

Gov. Pritzker Announces \$8 Million Expansion Of Apprenticeship Pathways In Illinois

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CHICAGO – Governor JB Pritzker and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) today announced an \$8 million expansion of the Apprenticeship Illinois program. Through a Notice of Funding Opportunity ([NOFO](#)), DCEO will expand innovative and high-quality apprenticeship programs to prepare

Illinoisans for jobs in high-demand industries. Through the expansion, the State aims to serve an additional 750 apprentices across key industries, with plans to reach underserved populations as well as industries heavily impacted by COVID-19.

The State of Illinois will leverage \$2 million in USDOL funding under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and \$6 million of additional funding under the USDOL State Apprenticeship Expansion, Equity and Innovation grant program, to develop innovative new pathways in communities throughout the state while ensuring these training programs are aligned with current labor market/force needs. The State will also seek to boost capacity of existing apprenticeship pathways in all sectors which are offered in partnership with hundreds of employer-led navigator partners across the state.

“During this unprecedented time for workers and companies, the investments we are making today to grow apprenticeships will help more Illinoisans get back to work in well-paying jobs, while developing strong talent pipelines for the future,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “From day one, my administration has focused on expanding workforce training, like apprenticeships, so that residents, regardless of where they live, can enter 21st century career pathways. With these investments, hundreds of additional Illinoisans will be able to gain the skills they need for successful careers as we continue to build a strong recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic for all of our residents.”

DCEO will expand apprenticeship opportunities geared toward restoring the creative arts and entertainment sector, while increasing training opportunities for underserved populations. Apprenticeship expansion dollars will also grow the capacity of pathways currently offered and which have been impacted during the crisis – including those ranging from healthcare to hospitality, tech to transportation, manufacturing and more.

“DCEO is proud to expand the Apprenticeship Illinois program, providing workers access to comprehensive training and credentials that will help them excel in the jobs and career paths our Illinois employers are looking to fill today,” said DCEO Acting Director Sylvia Garcia. “This is one of many ways that under Governor Pritzker’s leadership, the State continues to partner with Illinois businesses and communities to grow and develop our workforce and help residents compete and thrive in today’s economy.”

The State will seek to launch a new pathway to upskill workers in the creative arts & entertainment industry sector. Through this first-ever pathway, the State will supplement funds for workers in the creative, hospitality and service sectors to participate in training programs that build capacity for underrepresented populations for jobs in these industries. The program was informed by a workforce study conducted by the Arts Alliance of Illinois, which found over 60 percent of workers from arts related businesses and organizations in Illinois have either been laid off or furloughed during the pandemic.

“The arts and entertainment industry was among the first to be shuttered due to COVID-19, forcing devastating consequences for workers in every corner of Illinois,” said Claire Rice, Executive Director of the Arts Alliance. “New investments by the State to develop first-ever apprenticeship training pathways come at a crucial time and will help as we work to achieve greater diversity in our industry. We are grateful for the Pritzker administration’s swift response to the challenges facing our industry through a number of economic relief measures – including this one that will help give workers in the arts and entertainment sector an opportunity to gain new skills to support career progression.”

To increase equity in the workforce, DCEO and its partners will also leverage program expansion dollars to increase apprenticeship participation by underrepresented populations – including low-income individuals, older workers, women, returning citizens, persons with disabilities, veterans, youth and more.

To reach more residents across the state, particularly in underserved communities, DCEO will utilize the DCEO navigator and intermediary partnership models first piloted last year, and as a result of the Pritzker administration’s efforts to invest an additional \$4.7 million to grow the program. These apprenticeship partners will work to recruit from areas of the state which are underrepresented – including rural areas – and to prioritize diversity and inclusion within the Apprenticeship Illinois community.

“The Apprenticeship program provides a standard of excellence in the development of valuable, marketable skills for our teammates, while providing access to opportunity for people within our community who may not have had that access through any other means,” said Jeff Horvath, Vice President of TerraSource of Belleville. “That is a win for our company and a win for the individual - these apprenticeships let us “grow our own” talent, adding good jobs to the St. Clair County and Metro-East St. Louis economy by filling roles that are critical to the growth of our business.”

The Apprenticeship Expansion Program design is centered on supporting businesses and individuals. Expanding apprenticeships helps businesses with their current and future workforce needs as well as individuals with a career pathway, which includes work-based learning. DCEO will accept proposals that expand registered apprenticeships in Illinois. A fundamental goal of this NOFO is to increase apprenticeship opportunities for minorities and targeted populations that are underrepresented in registered apprenticeship occupations in Illinois.

“We have more than a thousand employers in our community that provide our students with workplace learning opportunities with the goal of helping to develop their talent pipeline,” said Dr. Lazaro Lopez Associate Superintendent for Teaching and Learning for High School District 214, in Arlington Heights, Illinois. “Many of these employers

are engaging with our district to offer youth apprenticeships as a workforce development tool. Students are ready for their future by gaining valuable work experience, earning competitive wages and industry credentials without taking on student debt, with a pathway to economic mobility right in our backyard.”

Funding will be provided for 10 -12 navigators and 16-20 intermediary grantees, who will develop industry aligned curriculum to train participants; and navigators who will work with employers to match residents to skills training opportunities. Applicants will be prioritized based on the quality of their proposal, demonstrated plans to serve targeted populations outlined in the Illinois WIOA Unified Plan, as well as projects to serve industries recovering from the pandemic.

In addition to expanding apprenticeship networks throughout the state, the Pritzker administration is focused on building apprenticeship capacity in a number of ways. This includes the launch of the apprenticeship tax credit program to incentivize apprenticeships at small and large sized businesses, creation of new apprenticeship networks in all ten economic development regions, and the work to stand up the Illinois Works program within DCEO, which will soon launch additional grants to expand pre-apprenticeship training programs in the trades.

The NOFO application is located on [Apprenticeship Illinois](#) website, with a deadline of September 15, at 5:00 p.m. Informational webinars will be held on [July 13th](#) and [July 14th](#), at 1:00 pm and you can register to participate online. Residents and employers seeking to join the Apprenticeship Illinois program may also visit the website [ApprenticeshipIllinois.com](#) to learn more and to find their local apprenticeship navigator.