

# How Coalitions Build Systems:



## A CASE STUDY OF IDAHO'S REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP EXPANSION EFFORT

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### **About the State Apprenticeship Expansion Case Studies**

The apprenticeship expansion case studies document the growth, successful implementation, and key expansion strategies from two states, Idaho and Maine, offering scalable strategies and promising practices.

The case study reports on Idaho and Maine, along with executive summaries of those reports, are available on the [Apprenticeship Promising Practices: Expanding Registered Apprenticeship Systems page](#).



## Introduction

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Since 2016, Idaho has achieved a 463 percent increase in the number of Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs) in the State and grown the number of apprentices participating in those programs by 120 percent. This growth has been supported by \$12.6 million in U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) grants.

This case study chronicles Idaho's experience, focusing on three strategies that helped the State adapt apprenticeship to the needs of new companies and industries and engage students and workers from underrepresented communities in apprenticeship opportunities.

## Background

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To strengthen the role of states as key drivers of Registered Apprenticeship expansion, the USDOL's Office of Apprenticeship (OA) has awarded over \$438 million in grants to states and U.S. territories since 2016. States are investing these resources in quality programs and raising the profile of apprenticeship as a talent solution within their education and workforce development systems. They are also building the partnerships and infrastructure necessary to diversify, scale, and sustain a modern Registered Apprenticeship system in the United States.

Although state strategies, approaches, and outcomes vary, states that have achieved significant expansion of their Registered Apprenticeship system over the last seven years have done so by focusing their efforts in [five key areas](#):

- State leadership and policy
- Outreach and business engagement
- Capacity to develop, register, and support programs
- Diverse apprentice pipelines
- Alignment with career pathways and post-secondary education

The elements encourage the development of effective programs and robust systems that are integrated in the broader workforce, education, and economic development landscape. States attentive to these elements have realized success in their efforts to deliver value for apprentices, employers, and communities alike. Case studies provide an opportunity to illustrate these elements in practice and in the context of states' own apprenticeship expansion goals.

This case study examines how Idaho used federal grant funds to enhance the capacity of its partners to leverage shared networks and resources to support an apprenticeship system that engages job seekers and meets the evolving workforce needs of employers.

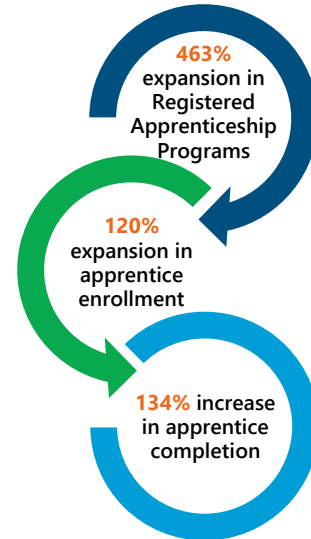
### **Collaborative Leadership in Action**

Collaborative leadership—the ability to simultaneously share power and inspire action—is a common thread in successful apprenticeship expansion efforts. The leadership team of Apprenticeship Idaho has embraced strategies and practices that have allowed them to forge a high-performing coalition in pursuit of apprenticeship system change. Throughout this report, we call out several characteristics that Apprenticeship Idaho leaders exhibited to make those traits tangible for other workforce leaders who may wish to adopt them.

# Apprenticeship in Idaho

In 2016, apprenticeships in Idaho were concentrated primarily in the skilled trades. The Idaho apprenticeship system was overseen entirely by USDOL OA staff, with limited involvement by the State, and little if any connection to the State’s workforce development and education systems.

Today, more than six years later, the system has grown. The State has created a robust system that collaborates with and enhances the capacity of the USDOL OA staff. Additionally, Apprenticeship Idaho, a coalition of state agencies and partners, is working to integrate Registered Apprenticeship into the broader workforce, education, and economic development systems in the State. This growth has been fueled in part by over \$12.6 million in federal grants to the [Idaho Department of Labor](#) (IDOL), which IDOL has used to connect communities of Idahoans with talent and desire to work with employers who are seeking to meet workforce needs.



**Lead Agency and Structure.** IDOL convenes a coalition of state agencies and partners. IDOL staff support program registration through the USDOL OA.

**Key Implementing Partners.** IDOL partners with several state agencies, including the [Idaho Division of Career and Technical Education](#) (IDCTE) and the [Idaho Workforce Development Council](#) (IWDC). The IWDC reports directly to the Governor’s Office and membership includes representatives from industry, labor unions, the Idaho state legislature, and key state agency partners including IDOL, the [Idaho State Department of Education](#), the [Idaho Division of Vocational Rehabilitation](#) (IDVR), the [Idaho Business for Education](#), and IDCTE.

**Growth.** In the fall of 2016, the Idaho apprenticeship system consisted of 121 RAPs and 1,630 active apprentices. In 2022, the State had 225 RAPs and 2,962 apprentices across a range of occupations and sectors.

**Funding.** Idaho has received a total of \$12.6 million in federal grant funding, as shown in Exhibit 1 below.

## Exhibit 1. Funding Sources

Grant	Agency	Year	Amount
USDOL State Apprenticeship Expansion (SAE) grant	IDOL	2016	\$2,242,992
USDOL Apprenticeship State Expansion (ASE) grant	IDOL	2019	\$1,331,490
USDOL Youth Apprenticeship Readiness grant (YARG)	IWDC	2020	\$2,490,630
USDOL Closing the Skills Gap (CSG) grant	IDCTE	2020	\$1,998,139
USDOL State Apprenticeship Expansion, Equity, and Innovation (SAEEI) grant	IDOL	2021	\$4,250,000
USDOL State Apprenticeship Expansion Formula (SAEF) grant	IDOL	2023	\$373,520

## IDAHO'S APPRENTICESHIP EXPANSION SUCCESS FACTORS

Idaho apprenticeship leaders attribute the State's expansion success to efforts in three key areas:

- **Apprenticeship Idaho coalition:** Mid- and high-level staff across several state agencies meet regularly to strategize on apprenticeship expansion efforts. This ensures consistent information and guidance reaches employers, sponsors, and apprentices.
- **Streamlined registration process:** Before connecting with USDOL OA for registration, all potential sponsors meet with one of the apprenticeship coordinators at IDOL who help draft strong program standards and make sure administrative systems are in place.
- **Sector development targeting group sponsors:** IDOL prioritizes industry associations, large employers, and institutions who may serve as sponsors for smaller employers spread out across the State.

# Coalition-Based Coordination

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Employers in Idaho seeking a high-quality talent development solution are served by Apprenticeship Idaho, a coalition of state agencies and federal and state partners that provide seamless services to employers and apprentices across the State. Formed by IDOL, IWDC, and IDCTE in 2020, the Apprenticeship Idaho Coalition seeks to enable young people to become skilled professionals in the industry of their choice, support businesses in accessing a stable pool of skilled talent, and engage local communities in growing the Idaho economy. The development of this coalition and the quality services it provides were seven years in the making.

## Collaborative Leadership in Action

### Embracing openness and collaboration

IDOL promotes a culture of shared ownership of Apprenticeship Idaho across coalition partners to build enthusiasm and capacity for Registered Apprenticeship expansion across multiple contexts.

**Roots in Workforce Development.** The coalition that would become Apprenticeship Idaho has its roots in the IWDC. Formed by, and reporting directly to, the Governor’s Office in 2017 as part of the State’s implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the IWDC was empowered to manage the State’s workforce development system, advance strategic workforce initiatives, and cultivate partnerships across the workforce and business community. Members of the council soon narrowed their focus on one aspect of their critical mission: building a coordinated system that allowed distinct state agencies to leverage one another’s resources, expertise, and networks in service of Idahoans and employers alike.

Workforce leaders recognized that, while Idaho did have a handful of union-backed RAPs in the building trades, most apprenticeship programs were unregistered and operated by small, non-union employers. As federal investments in apprenticeship expansion in Idaho grew, leaders from three Idaho state agencies—IDOL, IDCTE, and the newly established IWDC—were able to leverage this commitment to coordination to address two goals: 1) ensuring that increased apprenticeship outreach did not proliferate duplicative employer contacts, and 2) encouraging businesses operating in both traditional and new apprenticeship sectors to register their programs through USDOL OA.

## PARTNER ALIGNMENT & PURPOSE

Beginning in 2016, Idaho's workforce and education agencies received a series of USDOL grants, each with a focus on apprenticeship expansion that supplemented the limited state resources to support apprenticeship.

To manage these grants effectively, agency leaders from IDOL, IWDC, and IDCTE used a collective action approach to form a coalition of apprenticeship system partners. The coalition focused on a range of interconnected strategies that aligned their agencies around a common purpose, which included strong interagency coordination, development of a brand, and coordinated business engagement. Success with these efforts allowed the coalition to take on new expansion approaches and streamlined processes that accelerated apprenticeship growth in the State.

**Leveraging Interagency Coordination.** IDOL is the backbone organization of the coalition, a result of its State Apprenticeship Expansion (SAE) grant award in 2016 and its central role in the State's apprenticeship landscape. In this role, IDOL took on logistical and hosting responsibilities for the coalition. Other organizations subsequently joined, including [Idaho Business for Education](#), [IDVR](#), [Idaho Division of Veterans Services](#) (IDVS), and the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations' (AFL-CIO's) [Idaho Workers Opportunity Network](#). All coalition members held a vested interest in the development of an apprenticeship system in Idaho and agreed to contribute staffing resources, expertise, and relevant services.

### Collaborative Leadership in Action

#### Adopting a wide-angle point of view

IDOL leaders recognize that building a statewide apprenticeship system requires a critical mass of sponsors, system partners and apprenticeship champions. They direct staff to focus on addressing pain points rather than specific grant metrics or outcomes.

Since 2020, the group has met biweekly to coordinate, strategize, and develop internal processes to support program growth and efficient grants management. Additionally, a bimonthly meeting open to external partners and champions provides a forum for partners to cross-train, share grant updates, and build the coalition. This collaboration has resulted in tangible

outputs including a shared data management system, valuable external products such as a sponsor journey map, and the development of the Apprenticeship Idaho brand. Through these coalition meetings, IDOL, IWDC, and IDCTE aligned their various federal grant activities and linked the technical assistance (TA) they received in connection with their multiple USDOL grants. This effectively established a panel of subject matter experts who can assist any of the individual agencies or apprenticeship partners.

The strength of the intra-coalition coordination helped build the trust that was the foundation for the collective action that has been the hallmark of apprenticeship expansion in Idaho.

**Creating a Unified Brand.** Internally, collaboration has helped to ease the administrative burden for Idaho’s lean state strategies. To broaden the appeal of apprenticeship externally—to employers, sponsors, legislators, the Governor’s Office, apprentices, etc.—the coalition launched Apprenticeship Idaho as the single brand identity.



Under this name and logo, coalition members can issue unified public-facing messages including advertisements, press releases, requests for proposals (RFPs), and external engagement targeted to employers, apprentices, and others. The unified brand helps simplify communications and partnership building.

**Coordinating Business Engagement.** Coalition partners consider the cultivation and curation of apprenticeship sponsors fundamental to growing apprenticeship in the State, meeting grant goals, and producing grant deliverables. The partners recognized they needed system infrastructure to coordinate and streamline sponsor engagement across the agencies. Under IDOL’s leadership and with startup funding under the 2016 SAE grant, the coalition set up a customer relationship management (CRM) system to allow all partners to

access shared information on sponsor engagement as they work on different aspects of training, employment, and workplace supports for apprenticeship and mentors. This system helps ensure employer sponsors are not overwhelmed by outreach efforts from different state agencies. Furthermore, this system ensures employers/sponsors do not get lost as agencies refer them to IDOL for registration, and once registered, that timely support is provided to these sponsors to recruit and support apprentices.

**Collaborative Leadership in Action**

**Cultivating apprenticeship champions**

Expanding apprenticeship takes a coalition and coordination: IDOL leaders report that the only way to reach sponsors is to connect with other agencies’ employer networks—and share their own.

**“If you start having five or six people reach out to one contact regarding Registered Apprenticeships, there’s no quicker way to kill a program.”**

Michelle Stout  
Apprenticeship Coordinator, IDOL



## SUCCESS FACTORS OF APPRENTICESHIP IDAHO COALITION

As other states are looking to expand their coalitions to grow apprenticeship, Idaho has found that high-level collaboration enables downstream progress. Membership includes agency decision makers. Activities and key accomplishments are shown in Exhibit 2.

Exhibit 2. Success Factors of Apprenticeship Idaho Coalition

	Primary Goal	Key Activities/Uses	Individuals/Entities Involved
<b>Biweekly Leadership Meetings</b>	Conducting strategic planning and coordination	Creating system infrastructure, processes, and procedures; coordinating and compounding the impact of TA by aligning activities across grants	IDOL, IWDC, IDCTE
<b>Bimonthly Stakeholder Meetings</b>	Messaging, cross-training, and momentum building	Cross-training and networking between coalition partners; providing updates on grant progress	IDOL (Lead), IWDC, IDCTE, AFL-CIO, the Idaho Department of Correction (IDOC), IDVR, IDVS, joint apprenticeship and training committees, American Job Centers, community colleges, workforce training centers, etc.
<b>Shared Data Management System (HubSpot)</b>	Sharing data through a co-managed customer relationship management (CRM) system	Tracking sponsor engagement from outreach through registration and implementation	IDOL (Lead), IWDC, IDCTE Limited Access: IDVR
<b>Co-Design of Sponsor Journey Map</b>	Illustrating the registration process for system partners and champions	Training partner staff; communicating with prospective or existing sponsors	IDOL, IWDC Input from coalition members
<b>Apprenticeship Idaho Website &amp; Outward-Facing Communication</b>	Providing a “front door” to all things apprenticeship	Posting external messages; sharing unified information and guidance on apprenticeship	IDOL, IWDC Input from AFL-CIO, IDOC, IDVR, IDVS
<b>Shared Branding: Apprenticeship Idaho</b>	Presenting a unified message as a single “entity”	Sharing press releases, RFPs, and social media announcements	IDOL, IWDC Input from coalition members

# Streamlined Registration Process

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As the coalition increased its business engagement around apprenticeship, they encountered resistance based on two beliefs commonly held by employers in the State. First, employers believed that RAPs were only for certain occupations. Second, they also thought that RAPs were bureaucratically burdensome.

To counteract this reputation, coalition members sought to design a system that provides an efficient customer-centered registration experience for businesses. The result is a system that streamlines registration and eases the burden of work on sponsors, who do not need to maintain distinct relationships with each partner agency. Further, the discrete support for program registration increases the efficiency of the USDOL OA staff, who can focus on apprenticeship support and oversight activities.

**“We need to make this a seamless process for Idaho’s employers and the apprentices we’re serving under these grants. They don’t need to know which grant is serving them. They just need to know that they’re going to get the help.”**

Wendi Secrist  
Executive Director, IWDC

## INNOVATION IN ACTION

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### Demonstrating Employer ROI

When Idaho looked for opportunities to grow its Registered Apprenticeship system, it saw an opportunity in the many unregistered programs in the skilled trades. Those programs were unregistered because: a) state policy provides a pathway to journey worker status outside the Registered Apprenticeship system, and b) employers did not see value in the Registered Apprenticeship system. Idaho worked to address this employer perception by streamlining the registration process and using its coalition to leverage resources and demonstrate a return on investment (ROI) for employers participating in the Registered Apprenticeship system. This effort paid off, and Idaho was able to register 251 new skilled trades programs.

**Establishing clear roles.** Although the funding from multiple grants made such a redesign possible, coalition partners also needed to guard against the potential fragmentation of services that could have arisen from five different grant teams each recruiting businesses and registering programs separately from each other. The team settled on a solution that focused on assigning distinct roles to different actors where it made sense and on sharing roles with clearly delineated handoffs.

**Collaborative Leadership in Action**

**Cultivating next-generation leaders**

IDOL leaders established a trusting relationship with USDOL OA early and then directed staff to proactively screen and prepare programs for registration, turning their support staff into apprenticeship system experts and easing USDOL OA’s workload.

**Managing relationships.** Under this approach, business engagement staff from partner agencies conduct initial outreach and establish the primary relationship with employers. Once an employer agrees to sponsor an apprentice, partner staff make a warm handoff directly to IDOL. The warm handoff helps to prepare programs for registration and sponsors for implementation. Once IDOL have worked with sponsors to develop their program standards, IDOL sends the standards forward to USDOL OA for approval. IDOL then reconnects the employer with the original agency.

**SPOTLIGHT ON IDOL’S INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIP WITH USDOL OA**

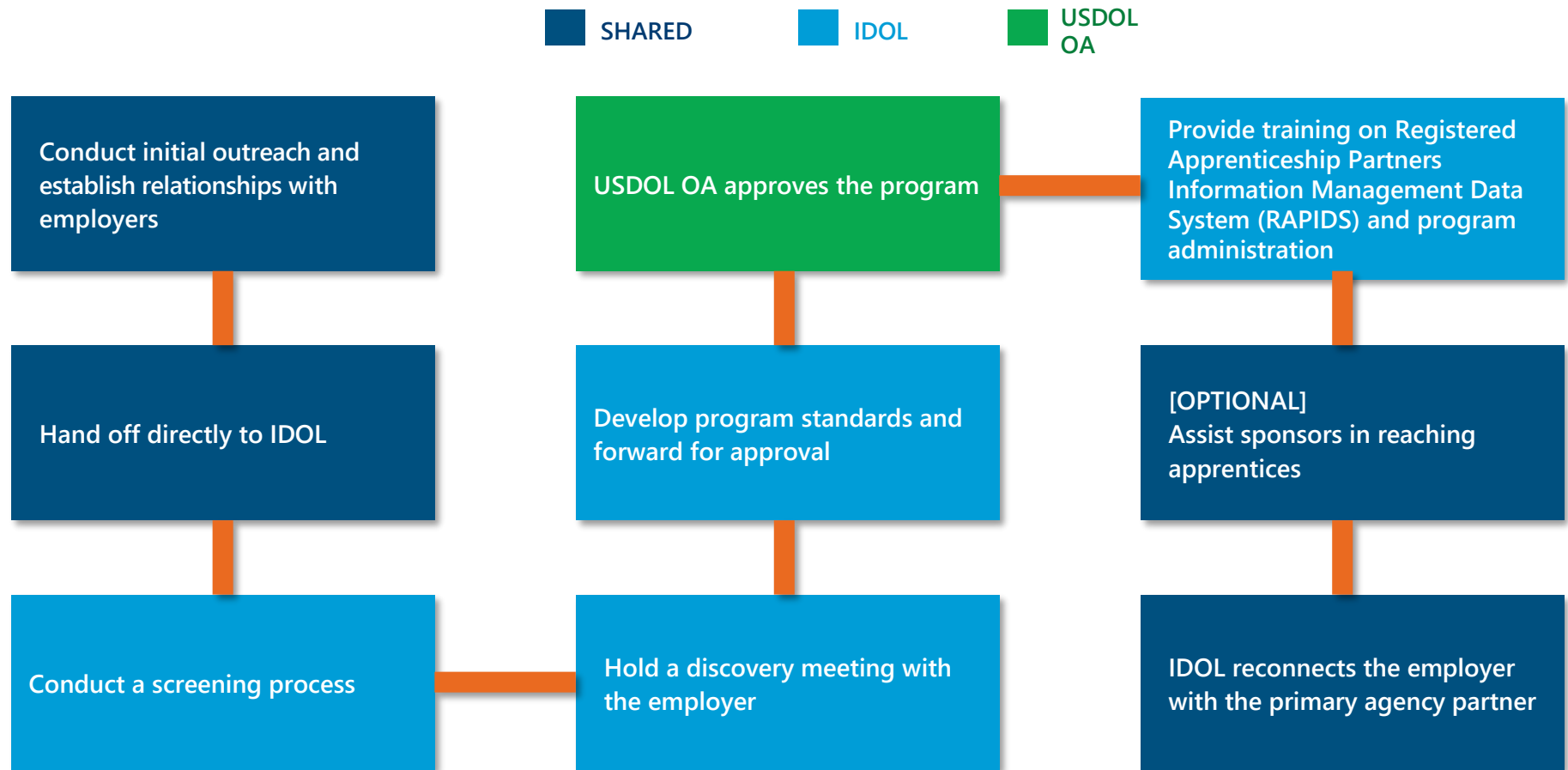
IDOL’s streamlined registration process enables OA to drastically increase its capacity to register and support programs in the State. The OA State Director, the sole OA staff member in the State, is tasked with registering all programs, monitoring program quality across the State, and cultivating new programs and sponsors. IDOL recognized that rapid apprenticeship expansion would require supporting and enhancing OA’s capacity. Therefore, IDOL proactively engaged with the OA State Director. Working together, they found specific actions that would help OA conduct its registration and oversight responsibilities more effectively.

IDOL Action	Impact/Effect
Establish regular check-ins; share ideas, ask for guidance, offer support	Well-established trust; OA supportive of state initiatives
Help sponsors develop quality standards before meeting with OA	Average approval time reduced from one to three weeks to two to five days
Monitor and provide TA on RAPIDS data management to sponsors	More accurate data; shorter OA program review meetings

## IDAHO'S REGISTRATION PROCESS

IDOL created a formal and efficient program registration process—one that required trust and coordination with USDOL OA and coalition partner agencies. This process is captured through a shared data tracking system to which all coalition partners have access. An overview of the process, noting IDOL, USODL OA, and shared activities, is included in Exhibit 3.

Exhibit 3. Idaho's Registration Process



At the heart of Idaho’s redesign is the development of three different staff positions that each focus on different aspects of the program development and registration process.

<b>Program Development and Registration Coordinator</b> <i>Idaho Department of Labor</i>	<b>Data Management Coordinator</b> <i>Idaho Department of Labor</i>	<b>Apprentice Recruitment Coordinator</b> <i>Idaho Division of Vocational Rehabilitation</i>
<p>The Program Development and Registration Coordinator uses the <a href="#">Apprenticeship Idaho Toolkit</a> to communicate apprenticeship benefits and requirements and review the new sponsor journey map with a potential employer/sponsor. The Coordinator then holds a discovery meeting to assess the employer’s/sponsor’s capacity to administer an apprenticeship program and finalizes understanding of the specific training needs. Once the discovery meeting is complete, the Coordinator helps the employer/sponsor develop program standards and submits these to USDOL OA for review and approval.</p>	<p>After program standards are approved, the Data Management Coordinator conducts a training on program administration—including data entry through the Registered Apprenticeship Partners Information Management Data System (RAPIDS)—and helps create job postings. The Data Management Coordinator has administrative access and provides ongoing oversight of RAPIDS data for all RAPs. A provision in the sponsor contract grants IDOL access to the sponsor’s RAPIDS account, thus allowing the Data Management Coordinator the ability to oversee the data and make updates as needed. Through this process, IDOL can flag programs that become dormant and confirm reported data are logical and accurate.</p>	<p>All newly registered programs are offered support in drafting and posting job descriptions and navigating the State’s network of coalition agencies and partners. Sponsored by IDVR, a certified vocational rehabilitation counselor with expertise in inclusive and accessible practices is assigned to assist with recruiting apprentices. While apprentices are recruited from across coalition partner programs and the broader workforce system, the Apprenticeship Recruitment Coordinator from IDVR gives employers/sponsors an introduction to an inclusive way of listing their opportunities.</p>

**INNOVATION IN ACTION**

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**DEIA Innovation**

Key to the State’s diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) apprenticeship strategy is a biweekly training session where new sponsors, dormant sponsors, and existing sponsors looking for system reorientation are invited and (re)introduced to the coordination team and offered support for apprentice recruitment—a role staffed by IDVR. This arrangement provides IDVR direct access to RAPs for which IDVR consumers may qualify. Conversely, program sponsors have direct access to a DEIA expert who can assist with recruitment, accommodations, program refinements, and apprentice retention.

IDVR’s partnership in this role offers the additional benefit of sustained formula funding (that the state receives for Vocational Rehabilitation programs) to support the State’s apprenticeship equity goals and mitigate the ebb and flow of other grant-funded expansion activities.

# Group Sponsors and New Sector Development

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Idaho's strategies for increasing the number of RAPs in the State and expansion into new sectors are shaped by its state culture and geography. Apprenticeship Idaho focused on large sector-focused employers and trade associations to act as an intermediary or "group sponsor." As intermediary organizations, the large employers and trade associations serve as a centralized sponsor for Idaho's smaller, geographically remote communities and association partners. In this way, smaller employers may hire apprentices without the administrative burden of managing the apprenticeship program.

## "GROUP SPONSOR" MULTIPLIER EFFECT

With a small number of state apprenticeship staff, advocates needed a way to reach employers across a large, mostly rural state. By focusing on regionally based employers, large employers and trade associations can serve as sponsoring intermediaries. IDOL and other apprenticeship advocates are able to leverage these preexisting relationships to reach smaller employers and attract employers in new industries. Engagement with industry associations has been particularly effective for finding sponsors for small employer and worksite placements for apprentices. The [Idaho Manufacturing Alliance](#) (with 200+ member employers) and the [Idaho Community Health Center Association](#), for example, both serve as centralized sponsoring organizations. This "group sponsor" strategy has helped coalition partners promote apprenticeship across the State and enabled IDOL to reach employers reluctant or unable to engage with government agencies directly.

## GROW-YOUR-OWN APPROACH IN ISOLATED COMMUNITIES

In communities with the limited resources available, apprenticeship offers a "grow-your-own" approach to finding talent that resonates with sponsors, partners, and apprentices. Idaho is a rural state with vast stretches of land populated with small towns experiencing a youth exodus and aging infrastructure. There are also five federally recognized tribes located in the state: the Shoshone-Bannock, the Shoshone-Paiute, the Coeur d'Alene, the Kootenai, and the Nez Perce.

For Idaho workforce agencies, engagement with several tribes is a long-term investment in relationship- and trust-building. Agency leaders made early inroads through meetings with the tribal councils, invitations for new or existing tribally controlled training programs to apply for specific workforce training grants,

development and sharing of [tribally oriented answers to apprenticeship frequently asked questions](#), and ongoing engagement through tribal liaisons and workforce system and community college navigators. Engagement efforts with the Nez Perce are now bearing fruit: the tribe, acting as a RAP intermediary sponsor, is actively collaborating with local employers to attract apprentices. As of May 2023, they have 15 apprentices working within 2 occupations: construction craft laborer and carpentry.

## INTERMEDIARIES DRIVE GROWTH IN NEW SECTORS

For many rural communities, sector associations and public service providers—such as healthcare providers and rural water agencies—represent the largest regional employer. Idaho is prioritizing apprenticeship expansion to both tribal and rural communities through these employer networks. In essence, these providers serve as sector intermediaries and apprenticeship advocates, helping the State grow programs rapidly.

The [Idaho Community Health Center Association](#) serves as the apprenticeship sponsor and partners with regional community colleges to serve apprentices within those communities through dental assistant and community health worker apprenticeship programs. IWDC, through its [Idaho Launch](#) program, enabled the Idaho Community Health Center Association to pay for on-the-job apprentice training in partnership with their local community colleges.

[The Idaho Rural Water Association](#) (IRWA) is an association of water and wastewater facilities operating in small towns and communities with populations under 10,000 people. The association sponsors multiple apprenticeships as well as classroom pre-apprenticeship programs to upskill incumbent workers, assisting local agencies with growing expertise internally. To meet the needs of Idaho's widely dispersed population, IRWA delivers related instruction virtually while apprentices complete their on-the-job training within their communities; this practice is critical to support engagement from geographically dispersed communities.

## Focus on the Future

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The work ahead for IDOL and partners in the Apprenticeship Idaho coalition will involve continuing the intermediary strategy to reach high-need sectors and communities. The Idaho Division of Human Resources and the Idaho State Board of Education are leading by example in this regard. The [passage of H0016](#) in 2023 by the state legislature, a move promoted by IWDC leadership, enables the State to alter its classification system so that state agencies may hire and sponsor apprentices. These new hires will help to fill a critical shortfall in state government and education districts.

Ultimately, leaders from IDOL and other partner state agencies are building the core components of an apprenticeship system that can outlast federal funding cycles and endure despite the absence of dedicated state spending. The coalition structure diversifies the potential resources available to support Idaho's apprenticeship work and offers an existing avenue for previously siloed agencies, to integrate more fully into broader workforce initiatives.



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