ When David Delmar, the Executive Director and Founder of Resilient Coders, spent time volunteering in youth detention facilities, he saw resilience in the eager students that society had written off. He was left thinking, “half of Boston is leading automation and the other half is being disrupted” and something should be done about that.² As a result, Resilient Coders was born.

Since its founding, Resilient Coders has positioned itself as a hub for technology apprenticeships. All of the students that come through their doors to learn JavaScript and other computer languages are immigrants, people of color, or come from low or extremely low-income homes. They're generally between the ages of 18-27, and each apprentice has a story of resiliency.

Before beginning the program, students receive a bi-weekly \$500 stipend as an incentive to persevere during the 14-week pre-apprenticeship training program. In their personal lives, Resilient Coders have fought homelessness, hunger, and/or lengthy legal immigration litigation that threatens their livelihoods. So considering that many of the students are homeless, the holistic support from Resilient Coders is critical. This includes helping students find adequate housing for themselves and even their families. In this program, late and tardy attendance warrants disqualification. The no-nonsense but nurturing environment prepares students to enter a workforce they may have never had access to previously. What's impressive is that most students accept a job as an entry-level software engineer which pays an \$85,000 salary, on average.³

Following their mentorship program, Resilient Coders alumni have accepted jobs from large companies like Microsoft to local employers like *The Boston Globe*. Resilient Coders prides itself on having added diverse candidates to the pool of job applicants at big tech companies. Thanks in part to their work and the work of similar organizations, Microsoft increased its share of non-white employees by 3%.⁴

As a hub for employer-driven education, Resilient Coders serves as an example of intermediaries supporting the expansion of apprenticeships and creating a postsecondary system that is aligned with local workforce needs. Currently, there are 18 students on the roster, and they all have a story to tell that ends in gratefulness for opportunity.⁵

Chicago Women in Trade (Chicago, IL)

Women in Illinois make up 2% of skilled trades and earn 23% less than men in the same occupations.⁶ These stats alone were reason enough for the Chicago Women in Trade (CWIT) to create the National Center for Women's Equity in Apprenticeship and Employment and programs such as "Women in Welding". Entering a male-dominated field has a unique set of barriers, and, since 1981, the tradeswomen of CWIT have been working to overcome them. For example, CWIT supports tradeswomen through weekly mentoring meetings that focus on stigmas faced by women in the trades as well as sexual harassment guidance.

When CWIT realized that women required different supports, the pre-apprenticeship program was launched. For 11-12 weeks, CWIT makes sure women get to their pre-apprenticeship program by providing \$75 per week for transportation. Spending an estimated \$30,000 per apprentice on everything from training to technical support, it is no wonder the organization boasts that 90% of program participants get hired and are retained in their jobs.

Plumbers, sheet metal workers, and welders are just some of the trade apprenticeships in which women participate. Specifically, the organization is committed to addressing the skills shortage in the welding field. By partnering with the Jane Addams Resource Center to run the "Women in Welding" program, the organizations work together to provide extra support for apprentices. A participant can enroll in the Adult Learner Programs & Services and receive tutoring, General Education Development (GED) preparation, and English as a Second Language (ESL) assistance.⁷ It looks like their efforts are paying off, at \$27.10 per hour, the average CWIT welder makes 67% more than the national average wage.⁸

Regional unions depend on CWIT for a pipeline of female workers, and because women currently make up only 7% of apprentices, there is an urgent need to ensure the success of women in the trades in Chicago. Pipefitters Local 597 and IBEW Local 134 are just two of many trade organizations that look to CWIT to provide qualified apprentices. Looking towards the future, CWIT takes advantage of the flexible learning environment of apprenticeships and adjusts their training programs to respond to the ever-changing 21st century economy.

Apprenti (Seattle, WA)

Non-Asian minorities and women are slowly finding their way to employment in the tech industry. For example, Facebook and Microsoft have increased the number of women they hire, but many tech companies are still not representative of the US population.⁹ A 2017 demographic breakdown of 23 large tech companies showed that most still employ a majority of white men.

In 2016, the Washington Technology Industry Association recognized the need for more diversity in the workplace and launched a registered apprenticeship program for tech workers called Apprenti. The

18-month program is focused on people who are highly competent but underemployed and underrepresented. With a deliberate marketing plan that leverages relationships with organizations like the National Urban League, Apprenti actively recruits and retains people from all walks of life by assessing what students are good at and creating an apprenticeship curriculum around their skills—not their previously earned credentials.

Problem-solving, algebraic level math, and emotional intelligence are just some of the skills that Apprenti's online screening assessment looks for. The program does not ask for a resume or details about previous jobs. Instead, Apprenti focuses on the relevant skills people bring to the table and, through assessment, verifies the skills for tech employers. Eighty-three percent of all participants are offered the job after the apprenticeship ends. ¹⁰

According to CompTIA, diversity in the information technology industry could net an extra \$400 billion a year if implemented properly. ¹¹ And after two years of existence, Apprenti is already nationally recognized for the important work it's doing in 15 states to integrate underrepresented populations into tech workplaces. Apprenti's robust diversity is a defining part of its program and shows what opportunities successful apprenticeships can produce. Ninety-four percent of their apprentices are people of color, women, or veterans—many of whom benefit from different supports and training than their traditional counterparts. For example, Apprenti makes mentorship and tutoring available for students to ensure retention in the job.

Additionally, veterans make up almost 40% of Apprenti program participants. When a veteran walks through their doors, Apprenti is able to pinpoint his or her transferable skills, such as flexibility and risk management, and translate them into a credential such as technological supply chain management. After completing the educational training portion of the apprenticeship with Apprenti, the veteran is placed at one of the 800 tech companies that are a part of the Washington Technology Industry Association—working as anything from an IT business analyst to a software developer. According to the Executive Director, Jennifer Carlson, apprenticeship completers boast a median salary of \$88,000 a year, which is a huge jump from the average \$28,900 salary held before entering the program. Considering that veterans account for almost 40% of Apprenti's population, Apprenti has mastered recognizing the skills that people have and matching them with the employees that need them. ¹²

TOPICS

ALL TOPICS

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ENDNOTES

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