

Apprenticeship Learning Community Discussion: Pipeline Development and Emerging Opportunities

Opening Theme: Where the Discussion Began

The discussion began with a strong shared theme: current apprenticeship pipelines are still most often fueled by incumbent workers, supported by community outreach, employer interest forms, instructor connections, and pre-apprenticeship programming. Across colleges, apprenticeship growth is happening through a mix of incumbent worker upskilling, current college cohorts, pre-apprenticeship participants, WIOA-connected learners, GED and Adult Education students, and high school and dual credit students. A notable takeaway was that many institutions are no longer treating apprenticeship as a stand-alone program, but as part of a broader talent ecosystem that links outreach, intake, instruction, employer engagement, and workforce supports.

Current Pipeline Models and Student Sources

Several colleges described especially strong integration of services. ECC reported close coordination with WIOA and continuing education within one unit, supported by significant marketing efforts and information sessions. ECC also noted that incumbent workers remain the biggest pipeline into Registered Apprenticeships, with employers often starting there before moving into hiring current students or pre-apprentices into entry-level roles. ECC continues to strengthen the connection between pre-apprenticeship, apprenticeship, WIOA, and ICAPS, while also working with 13 local high schools and exploring cohort-based, predictable scheduling models. An important practice highlighted was ECC's approach to vetting candidates before enrollment in pre-apprenticeship to ensure students understand the pathway and are committed to moving forward.

Heartland reported comparable reliance on incumbent workers while also working with career centers to build a manufacturing pathway at the high school level with embedded pre-apprenticeship. Moraine Valley described an established cross-division apprenticeship team

spanning workforce and credit divisions and is exploring both healthcare apprenticeships and nontraditional sectors such as banks and credit unions.

Notable Institutional Approaches

CCC is in the early stages of launching pre-apprenticeships, including a technology-focused model rolled out last month to build a future talent pool for employer partners, as well as a commercial real estate pre-apprenticeship. CCC also emphasized career readiness as a central part of its model and noted that it supports both registered and unregistered apprenticeship pathways.

PC shared that apprenticeships are co-located with Adult Education and WEI, creating strong alignment across services. PC launched its first healthcare pre-apprenticeship yesterday, filled immediately through WIOA Youth and GED learners, and also offers E-CNA and E-CDL through Adult Education for non-native speakers using contextualized English language instruction ahead of career training.

HCC is examining how to build a pre-apprenticeship model that fits its context, especially in cases where employers are not yet prepared to wait for candidates to complete early-stage training.

Opportunities for New Pipeline Development

The discussion surfaced several promising opportunities for new pipeline development. Colleges want to work more intentionally with dual credit, youth apprenticeship, Adult Education, and incumbent worker models. Dual credit was repeatedly described as a particularly valuable opportunity because it offers access to a “captive audience” of students who can be introduced earlier to apprenticeship pathways through high school partnerships, dual credit teachers, and career exploration.

Adult Education and literacy programming were also identified as critical entry points, especially for GED learners and English language learners who may need additional preparation before entering technical coursework. In this context, pre-apprenticeship is increasingly serving not just as career exploration, but as a bridge that strengthens employability, English skills, and learner readiness for college-level career training.

Partnerships and Stakeholders Needed

Expansion will require stronger coordination across both internal and external partners. Colleges identified the need to work closely with faculty, program coordinators, deans, American Job Centers, state agencies, chambers of commerce, WIOA partners, and employers to make pipelines sustainable. Existing relationships with instructors, workforce teams, and employers are already helping create momentum, but broader alignment will be necessary to scale programs effectively.

Resource and Capacity Needs

A clear theme across the discussion was the need for more staff and more funding to grow apprenticeship efforts. Participants also emphasized the need for stronger employer buy-in beginning at the pre-apprenticeship stage so that training connects directly to actual hiring demand. Some colleges noted effective employer incentive models, such as having employers initially cover tuition and books and then receive reimbursement through workforce partnerships.

Closing Takeaway

Overall, the conversation showed that the most innovative apprenticeship work is happening where colleges braid together Adult Education, workforce systems, employer partnerships, pre-apprenticeship, dual credit, and academic programming into a more intentional and scalable talent development strategy. What stood out most was not just the diversity of pipelines, but the growing shift toward integrated systems that connect students earlier, prepare them more intentionally, and align employer engagement more closely to long-term workforce needs.