



Industry Recognized Apprenticeship Program Standards Recognition Entity Small Business Compliance Guide

Guidance to Explain How a Small-Entity Standards Recognition Entity Can Ensure Compliance with the Department of Labor’s Final Rule Establishing a Framework for Industry-Recognized Apprenticeship Programs, 85 Fed. Reg. 14294 (March 11, 2020)

This publication is for general information only. The U.S. Department of Labor’s regulations at 29 C.F.R. 29, subpart B are the controlling source for information relating to Industry Recognized Apprenticeship Programs.

This document does not have the force and effect of law and is not meant to bind the public in any way. This document is intended only to provide clarity to the public regarding existing requirements under the law or agency policies.

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I. Introduction

On March 11, 2020, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) published a [final rule](#) establishing a regulatory framework for a new type of apprenticeship model: Industry-Recognized Apprenticeship Programs (IRAPs).¹ The IRAP model supplements the existing registered apprenticeship system with a flexible, industry-led model—one that will be capable of rapidly increasing the availability of apprenticeships in emerging, high-growth sectors. The IRAP final rule stemmed from the 2017 Executive Order, “Expanding Apprenticeships in America,” which directed DOL to expand apprenticeship opportunities in America.

The IRAP final rule established a process for DOL’s Office of Apprenticeship (OA) to recognize qualified, third-party Standards Recognition Entities (SREs), which will in turn evaluate and recognize IRAPs. The regulations governing this process are found in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) at [29 CFR part 29, subpart B](#). These regulations and the IRAP final rule describe what entities may become SREs, the responsibilities and requirements for SREs, and how OA will oversee SREs. The IRAP final rule also described the standards of high-quality apprenticeship programs that SREs will recognize.

This Small Entity Compliance Guide will assist small-entities interested in becoming SREs in complying with the IRAP final rule.² It explains the obligations and responsibilities of SREs under the IRAP final rule.

II. What is an SRE?

An SRE is a third-party entity recognized by DOL as qualified to recognize IRAPs. SREs are trusted workforce development leaders in their industry(ies). An entity is qualified to be recognized as an SRE if it demonstrates the following:

- SREs must have the expertise to set competency-based standards, through a consensus-based process involving industry experts, for the requisite training, structure, and curricula for apprenticeship programs in the industry(ies) or occupational area(s) in which they seek to be an SRE.
- SREs must have the capacity and quality assurance processes and procedures to ensure IRAPs comply with 29 CFR 29.22(a)(4), which details the DOL standards, including safety, compensation, and quality, with which IRAPs must comply.
- SREs must have the resources to operate as an SRE for a 5-year period.

¹ *Apprenticeship Programs, Labor Standards for Registration, Amendment of Regulations; Final Rule*, 85 Fed. Reg. 14294 (Mar. 11, 2020) (hereinafter “IRAP final rule”).

² See Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act, Pub. L. No. 104-121, § 212(a).

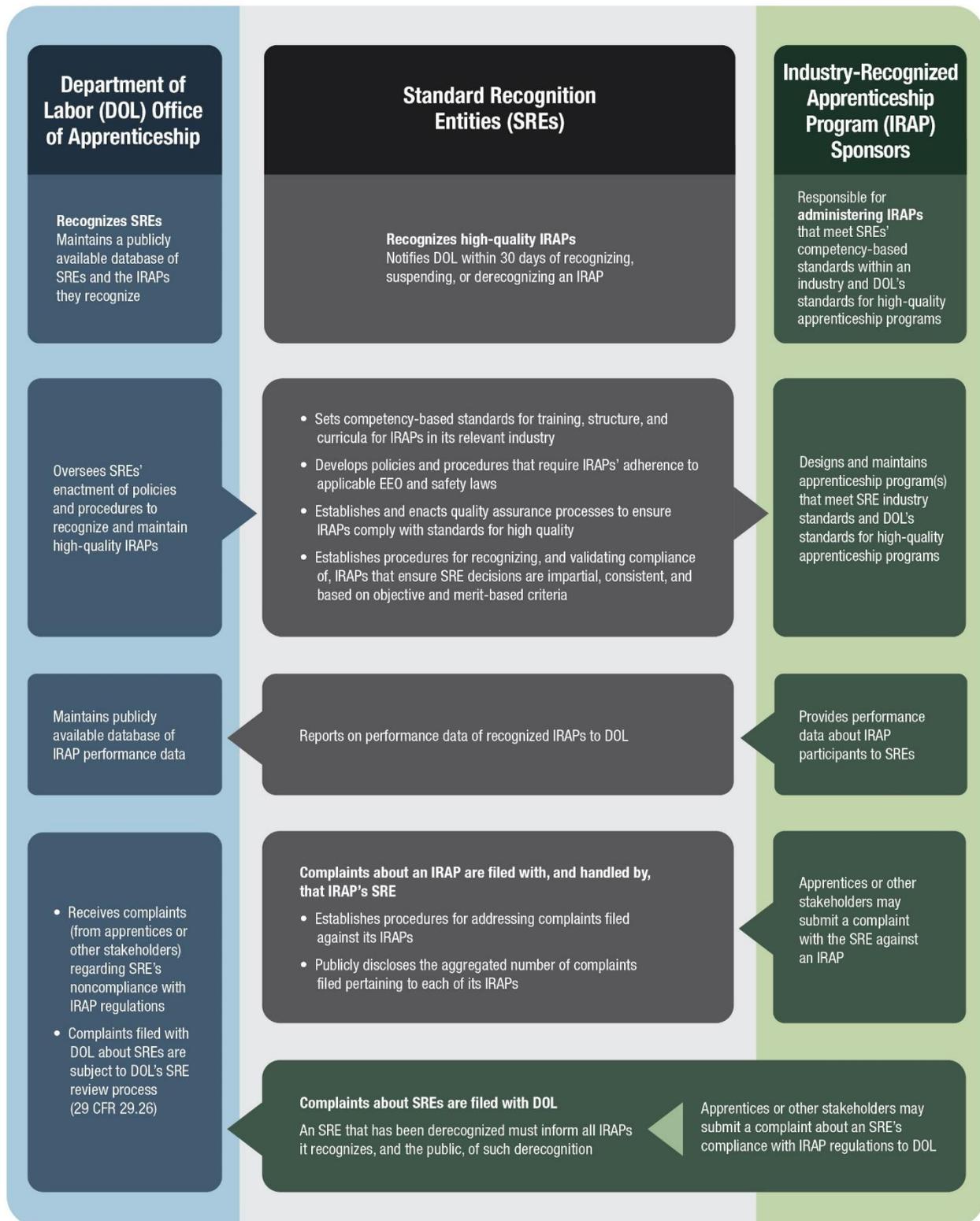
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- SREs must demonstrate impartiality by disclosing partners who will be engaged in recognition activities and describing their roles, including their relationships with subsidiaries. SREs may recognize an IRAP internal to their organization (i.e., SREs may serve as both a recognition entity and an IRAP program sponsor) as long as they develop and adhere to policies and procedures to mitigate potential conflicts of interest.
- SREs must be in good standing with the U.S. Federal Government. They cannot be suspended or debarred from doing business with the federal government.

Key responsibilities of SREs include the ability to recognize high quality IRAPs; notify OA within 30 days when they have recognized, suspended, or derecognized an IRAP; provide program and performance data to OA in a timely manner; develop policies and procedures that require IRAPs' adherence to applicable Federal, State, and local laws pertaining to EEO and reflect comprehensive outreach strategies to reach diverse populations, and to establish policies and procedures for recognizing, and validating compliance of, programs that ensure that SRE decisions are impartial, consistent, and based on objective and merit-based criteria.

Figure 1 below illustrates the roles, responsibilities, and the relationships between DOL's OA, SREs, and IRAPs in the execution of the IRAP model of apprenticeship.

Figure 1. DOL, SRE, and IRAP Sponsor Roles and Responsibilities



For information on becoming an IRAP sponsor, please review the IRAP Factsheet at https://www.apprenticeship.gov/sites/default/files/IRAP_Sponsor_Fact_Sheet.pdf. Prospective IRAPs apply directly to an SRE according to the SRE's process.

III. Eligibility for Becoming a Standards Recognition Entity

The following is a non-exhaustive list of entities that DOL determined to be particularly well-suited to become SREs (see 29 CFR 29.20(a)(1)-(9)):

- Trade, industry, and employer groups or associations;
- Corporations and other organized entities;
- Educational institutions, such as universities or community colleges;
- State and local government agencies or entities;
- Non-profit organizations;
- Unions;
- Joint labor-management organizations;
- Certification or accreditation bodies or entities for a profession or industry; or
- A consortium or partnership of these entities.

Entities seeking to become SREs should review the eligibility criteria below to determine whether they have the organizational capacity, the expertise, and the resources to be recognized by DOL.

A. Eligibility Criteria

Entities considering whether to apply for DOL recognition should determine whether they meet the following eligibility criteria.

Entities seeking to be SREs should possess expertise in the occupations for which they seek recognition from DOL. SREs will leverage this expertise to set competency-based standards of apprenticeship for the training, structure, and curricula that the SRE determines to be necessary for high quality IRAPs to effectively train apprentices in a given occupation. An SRE must establish such standards using industry experts and must demonstrate the qualifications of its experts and explain the process they will use to develop standards. The standards set by an SRE must be competency based, meaning that each apprentice's skill acquisition must be determined through the apprentice's successful demonstration of acquired skills and knowledge. Setting standards for training successful apprentices is not new to many entities. Entities that developed, or are developing, such apprenticeship standards may be able to receive recognition by describing their processes and expertise used to develop such standards.

- Entities seeking to become SREs will identify the industry and occupations for which they can demonstrate expertise and will seek to recognize IRAPs. Applicants will select

the industry(ies) from a dropdown menu (based on North American Industry Classification System codes), and will then select occupations within that industry(ies) (based on O*NET occupational codes).

- Entities must possess the capacity and quality assurance processes to ensure IRAPs comply with DOL's ten required components of an IRAP discussed in Section V.A. of this Guide. SREs must be capable of engaging in an ongoing quality control relationship with the IRAPs they recognize to ensure that the IRAPs remain in compliance with these ten standards upon initial recognition as IRAPs and on an annual basis thereafter.
- Entities must possess the resources to operate as an SRE for 5 years (29 CFR 29.21(b)(3)). As a part of demonstrating their financial capacity to serve in the SRE role, entities must disclose any bankruptcies from the past 5 years to DOL.
- Entities must disclose any confirmed or potential partners that will be engaged in their IRAP recognition activities, including a description of the potential partner's role and any additional relationships with subsidiaries or other related entities that could impact impartiality. (29 CFR 29.21(b)(4))
- Entities must not be suspended or debarred from conducting business with the U.S. Federal Government. (29 CFR 29.21(b)(5)). The SRE application form requires an entity to report any injunctions, debarments, or other restrictions that may prevent it from being permitted to conduct business with the U.S. Federal Government or with members of its industry sector from the past 5 years.
- Entities must mitigate any actual or potential conflicts of interest including, but not limited to, conflicts that arise from an entity's intention to recognize its own IRAP(s) as well as offering services to actual or prospective IRAPs. Concrete methods for mitigating conflicts must be submitted with the entity's application and may include processes, procedures, or structures. Recognized SREs are obligated to update such policies and procedures for mitigating conflicts before changes are implemented and if new conflicts should arise. (29 CFR 29.21(b)(6)).
- Entities must possess the appropriate expertise and resources to recognize IRAPs in the selected industry(ies) in the intended geographic area. (29 CFR 29.21(b)(7)). The SRE application form requires an entity to identify the geographic area where it intends to recognize IRAPs. The geographic area in which an SRE intends to recognize IRAPs may be nationwide or limited to a region, State, or local area.

- Entities must submit policies and procedures for recognizing, and validating compliance of, programs that ensure that SRE decisions are impartial, consistent, and based on objective and merit-based criteria; ensure that SRE decisions are confidential except as required or permitted by this subpart, or otherwise required by law. Such policies and procedures must be written in sufficient detail to reasonably achieve the foregoing criteria.

B. Exclusion from Eligibility

DOL will not recognize any SRE that intends to recognize IRAPs that train apprentices to perform construction activities. (29 CFR 29.30(a)). The IRAP final rule defines *construction activities* as: “The erecting of buildings and other structures (including additions); heavy construction other than buildings; and alterations, reconstruction, installation, and maintenance and repairs.” (29 CFR 29.30(a)). Recognized SREs are similarly prohibited from expanding their recognition activities into construction activities.

IV. SRE Application Process

An entity that seeks to be recognized as an SRE by DOL must fill out and submit an online application for review by DOL through the Department’s [IRAP webpage](#). Applications are submitted to and reviewed by the Administrator of DOL’s OA (29 CFR 29.21(a)). Entities seeking to become SREs can learn more about the application steps by referring to the [Pre-Application Checklist](#), the [IRAP SRE Application Technical Assistance Guide](#), and the [IRAP Webinar for Prospective SREs](#).

DOL’s SRE application Form requires 22 attachments that should be uploaded into the online application portal. These attachments track the eligibility criteria explained above. The attachments and information collected in the application Form itself will enable DOL to review whether the applicant is qualified for recognition. 29 CFR part 29, subpart B. Entities seeking DOL recognition to serve as SREs can review this [SRE Pre-Application Checklist](#) to review required attachments and assess which existing entity documents may satisfy the attachment requirements and which types of documents will need to be developed.

DOL is suspending the acceptance of new and pending applications to become a Standards Recognition Entity (SRE) until further notice. All SREs that have already been approved by DOL, and all IRAPs that have been recognized by an SRE, should continue to perform their functions as described in the regulation. This suspension in activity only applies to applications by and selection of new SREs.

- ***If DOL approves*** an application and recognizes an entity as an SRE:
 - DOL will notify the applicant.

- The entity will be recognized as an SRE for 5 years. (29 CFR 29.21(c)(1)).
- An SRE must apply for re-recognition at least 6 months before the date that its current recognition expires. (29 CFR 29.21(c)(1)).
- **If DOL denies** an entity's application for recognition as an SRE:
 - DOL will provide notice of denial of recognition with the reason(s) for denial.
 - The applicant can correct any application deficiencies and resubmit its application. (29 CFR 29.21(d)(1)).
 - An applicant can request administrative review of DOL's denial decision within 30 days of receipt of the notice of denial. (29 CFR 29.21 (d)(2)).
 - A request for administrative review must comply with the service requirements at 29 CFR part 18.
 - Should OA receive any requests for administrative review, such requests will be forwarded to the Office of Administrative Law Judges. Requests for administrative review are handled in accordance with the process and procedures laid out in the IRAP regulations at 29 CFR 29.29.

V. Requirements and Responsibilities of SREs – Ongoing Compliance

Once recognized, an SRE must carry out a variety of functions. Below, these post-recognition responsibilities are grouped into five categories; required IRAP criteria, recognizing IRAPs, ongoing quality control, maintaining policies and procedures, and making information available to DOL and the public. In addition, SREs have an overarching responsibility to maintain all documentation relating to the IRAPs they recognize for at least five years.

A. IRAP Criteria

All SREs must ensure that the IRAPs they recognize comply with the following ten criteria. IRAPs must comply with these criteria at the time of recognition and SREs must certify to DOL in writing that all IRAPs continue to meet the criteria on an annual basis thereafter.

1. Each IRAP must train apprentices for employment in jobs that require specialized knowledge and experience and involve the performance of complex tasks.
2. Each IRAP must have a written training plan that must be provided to an apprentice prior to beginning an IRAP, must detail the program's structured work experiences and appropriate related instruction, be designed so that apprentices demonstrate competency and earn credential(s), and must provide apprentices progressively advancing industry-essential skills.

3. IRAP apprentices must receive credit for prior knowledge and experience relevant to the instruction of the program, where appropriate.
4. Each IRAP must provide apprentices industry-recognized credential(s) during participation in or upon completion of the program.
5. Each IRAP must provide a working environment for apprentices that adheres to all applicable Federal, State, and local safety laws and regulations and complies with any additional safety requirements of its SRE.
6. Each IRAP must provide apprentices structured mentorship opportunities throughout the duration of the apprenticeship that involve ongoing, focused supervision and training by experienced instructors and employees, to ensure apprentices have additional guidance on the progress of their training and their employability.
7. Each IRAP must ensure apprentices are paid at least the applicable Federal, State, or local minimum wage. IRAPs must provide a written notice to apprentices of what wages apprentices will receive and under what circumstances apprentices' wages will increase. The program's charging of costs or expenses to apprentices must comply with all applicable Federal, State, or local wage laws and regulations, including but not limited to the Fair Labor Standards Act and its regulations. (See Appendix A for more information).
8. Each IRAP must affirm its adherence to all applicable Federal, State, and local laws pertaining to Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO). (See Appendix A for more information).
9. Each IRAP must disclose to apprentices, before they agree to participate in the program, any costs or expenses that will be charged to them (such as costs related to tools or educational materials).
10. Each IRAP must maintain a written apprenticeship agreement for each apprentice that outlines the terms and conditions of the apprentice's employment and training. The apprenticeship agreement must be consistent with its SRE's requirements.

B. Recognizing IRAPs

There are a few procedural requirements for recognizing IRAPs of which SREs should be aware. SREs must recognize or reject in a timely manner apprenticeship programs seeking to become IRAPs. (29 CFR 29.22(a)(1)). SRE's must inform DOL within 30 calendar days after recognizing an IRAP. Similarly, an SRE must notify DOL within 30 calendar days in the event the SRE suspends or derecognizes an IRAP, and the SRE must provide the name and contact information of the IRAP. (29 CFR 29.22(a)(2)). IRAPs may only be recognized by an SRE for a maximum of 5 years, after which time an IRAP must request re-recognition to receive continued recognition. (29 CFR 29.22(e)).

C. Ongoing Quality Control

SREs must maintain an ongoing quality control relationship with the IRAPs they recognize. The precise nature of this relationship is determined by the SRE, but it must meet the following five criteria (29 CFR 29.22(f)). The quality control relationship must:

1. Result in reasonable and effective quality control that includes consideration of apprentices' credential attainment, program completion, retention rates, and earnings;
2. Not prevent IRAPs from receiving recognition from another SRE;
3. Not conflict with IRAP regulations (at 29 CFR part 29, subpart B) or any applicable Federal, State, or local law (see Appendix A of this Small Entity Compliance Guide for more information about compliance with other Federal, State, or local laws);
4. Involve periodic compliance reviews by the SRE to ensure that the IRAPs it recognizes comply with DOL required components of an IRAP listed above and at 29 CFR 29.22(a)(4); and
5. Include policies and procedures for suspension or derecognition of IRAPs that fail to comply with requirements.

D. Maintaining Policies and Procedures

After recognition by DOL, SREs are required to develop policies and procedures in addition to those discussed above that are required at the time of application. SREs must develop and maintain policies and procedures for addressing complaints against an IRAP. Such complaints may only be filed by apprentices, prospective apprentices, an apprentice's authorized representative, a personnel certification body, or an employer (29 CFR 29.22(j)). In addition, SREs must develop and maintain policies and procedures addressing the suspension and derecognition of IRAPs. In addition, SREs must develop and maintain written policies and procedures that require IRAPs' adherence to all applicable Federal, State, and local Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) laws. Appendix A of this Small Entity Compliance Guide contains additional resources regarding such compliance. Two specific policies are procedures relating to EEO laws are always required of SREs. First, SREs must develop and maintain policies and procedures to address harassment, intimidation, and retaliation in IRAPs. Second, all SREs must develop and maintain policies and procedures reflecting comprehensive outreach strategies to diverse populations for IRAP participation and assign responsibility to an individual to assist IRAPs with EEO matters (29 CFR 29.22(i)). As with other policies and procedures, an SRE must notify DOL if it makes significant changes to policies or procedures relating to complaint filing, suspension and derecognition, and EEO.

E. Making IRAP Information Available to DOL and the Public

SREs collect a variety of information as summarized below and disclose the information to DOL and the public, only to the public, or to IRAPs, as explained below. The following information must be disclosed to entities outside of DOL:

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- SREs must publicly disclose the credentials IRAPs provide to apprentices upon IRAP completion (29 CFR 29.22(c)).
- SREs must notify the public about the rights of apprentices and other stakeholders (a prospective apprentice, an apprentice's authorized representative, a personnel certification body, or an employer) to file complaints with the SRE against an IRAP it oversees, including the requirements for filing a complaint (29 CFR 29.22(k)).
- SREs must make publicly available information about the aggregated number of complaints pertaining to each IRAP it oversees in a format and frequency prescribed by DOL. (29 CFR 29.22(j)).
- SREs must notify the public about the right of an apprentice or other stakeholders (an apprentice's authorized representative, a personnel certification body, an employer, or an IRAP) to file a complaint with DOL about the SRE's lack of compliance with the IRAP regulations at 29 CFR part 29, subpart B. (29 CFR 29.22(l) and 29.25(a)).
- An SRE must inform the IRAPs it recognizes and the public in the event that DOL derecognizes the SRE. (29 CFR 29.22(m)).
- SREs must publicly disclose any fees they charge to IRAPs they recognize. (29 CFR 29.22(n)).

In addition, SREs must make publicly available and submit to DOL annually, in a format prescribed by the Administrator, the following information on each IRAP the SRE recognizes and oversees (29 CFR 29.22(a)(3) and 29.22(h)(1)-(10)):

- Up-to-date contact information for the IRAP (29 CFR 29.22(h)(1));
- The total number of new and continuing apprentices annually training under an apprenticeship agreement with the IRAP (29 CFR 29.22(h)(2));
- The total number of apprentices who successfully completed the IRAP annually (29 CFR 29.22(h)(3));
- The annual completion rate for apprentices. The annual completion rate is calculated by comparing the number of apprentices in a designated apprenticeship cohort who successfully completed the IRAP requirements and attained an industry-recognized credential with the number of apprentices in that cohort who initially began training in the IRAP (29 CFR 29.22(h)(4));
- The median length of time for IRAP completion (29 CFR 29.22(h)(5));
- The post-apprenticeship employment rate, calculated 6 and 12 months after program completion (29 CFR 29.22(h)(6));

- The industry-recognized credentials attained by apprentices in the IRAP, including the annual number of such credentials attained (29 CFR 29.22(h)(7));
- The annualized average earnings of an IRAP's former apprentices, calculated over the 6-month period after IRAP completion (29 CFR 29.22(h)(8));
- Training cost per apprentice (29 CFR 29.22(h)(9)); and
- Basic demographic information on participants in an IRAP (29 CFR 29.22(h)(10)).

In addition to the information discussed above, SREs must provide to DOL any information requested as part of a compliance assistance review conducted by DOL.

VI. SRE Obligations to Notify DOL of Major Changes

After it has been recognized by DOL, an SRE must notify DOL if (1) it makes any major changes that could affect the operations of its IRAP recognition program or that materially affects the SRE's ability to function in its IRAP recognition role; or (2) it seeks to recognize IRAPs in additional industries or geographic areas. (29 CFR 29.21(c)(2)).

Major SRE changes that could affect the operations of an SRE's recognition program would include, for example, involvement in lawsuits that materially affect the SRE, changes in legal status, or any other change that materially affects the SRE's ability to function in its IRAP recognition capacity. (29 CFR 29.21(c)(2)(i)). In addition to notifying DOL, an SRE must provide to DOL all material information relating to such change.

SREs seeking to recognize IRAPs in additional industries, occupational areas, or geographic areas must provide to DOL all material information relating to such intended change before implementing the change(s). (29 CFR 29.21(c)(3)). In light of the information received, DOL will evaluate whether the SRE is qualified to recognize IRAP in the new industries, occupational areas, or geographic areas. (29 CFR 29.21(c)(3)).

An SRE must follow the policies and procedures that it submitted to DOL as part of its application. An SRE must notify DOL in the event that it makes significant changes to any such policies and procedures. (29 CFR 29.22(p)).

VII. SRE Suspension or Derecognition by DOL

As a part of DOL's oversight role, DOL reserves the right to conduct a review of an SRE's compliance and to ultimately suspend or derecognize an SRE if the SRE fails to maintain substantial compliance with 29 CFR Part 29, subpart B. The formal review process at 29 CFR 29.26 may be initiated through a complaint relating to an SRE or by other information that suggests that an SRE may not be in substantial compliance or may not longer be capable of continuing to operate as an SRE. The concept of substantial compliance recognizes that it would

not be appropriate to suspend or derecognize an SRE on account of minor technical, mathematical, or clerical errors that can in all likelihood be corrected by the SRE once brought to the SRE's attention. An SRE may be suspended or derecognized based on its inability to continue to operate where the SRE becomes unable to perform most or all required functions on account of reasons such as financial insolvency. At the initiation of such a review, DOL will provide the SRE with written notice of the basis for the review and afford the SRE an opportunity to respond and provide appropriate documentation.

At the conclusion of DOL's review, DOL may determine that the identified issues were resolved or, if not resolved, DOL may suspend the SRE for 45 calendar days. During any suspension period, SREs will be prohibited from recognizing new IRAPs. At the conclusion of the 45-day suspension, the suspension may be extended, lifted, or the SRE may be derecognized. SREs may request an Administrative Review of a suspension or derecognition decision with the DOL Office of Administrative Law Judges within 45 days of the decision.

Following derecognition of an SRE by DOL, the IRAPs recognized and overseen by the SRE will maintain their recognized status until 1 year after DOL's decision about derecognizing the IRAP's SRE becomes final, including any appeals/administrative reviews. At the end of this 1-year period, the IRAPs recognized by a derecognized SRE will lose their status unless they are recognized by another SRE (29 CFR 29.28(a)).

Appendix A: Other Federal, State, and Local Laws Relevant to SRE Compliance with IRAP Regulations

DOL's IRAP regulations require that SREs and the IRAPs they recognize must adhere to relevant Federal, State, and local laws. Specifically, the regulations make clear that IRAPs must:

- Adhere to Federal, State, and local laws pertaining to EEO (29 CFR 29.22(a)(4)(viii));
 - An SRE must have policies and procedures that require IRAPs' adherence to applicable Federal, State, and local laws pertaining to EEO (29 CFR 29.22(i))
- Provide a work environment for apprentices that adheres to all Federal, State, and local safety laws and regulations (29 CFR 29.22(a)(4)(v));
- Pay apprentices at least the applicable Federal, State, or local minimum wage (29 CFR 29.22(a)(4)(vii)); and
- Comply with all applicable Federal, State, or local wage laws or regulations regarding any costs or expenses charged to apprentices (29 CFR 29.22(a)(4)(vii)).

This Appendix A is intended to assist SREs with compliance with the IRAP regulations by providing references to government websites with additional resources relevant to further understanding Federal, State, and local laws. Please note that this appendix is not intended to be an exhaustive resource for all potentially relevant Federal, State, and local laws. SREs ultimately must take responsibility for ensuring they have a complete understanding of all relevant Federal, State, and local laws. The links below provide entities with information about compliance with relevant EEO, safety, and wage laws.

Equal Employment Opportunity

- The Department of Labor's central hub for EEO contains information, relevant laws, and relevant regulations for sub-topics covered by EEO laws (age discrimination, disability, ethnic/national origin, Federal financial assistance programs, immigration, and veterans):

<https://www.dol.gov/general/topic/discrimination>

- The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's overview of Equal Employment Opportunity laws for employers:

<https://www.eeoc.gov/employers/index.cfm>

- The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's overview of State and local government coverage of Equal Employment Opportunity laws:

https://www.eeoc.gov/employers/coverage_state_local.cfm

Safety

- Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)'s Summary of Employer Responsibilities for providing a safe workplace:
<https://www.osha.gov/as/opa/worker/employer-responsibility.html>
- OSHA's Compliance Assistance 'Quick Start' tool:
<https://www.osha.gov/complianceassistance/quickstarts>
- State-specific information – OSHA-approved State Plans for workplace safety and health:
<https://www.osha.gov/stateplans>

Wages and Compensation

- The Department of Labor's webpage with information about State-specific minimum wage laws:
<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/minimum-wage/state>
- The Department of Labor's Fair Labor Standards Act Advisor webpage:
<https://webapps.dol.gov/elaws/whd/flsa/screen7.asp>