



Apprenticeships at Work

Convening:

Continuing the Conversation

July 15, 2026

9 am – 4 pm

Heartland Community College

Normal, IL

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Agenda

- 9 am – 9:30 am Registration / Coffee
- 9:30 am Welcome and Introductions – CCB 1406/11407
- 9:50 – 10:40 am Keynote Address– John Colborn, Executive Director for Apprenticeships for America
- 10:50 am – 11:35 am Break-Out Session #1
- *Building Bridges: Bold Partnership Strategies That Expand Your Apprenticeship Ecosystem* – Room AMC 2608
Presenter: Bonnie Moore, Lake Land College
 - *Expanding Childcare Opportunities through Apprenticeships*– Room SCB 2002
Presenters: Dain Meza-Gotto, Patrick Hall, Julie Brancaleon, Joliet Junior College
 - *From Program to Pathway: Using Apprenticeship to Advance College-Wide Goals* – Room AMC 1902
Presenters: Veronica Inselmann, Curt Rendall, Heartland Community College
 - *Apprenticeship with Impact: Strengthening Student Support and Experience Through Collaboration* – Room AMC 2602
Presenters: Sheila Cheripka & Besa Sadiku, Harper College
- 11:40 am – 1 pm Lunch & Campus Confidential: Presidents Share Their Innermost Thoughts on Apprenticeships – CCB 14606/1407
- Lake Land College – Dr. Josh Bullock
 - William Rainey Harper College – Dr. Avis Proctor
 - Illinois Valley Community College – Dr. Tracy Morris
 - Kaskaskia College – Mr. George Evans
- 1:15pm – 2pm Table Talks – *Degree Apprenticeships*, Iris Palmer, Director for Community Colleges at New America
- 2:15 pm – 3 pm Break-Out Session #2
- *Build It with What You Have: Creating and Scaling a Healthcare Pre-Apprenticeship from Existing Resources* – Room AMC 2608
Presenter: Aimee Densmore, Parkland College

- *All Aboard the Apprenticeship Express: From Idea to Impact*
Room SCB 2002
Presenters: Joy Fitts and Taryn Chesnek, Kaskaskia College
- *From Pilot to National Model: How Insurance Apprenticeships Scaled from Harper College* – Room AMC 2602
Presenter: Besa Sadiku, Harper College
- *Understanding Apprenticeship Degrees: What They Are and What It Takes to Get Started* – Room AMC 1902
Presenter: Bri Barnes-Eldert, National Center of the Apprenticeship Degree

3 pm – 3:15 pm

Snack – AMC Lobby

3:15 pm – 4 pm

Break-Out Session #3

- *Intrusive in the Best Way: Proactive Student Support That Works* – Room AMC 1902
Presenters: Elissa Kojzarek, Gina de Rosier Cook, Elgin Community College
- *Aligning Community College Apprenticeship Priorities: A Collaborative Planning Lab* – Room AMC 2602
Presenter: Curt Rendall, Heartland Community College
- *Build Your Apprenticeship Program with Adult Education Learners in Mind* - Room SCB 2002
Presenter: Kathy Olesen-Tracey, Illinois Community College Board

SPEAKERS

John Colborn



John Colborn, Executive Director of **Apprenticeships for America** has amassed over 30 years of experience with community-based and national nonprofits, including serving as an education, workforce, and human services practitioner, Director of the Aspen Institute Skills for America's Future program, Vice President Operations at the Ford Foundation, and program manager at the Philadelphia-based Reinvestment Fund. Colborn holds a BA from Oberlin College and a Master of Business Administration from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania.

Dr. Sarah Diel-Hunt

Sarah Diel-Hunt serves as **Heartland's** Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs, providing strategic leadership for undergraduate academic programs, adult and continuing education, the College's Strategic Enrollment Management Plan, and all enrollment services and marketing operations. Dr. Diel-Hunt is actively engaged in community and statewide service, contributing to initiatives that align educational programs with workforce needs and foster civic engagement among college students.



Iris Palmer



Iris Palmer is the Director for Community Colleges at **New America** and is a member of the Higher Education program and the Center on Education & Labor program. She provides research and analysis on community colleges, adults enrolled in higher education, and apprenticeships. Palmer previously worked at the National Governors Association on postsecondary issues, where she helped states strengthen the connection between higher education and the workforce, support competency-based systems, and use data from effectiveness and efficiency metrics.

Daniel Serota

Daniel Serota is the Vice President of Government and Public Affairs at **Aon**, where he leads the firm's North America public policy, regulatory strategy, and political engagement. He oversees the development of strategic relationships with policymakers, industry partners, and civic leaders. Mr. Serota played a central role in establishing the Chicago Apprentice Network, which has become a nationally recognized model for expanding apprenticeship pathways. He was appointed by Governor J.B. Pritzker to the Illinois Workforce Innovation Board, where he chairs the Apprentice Illinois Committee. A recognized civic and business leader, Mr. Serota is a Leadership Greater Chicago Fellow, an Edgar Fellow, and a Crain's Chicago Business 40 Under 40 honoree.



PRESIDENTS

Dr. Tracy Morris

Dr. Morris began her college career at **Illinois Valley Community College (IVCC)**, earning her Associate of Arts before earning her Bachelor of Science degree from Western Illinois University. She went on to earn her Masters in Counseling and a Doctorate in Adult and Higher Education, both from Northern Illinois University. Dr. Morris served as a high school teacher, K-8 school counselor, and a community college advisor and orientation coordinator before entering higher education administration. In December 2022, Dr. Morris was selected as the first IVCC graduate to be named IVCC President, a role she has held for 3 years.



Dr. Josh Bullock



Dr. Bullock has served as the president of **Lake Land College** since 2013. Under his leadership, Lake Land College has implemented a comprehensive strategic plan focused on “Education that Fits Your Life”, initiated co-requisite remediation frameworks for student success, integrated a data analytics platform to facilitate data-driven decision making, and developed unique training models to help local businesses sustain a skilled workforce. Dr. Bullock also serves on the boards of numerous regional and state organizations, including the Illinois Student Assistance Commission, and is a faculty practitioner for the Ferris State University Doctorate in Community College Leadership (DCCL) program.

He is married to the love of his life, Jen, and enjoys spending time with his family.

Dr. Avis Proctor

Dr. Avis Proctor has served as the sixth president of **William Rainey Harper College** since July 2019 and brings more than 30 years of experience in education and leadership. An Aspen Presidential Fellow and higher education scholar, she is recognized for her innovation in advancing student success and strengthening workforce and economic development. Under her leadership, Harper College has expanded academic offerings in high-demand fields such as artificial intelligence, aviation, cybersecurity, and fire science. Dr. Proctor earned a bachelor’s degree in mathematics education from Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, a Master of Science in Teaching Mathematics from Florida Atlantic University, and a doctorate in higher education from Florida International University.



George Evans



George Evans was named the President of **Kaskaskia College** in 2018, after 10 years of service to the College in leadership roles as Dean of Career and Technical Education, Director of the College's Education Program at the Centralia Correctional Center, and adjunct faculty member. A proud Kaskaskia College graduate, he is a strong advocate for CTE and vocational education, registered apprenticeships, and workforce development initiatives that connect students with high-demand careers. Under his leadership, Kaskaskia College has expanded partnerships with employers, industry organizations, and workforce agencies to strengthen talent pipelines throughout Southern Illinois. In 2024, Governor J.B. Pritzker appointed Evans to the Illinois Community College Board, where he continues to champion workforce training and

economic development across the state.

Session Descriptions

10:50 - 11:35 am

Building Bridges: Bold Partnership Strategies That Expand Your Apprenticeship

Ecosystem – Room AMC 2608

Presenter: Bonnie Moore, Lake Land College

Partnerships don't happen by accident — they're built with intention, strategy, and a willingness to think beyond the transactional. This session challenges community college staff to reimagine how they engage external partners — from industry employers and trade associations to community-based organizations — and turn those relationships into a thriving, self-sustaining apprenticeship ecosystem. Grounded in real work from Lake Land College's Center for Business & Industry, attendees will leave with a repeatable process they can put into action immediately.

Expanding Childcare Opportunities through Apprenticeships – Room SCB 2002

Presenters: Dain Meza-Gotto, Patrick Hall, Julie Brancaleon, Joliet Junior College

Joliet Junior College (JJC) is working to address early childhood education teacher shortages and improve the success of childcare centers through pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs. This session will provide an overview of the strategies JJC used to launch early childhood education apprenticeship programs, engage employers, and partner with regional agencies to fund this initiative. Participants will learn about the successes and challenges JJC has encountered in their early childhood education apprenticeship programs.

From Program to Pathway: Using Apprenticeship to Advance College-Wide Goals –

Room AMC 1902

Presenters: Veronica Inselmann, Curt Rendall, Heartland Community College

Whether a college is launching apprenticeship for the first time or preparing to scale it, apprenticeship can be most effective when positioned as one strategy among many to advance enrollment, persistence, completion, and economic development. At the request of the president, Heartland Community College led a year long, cross-campus planning process to explore that question, align apprenticeship with departmental and institutional goals, and create a framework for moving from apprenticeship as a program to apprenticeship as a pathway. This session will share that process and provide practical tools, planning methods, and final product examples that participants can adapt to build internal alignment, shared investment, and readiness for the next phase of apprenticeship work applicable to wherever your institution is along the apprenticeship journey.

Apprenticeship with Impact: Strengthening Student Support and Experience Through Collaboration – Room AMC 2602

Presenters: Sheila Cheripka & Besa Sadiku, Harper College

This session will highlight how Harper College has implemented apprenticeship programs with a strong focus on student support and experience to drive success and satisfaction. Through employer partnerships, mentorship, and integrated advising, the model supports academic and career growth. Key approaches for building a student-centered apprenticeship experience, including recruitment, onboarding, on-the-job support, and career placement, will be shared. The session will also explore common student barriers to success and strategies to address them through collaboration among students, faculty, campus resources, and employer partners, to sustain student success throughout the apprenticeship journey.

2:15 - 3:00 pm

Build It With What You Have: Creating and Scaling a Healthcare Pre-Apprenticeship from Existing Resources – Room AMC 2608

Presenter: Aimee Densmore, Parkland College

Community colleges are uniquely positioned to launch pre-apprenticeship programs, but many hesitate, believing they need new funding, new curriculum, or new infrastructure to get started. This session will share how Parkland College designed, launched, evaluated, and refined a healthcare pre-apprenticeship by leveraging existing institutional assets, internal partnerships, and employer relationships already in place. Participants will walk through the step-by-step development process, including program design, student recruitment, lessons learned from the first cohort, improvements made for the second launch, and strategies for serving out-of-school youth through partnership with Adult Education. Attendees will leave with practical tools and a replicable framework for building their own pre-apprenticeship pathways without starting from scratch. Parkland's healthcare pre-apprenticeships were partially funded by the IL DCEO Apprenticeship Expansion Grant.

All Aboard the Apprenticeship Express: From Idea to Impact – Room SCB 2002

Presenters: Joy Fitts and Taryn Chesnek, Kaskaskia College

Building a successful apprenticeship program doesn't happen overnight, it takes momentum, the right partners, and a clear destination. In this engaging session, Kaskaskia College shares how we launched Apprenticeships and built it into a growing, employer-driven model. From the first conversations with industry to gaining faculty buy-in and

partnering with workforce agencies for funding support, we'll walk through each "stop" along the journey. This session blends storytelling with practical strategies, highlighting both successes and lessons learned along the way. Whether you're just stepping onto the platform or ready to pick up speed, you'll leave with actionable ideas to move your apprenticeship efforts forward.

From Pilot to National Model: How Insurance Apprenticeships Scaled from Harper College – Room AMC 2602

Presenter: Besa Sadiku, Harper College

This session explores how Harper College developed one of the earliest registered insurance apprenticeship models in the United States, beginning in 2016 through the American Apprenticeship Initiative grant in partnership with industry leaders such as Zurich North America and Aon. Over the past decade, the program has served more than 630 apprentices, with over 220 completing the insurance program, demonstrating strong completion and employment outcomes. Participants will learn how faculty, deans, and industry partners collaborated to design curriculum, build related instruction, and create a scalable talent pipeline in a new and emerging industry space. The presentation will also highlight how this early model helped inform broader employer-led efforts such as the Chicago Apprentice Network, where Zurich and Aon played founding roles in advancing apprenticeship adoption across industries. Finally, it will showcase how Zurich North America has designated Harper College as a national provider for multiple associate degree apprenticeship pathways.

Understanding Apprenticeship Degrees: What They Are and What It Takes to Get Started – Room AMC 1902

Presenter: Bri Barnes-Eldert, National Center of the Apprenticeship Degree

As apprenticeship programs continue to grow across industries, more colleges, employers, and workforce partners are asking how apprenticeship can connect not only to workforce entry, but also to college credit, degree attainment, and long-term career mobility. This interactive session will introduce attendees to Apprenticeship Degrees as a model that aligns paid work, on-the-job learning, related instruction, and postsecondary credentials. Participants will gain a practical understanding of what Apprenticeship Degrees are, how they differ from more traditional apprenticeship models, and what it takes to begin exploring them in a real-world context. Through a guided activity, attendees will work through an initial feasibility and readiness exercise to identify the core partners, conditions, and questions that should be in place before moving from interest to design. Attendees will leave with a tangible framework they can use to guide conversations and next steps within their own institution, organization, or partnership.

3:15 - 4:00 pm

Intrusive in the Best Way: Proactive Student Support That Works – Room

AMC 1902

Presenters: Elissa Kojzarek, Gina De rosier-Cook, Elgin Community College

Workforce development students often face barriers that go beyond academics—transportation, childcare, financial stress, and unfamiliarity with education systems. At Elgin Community College, all work-based learning programs utilize a concierge model of student support. In this presentation, we'll share how this intrusive, intensive model allows apprenticeship coordinators to develop real relationships with students to proactively remove barriers and keep students engaged and on the path to success.

Aligning Community College Apprenticeship Priorities: A Collaborative Planning Lab – Room AMC 2602

Presenter: Curt Rendall, Heartland Community College

Many Illinois community colleges now have tools, guides, and experience to help launch and scale apprenticeship programs. The next challenge is deciding where collaboration across colleges would make the greatest difference. This interactive planning lab will bring apprenticeship practitioners together to identify the top 3–5 shared priorities for the next year where coordinated action could reduce duplication, simplify employer engagement, and improve the apprentice experience. Potential focus areas may include employer agreements, fee structures, funding mechanisms, program “products,” shared messaging, onboarding materials, mentor expectations, and communication strategies for employers and prospective apprentices. The session is designed for colleges that are already building apprenticeship capacity and want to strengthen coordination across institutions, regions, and employer partnerships.

Build Your Apprenticeship Program With Adult Education Learners in Mind – Room

SCB 2002

Presenter: Kathy Olesen-Tracey, Illinois Community College Board

Adult education programs play a critical role in preparing learners for high-demand careers, yet many providers struggle to create seamless transitions from adult education instruction to workforce training and registered apprenticeships. This interactive session will explore strategies for designing and strengthening career pathways that connect adult literacy education, ICAPS, and pre-apprenticeship programs to registered apprenticeship opportunities. Participants will examine promising practices, engage in collaborative discussions, and work through real-world planning scenarios to identify partnership, program design, and student support strategies that promote successful transitions into

apprenticeship careers. Attendees will leave with practical tools, actionable ideas, and a framework for building or enhancing pathways that support learner success while meeting workforce and industry needs.

Apprenticeships at Work

Convening

July 15th 2026 9am-4pm

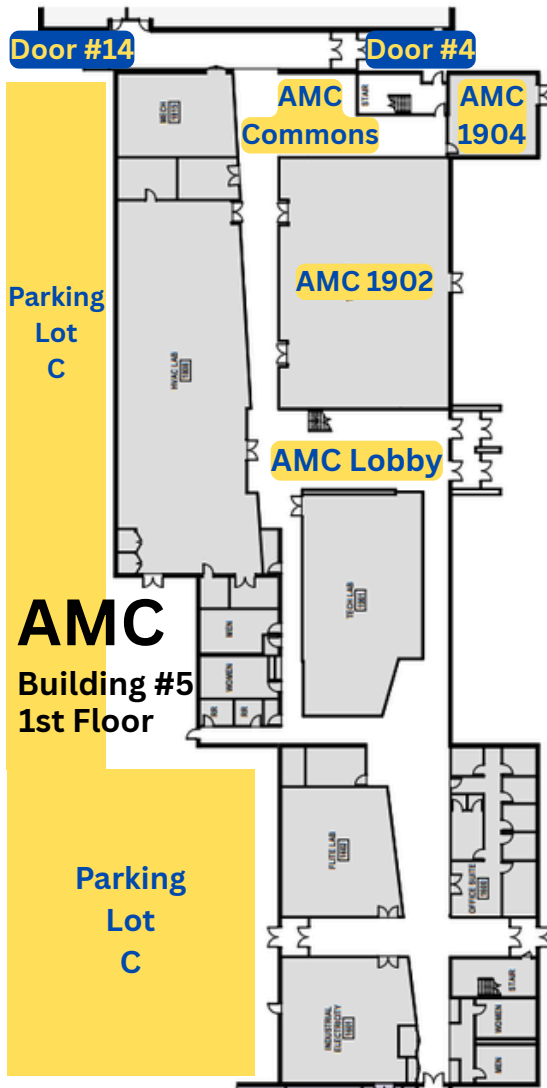
Pre-Session Workshop

July 14th 2026 2pm-5pm

Networking Social

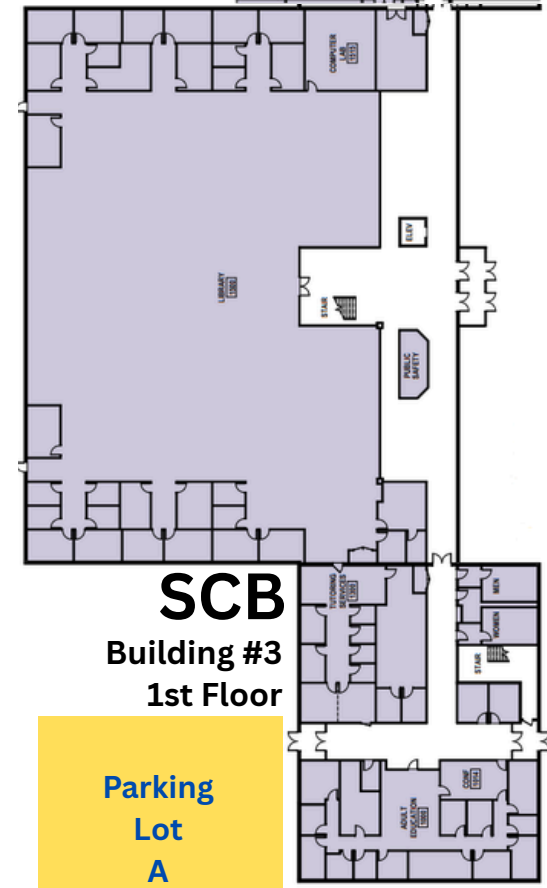
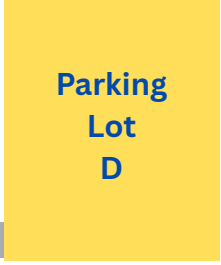
July 14th 2026 5:15pm-7pm

Location: Heartland Community College



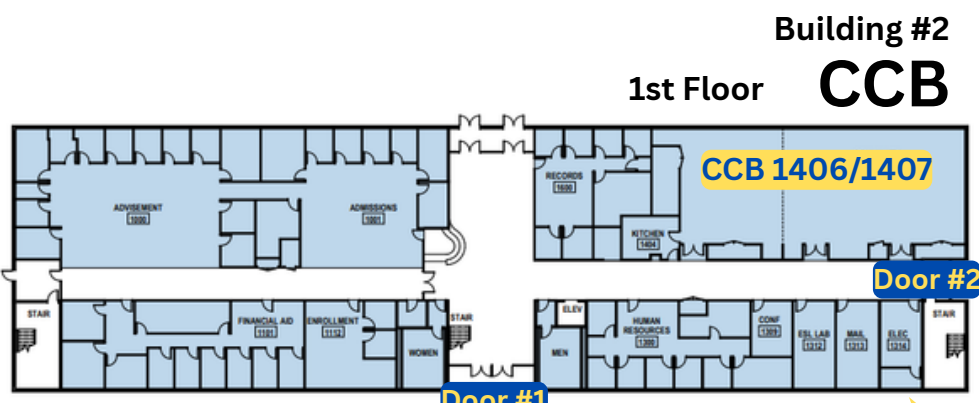
AMC
Building #5
1st Floor

Vermillion Way

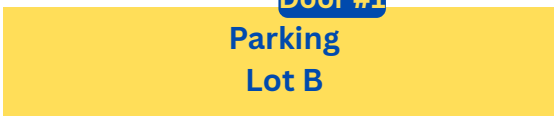


SCB
Building #3
1st Floor

Community College Drive



Building #2
1st Floor
CCB



Apprenticeships at Work

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July 15th 2026 9am-4pm

Pre-Session Workshop

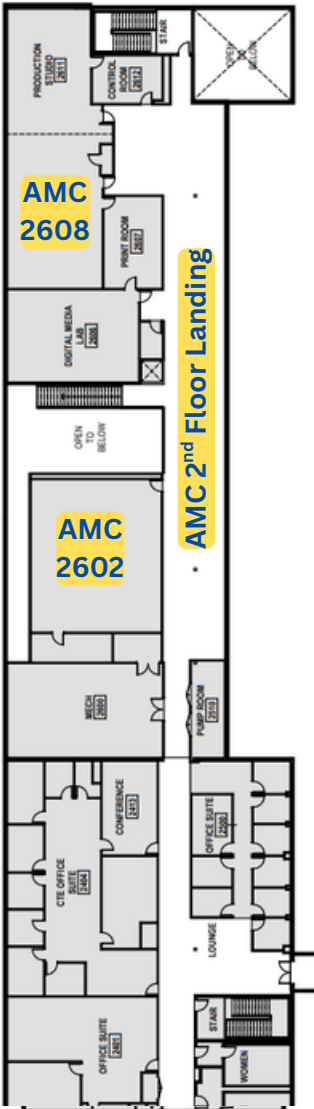
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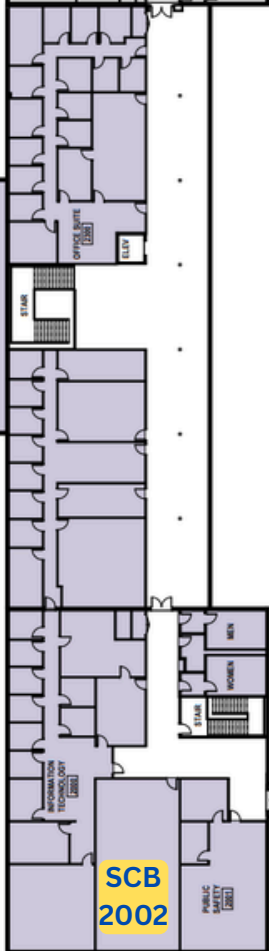
July 14th 2026 5:15pm-7pm

Location: Heartland Community College

AMC
Building #5
2nd Floor



SCB
Building #3
2nd Floor



Building #2
2nd Floor **CCB**

