



Emerging Occupations in Registered Apprenticeship

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Overview

Registered apprenticeship programs (RAPs) have grown substantially over the past decade, driven by robust federal investment and coordination with state and local partnerships. Between 2015 and 2022, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) awarded over \$1 billion in apprenticeship grants to help strengthen apprenticeship programs and spur new program growth (Butrica et al. 2023). The number of active apprentices has nearly doubled over the past decade, growing from roughly 360,000 apprentices in 2015 to almost 700,000 active apprentices in the past year (DOL 2025a).

This fact sheet highlights five occupations that have recently seen growth in the number of registered apprentices in related training programs. State apprenticeship staff, apprentice intermediaries, and employers can look to these occupations as useful examples of how expanding apprenticeships can strengthen talent pipelines in occupations that may not have historical ties to apprenticeship.

RAPs and their benefits

RAPs are career pathway programs characterized by paid, on-the-job training that includes mentorship paired with structured, classroom-based educational instruction. Programs are industry-approved to ensure alignment with industry standards, and apprentices receive industry credentials after completing their training. Apprenticeships become registered once their curriculum and program structure are approved by DOL or a State Apprenticeship Agency (DOL 2025b).

RAPs offer considerable benefits to both employers and workers and can strengthen economic growth through connecting skilled workers to stable, high-wage jobs. Studies have shown that RAPs can lead to higher earnings for workers (Reed et al. 2012), positive return on investment for employers (Kuehn et al. 2022), and increased employee retention (Souvanna et al. 2023). RAPs also support economic growth regionally and nationally by providing trained workers for high-demand occupations.

New-growth industries

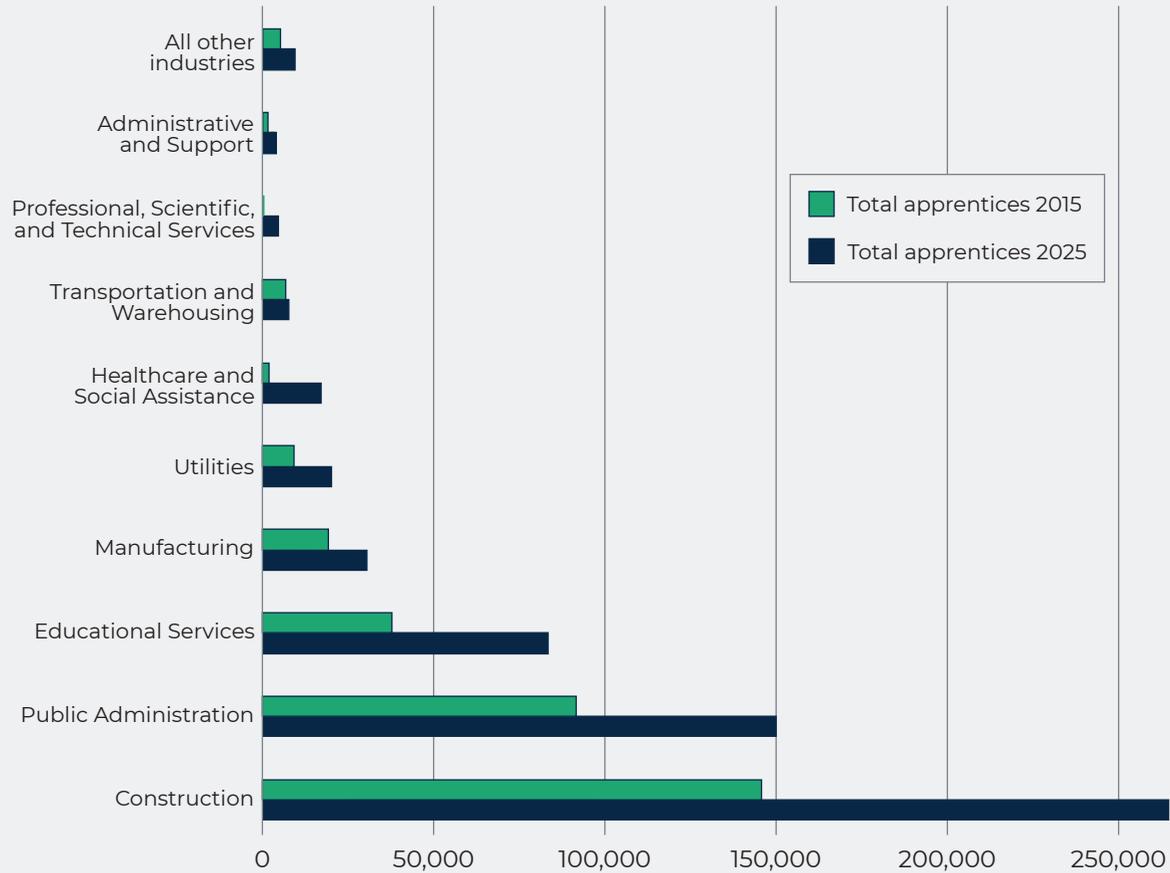
Registered apprenticeships have previously been concentrated in the construction and building trades (such as carpentry or plumbing), yet overall growth in registered apprenticeships over the past decade has included programs developed in new industries and occupations. Much of this growth has been concentrated in a few key industries, primarily healthcare (DOL 2024) and advanced manufacturing (ApprenticeshipUSA n.d.), though other new industries have also expanded. Since 2015, counts of active apprentices have grown by roughly 120 percent and 64 percent in education and public administration, respectively (DOL 2025a). However, these new-growth industries still represent only a fraction of the number of apprentices in the traditional construction trades (Figure 1).

As these industries continue to grow, RAPs will emerge in occupations that may seem very different from the skilled trades long associated with apprenticeships. Although recent research on apprenticeships has detailed some of these areas of new growth, little has been written on the scope of emerging occupations in the apprenticeship landscape.¹ This fact sheet describes several emerging occupations that illustrate how the “earn and learn” model of apprenticeship has been creatively deployed in nontraditional occupations to fill demand for workers and strengthen career pathways.

Emerging occupations

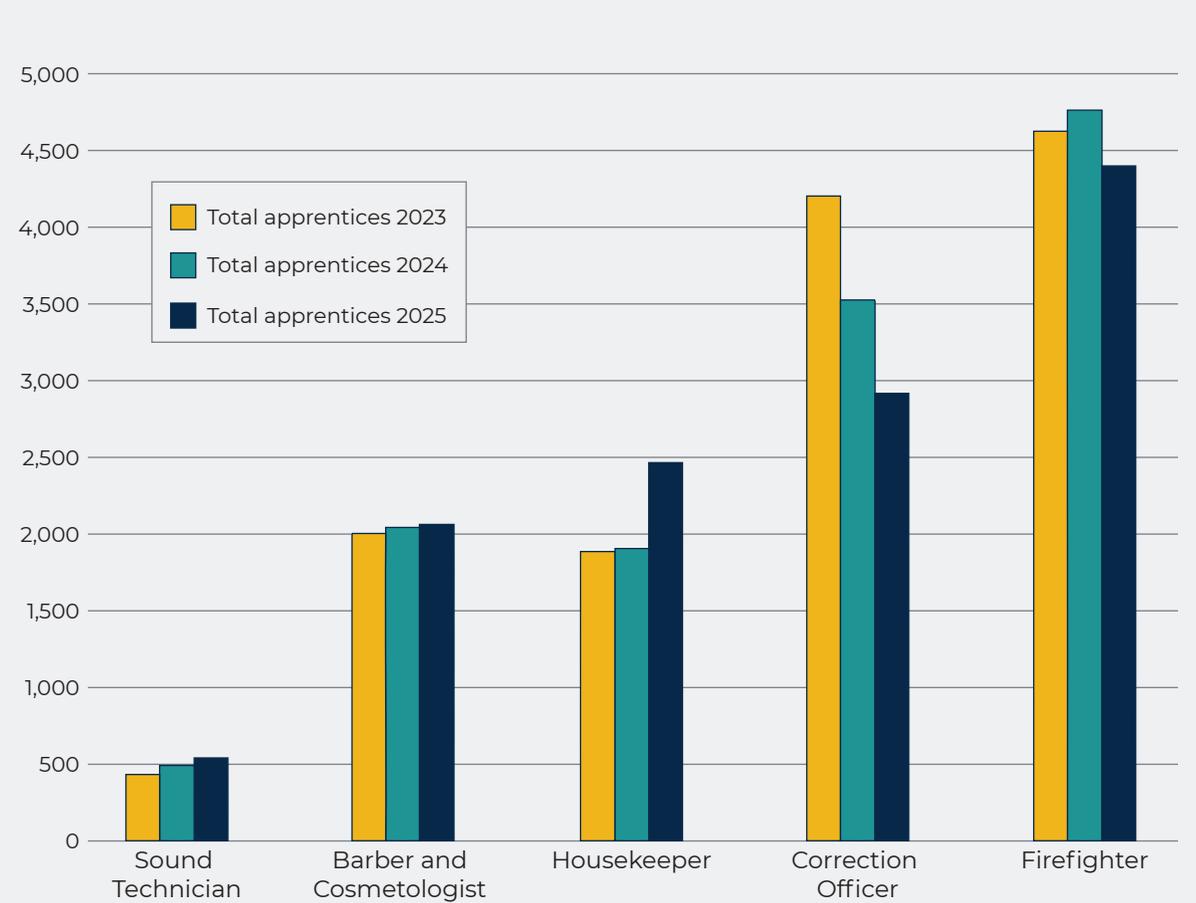
For the purposes of this fact sheet, we examined five occupations outside the industries receiving renewed attention in recent years: sound technicians, barbers and cosmetologists, housekeepers, corrections officers, and firefighters. To identify these occupations, we used DOL’s Registered Apprenticeship Partners Information Database System (RAPIDS) data to highlight a series of occupations that (1) had more than 500 active apprentices in federal fiscal year 2025, (2) are concentrated in industries outside construction, healthcare, and advanced manufacturing, and (3) have seen over 10 percent growth in enrollment over the past decade. After narrowing our search, we highlighted the five aforementioned exemplary occupations, representing high-demand occupations in a wide array of industries (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Active apprentices by industry, fiscal years 2015 and 2025



Source: ApprenticeshipUSA (2025)

Figure 2. Total apprentices by occupation, fiscal years 2023–2025





Sound technicians

Sound technicians assemble and operate sound equipment for live music, recording, and other productions (National Center for O*Net Development 2025e). Although sound technicians are still a small occupation by total employment (roughly 13,000 total), the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS n.d.) projects annual occupational openings of roughly 1,200 per year over the next decade. Enrollment in sound technician RAPs has grown along with worker demand in the occupation, with RAPIDS data showing 29 percent growth in enrollment since 2015 (DOL 2025a).

California is currently the only state with RAPs in this occupation, but these programs could serve as a model for other states. California's Department of Industrial Relations has worked with local unions and community colleges in Southern California to register several sound technician apprenticeships to help serve the region's vibrant entertainment industry. Flagship programs like the [Electrical Training Institute of San Diego & Imperial Counties](#) partner with [local community colleges](#) to provide a four-year program of on-the-job training under the supervision of a journeyman electrician and related technical instruction in a classroom setting. Although all the current 576 active registered apprentices in this occupation are concentrated in California, other states could look to the sound technician RAP as a leading example for expansion into arts and entertainment hubs such as Chicago, Nashville, Atlanta, and New York.



Barbers and cosmetologists

The number of barbers and cosmetologists has grown alongside the increasing number of RAPs in the personal services industry.² These occupations provide a range of hair-cutting and styling services, with barbers offering additional services focused on grooming and styling of facial hair. BLS (n.d.) data project strong growth for both occupations over the next decade—4.1 percent for barbers and 5.6 percent for cosmetologists. These figures correspond to estimated annual job openings of over 8,000 and 75,000, respectively. RAPs for both occupations have also expanded, with the number of active barber apprentices growing 58 percent since 2015 and the number of active cosmetologist apprentices growing a staggering 370 percent in the same span (DOL 2025a).

Trade unions and national intermediaries in the industry have helped register and grow apprenticeship pathways in recent years. Long-standing regional programs like the [Louisiana Barber Apprenticeship Program](#), sponsored by the [United Food and Commercial Workers Local 496](#), provide hands-on training and online classes in related technical instruction to prospective apprentices seeking their barber licenses. Federally registered programs like the [Atarashii Apprenticeship Program](#) offer cosmetologist training in 16 states, culminating in a nationally recognized credential as apprentices prepare for state licensure exams. The program partners with more than 100 employers nationwide to help place cosmetologists in salons following their licensure.



Housekeepers

Housekeepers perform cleaning duties to maintain commercial establishments (National Center for O*Net Development 2025c). BLS data from 2024 estimated a total of more than 850,000 employed housekeepers, highest of the occupations highlighted in this fact sheet (BLS n.d.). Although 10-year projected growth for this occupation is low (just 0.4 percent), the high turnover in this occupation contributes to an estimate of more than 190,000 job openings per year over the next decade. Housekeepers also represent one of the largest occupations in the hospitality industry by apprentice enrollment, with 2,460 active apprentices in the past fiscal year and nearly 15 percent growth since 2015 (DOL 2025a).

The hospitality industry has renewed efforts to strengthen the workforce through national and regional programs. National intermediary organizations such as the [American Hotel and Lodging Educational Institute](#) partner with dozens of hospitality firms nationwide to provide apprenticeships like the [Lodging Manager Apprentice program](#), which provides related technical instruction and on-the-job training to apprentices seeking entry-level housekeeping and front-desk training. Regional intermediaries such as the [Los Angeles Hospitality Training Academy](#) partner with local hotels and [hospitality worker unions](#) to deliver training like the [Room Attendant Apprenticeship program](#), bolstering the area's hospitality workforce.



Corrections officers

Corrections officers guard inmates in penal or rehabilitative institutions (National Center for O*Net Development 2025a). RAP enrollment among corrections officers has been consistent and high, with more than 2,500 active apprentices in each of the last three years (DOL 2025a). Although RAP growth has slowed in recent years, the occupation has grown 21 percent since 2015, and BLS (n.d.) data project ongoing demand of more than 30,000 annual job openings over the next decade.

Missouri has had particularly strong enrollment in RAPs designed to fill shortages of workers in their state corrections agencies. In 2019, a partnership between Missouri's state workforce, education, corrections, and apprenticeship agencies developed a corrections officer RAP and enrolled nearly 1,500 apprentices in its first year (DOL 2019). This one-year program helps strengthen the correctional workforce while offering trainees opportunities for on-the-job training, including in Missouri's new [Academy for Excellence](#) in Corrections, a former correctional center converted into a training facility.



Firefighters

Firefighters control and extinguish fires and respond to a range of emergency situations (National Center for O*Net Development 2025b). BLS (n.d.) data project steady occupational growth of 3.4 percent over the next decade, corresponding to roughly 27,000 annual job openings. However, recent firefighter shortages have contributed to high demand for new recruits. The number of active apprentices has grown by 221 percent over the past decade, including 4,387 active apprentices in the past fiscal year (DOL 2025a).

Although many state and local government agencies recruit and train firefighters, most recent apprenticeship enrollees (over 1,300 in fiscal year 2025) have been concentrated in national apprenticeship programs (DOL 2025a). Just this year, the [International Association of Fire Fighters](#) launched a federal RAP to help address a nationwide shortage of firefighters. The program aims to promote local apprenticeship partnerships by establishing federally recognized standards for firefighter training, including on-the-job training and related technical instruction. Similarly, programs like the U.S. Forest Service's [Wildland Firefighter Apprenticeship Program](#) recruit from across the country to address critical labor shortages, as states from Alaska to Texas face rising wildfire threats each year.

Takeaways

With strong [policy support](#) and [resources](#) for apprenticeship expansion, apprenticeships in industries beyond the traditional skilled trades are poised to continue their growth. As state workforce agencies, apprenticeship intermediaries, and employers strategize on how to support growth in these industries, they should consider how the apprenticeship model may be applied to new and emerging occupations. The programs highlighted here can be viewed as models for how the structured, work-based learning of apprenticeships can fill labor shortages, strengthen talent pipelines in growing industries, and drive regional economic growth, even in occupations not traditionally linked to apprenticeships.

For more information on RAPs, including how to register a new program, visit [apprenticeship.gov](#). To learn more on apprenticeship standards and programs for occupations like those listed above, visit the [National Apprenticeship Resource Hub](#) and [apprenticeshipstandards.org](#). To read more of Mathematica's research on registered apprenticeships, visit [mathematica.org](#).

Endnotes

¹ See Gardiner et al. (2021)

² Barbers and cosmetologists are classified under two distinct Standard Occupational Classification codes (39-5011 and 39-5012, respectively) but perform many of the same job functions (National Center for O*Net Development 2025d)

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