



OPPORTUNITY AMERICA

APPRENTICESHIP FORWARD PANEL UNREGISTERED WORK-BASED LEARNING

In May 2017, Opportunity America organized a panel at the Apprenticeship Forward conference cosponsored by the National Skills Coalition, New America and Jobs for the Future. The subject: unregistered work-based learning programs. Many employers across the U.S. are drawn to the principles at the heart of European-style apprenticeship and yet for a variety of reasons, they hesitate to register the training they offer. Why don't more companies sponsor registered apprenticeships? What are the advantages of less formal work-based learning – for employers and employees? And what's good public policy – should Washington support and encourage unregistered programs? The panel included representatives from two companies with unregistered earn-and-learn programs and a national organization that accredits construction craft skills training. Opportunity America president Tamar Jacoby moderated the session.

MODERATOR Tamar Jacoby president, Opportunity America

"I think we can all agree that apprenticeship is the gold standard of workforce education. But employer uptake in the U.S. remains disappointingly low. And for many companies, the alternative is unregistered apprenticeship-style training: robust, structured on-the-job training and robust, structured related classroom instruction that leads to a portable national credential – just like apprenticeship, but not registered."

Michael Bennett VP of human resources, Cianbro Corporation

Headquartered in Pittsfield, Maine, Cianbro Corporation is a national construction contractor with some 4,000 employees. The company is deeply committed to employee training, including registered apprenticeship. But just over half of its earn-and-learn programs are unregistered.

"Our registered and unregistered programs are very similar. But the benefit on the non-registered side is the flexibility. Our company needs workers who can do many different things on the job – sometimes several different trades – and we need the flexibility to meet the needs of ongoing projects. Our unregistered programs are just as rigorous, but they're more relevant to the jobs at hand. That's a benefit to the organization, but also to the individual."

Elizabeth Hanning VP of human resources, Pridgeon & Clay

Pridgeon & Clay is a 1,000-employee metal-stamping company that caters primarily to the automotive industry. Headquartered in Grand Rapids, Michigan, but with a global footprint, the firm sponsors nine different apprenticeship-like programs – none of them registered.

"We used to have a registered program, but now all our training is unregistered. We train on the job. We partner with a community college. Trainees learn nontechnical skills like business writing and public speaking. And they earn a national certification. The difference: we have more freedom to decide how long the program should be, the mix of skills and how many hours trainees should spend on exactly which tasks. There's also less paperwork – we don't have to deal with an onerous application process."

Steve Greene vice president, National Center for Construction Education & Research

NCCER is a Florida-based nonprofit organization that accredits job training programs in the construction industry – secondary, postsecondary and employer-provided craft training in the U.S. and internationally.

"NCCER maintains a nationwide system of construction trade credentials designed to assure quality for companies like Cianbro with unregistered earn-and-learn programs. We're a credentialing body. We're an accrediting body. And we write curriculum – curriculum that meets the apprenticeship standards of the U.S. Department of Labor, with the appropriate number of classroom hours and associated work-based learning activities In the construction and manufacturing industries alone, we're short half a million people. But there are less than 600,000 registered apprentices training for any occupation – less than one half of one percent of all U.S. workers. We think it's possible to increase that number dramatically without sacrificing flexibility or quality control."



Opportunity America is a Washington-based nonprofit promoting economic mobility – work, skills, careers, ownership and entrepreneurship for poor and working Americans. The organization's principal activities are research, policy development, dissemination of policy ideas and working to build consensus around policy proposals.