Diversifying the Solar Workforce Through Inclusive Apprenticeships

Devin Boyle, Josh Christianson, Alexander Winn

With the solar industry projected to add an additional 500,000 to 1.5 million workers by 2035, there is a growing need for a new talent pool to help fill the positions of tomorrow. An apprenticeship program that is designed to be inclusive of people with disabilities can help create a diverse talent pipeline of valued workers to fill this need.

The Partnership on Inclusive Apprenticeship (PIA) supports the workforce development community to better understand and design programs that are inclusive of everyone, including people with disabilities.

### THE INCLUSIVE TALENT POOL OPPORTUNITY

**A WIDER TALENT POOL:**

Only 29.1% of working-age adults with a disability are employed, compared with 70% of working-age adults without a disability. Nearly 11 million Americans could enter the labor force by 2035, there is a growing need for a new talent pool to help fill the positions of tomorrow. An apprenticeship program that is designed to be inclusive of people with disabilities can help create a diverse talent pipeline of valued workers to fill this need.

### THE VALUE OF INCLUSIVE APPRENTICESHIP

**SIGNIFICANT RETURN ON INVESTMENT:**

In 2020, the average Registered Apprenticeship Program yielded a 170% return on investment for North Carolina employers. Companies that embraced best practices for employing and supporting workers with disabilities averaged 28% higher revenue, doubled their net income, and attained 30% higher profit margins.

**LOWER TURNOVER AND REDUCED TRAINING COSTS:**

Apprentices have significantly lower turnover than college graduates which means employers spend fewer resources finding and training new hires. At four Walgreens locations, employers spend fewer resources finding and training new hires. At four Walgreens locations, the three-year average turnover rate was 48% higher for team members without a disability, compared to team members with a disability.

### A PATH FORWARD: STEPS TO CREATING AN INCLUSIVE APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

1. **EXPLORE HOW APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS CAN HELP PREPARE THE FUTURE SOLAR WORKFORCE BY LEARNING MORE ABOUT THE VALUE OF INCLUSIVE APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS.**

2. **BUILD A FOUNDATION TO CREATE AN APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM, MAKING SURE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF FUNDING SOURCES AVAILABLE IN MANY STATES THAT CAN HELP BUSINESSES IN DEVELOPING PROGRAMS, ADOPTING BEST PRACTICES FOR INCLUSIVE HIRING AND TRAINING, AND FUNDING WORKPLACE ACCOMMODATIONS FOR JOB SEEKERS WITH DISABILITIES.**

3. **PARTNER WITH LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT LEADERS THAT CAN HELP CONNECT APPRENTICES AND EMPLOYERS, INCLUDING COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGES, COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS, LABOR-MANAGEMENT PARTNERSHIPS, WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARDS, CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE, AND INDUSTRY ASSOCIATIONS.**

4. **REGISTER AN APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM WITH A STATE APPRENTICESHIP AGENCY OR THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR.**

5. **RECRUIT TALENTED CAREER SEEKERS WHILE ENSURING IT’S DONE IN A WAY THAT IS INCLUSIVE OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES.**

Learn how to put these steps into action at InclusiveApprenticeship.org

### PARTICIPATION IN THE WORKFORCE

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**REFERENCES:**

1. National Renewable Energy Laboratory, 2021
3. US Department of Labor, 2021
4. ApprenticeshipNC, 2020
5. Accenture, 2018
6. US Department of Labor, 2018
8. The Partnership on Inclusive Apprenticeship (PIA) is funded by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) and managed by Wheelhouse Group. The material contained in this document does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Labor or any of its agencies. The mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations is not an endorsement by the U.S. Government, U.S. Department of Labor, or the Office of Disability Employment Policy.