





California's Regional Intermediaries

A Scalable Solution for Regional Apprenticeship Expansion

AT A GLANCE

California's regional intermediaries, such as LAUNCH, NCAN, and SCAN, offer scalable solutions for apprenticeship expansion by bridging and connecting education, industry, support service providers, government, labor, and other apprenticeship stakeholders, fostering collaboration, and reducing employer administrative burdens. Their successful models align apprenticeship programs with local needs, providing valuable blueprints for nationwide, employer-centric apprenticeship regional ecosystems.

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Executive Summary

California's regional intermediaries, including the LAUNCH Apprenticeship Network, Northern California Apprentice Network (NCAN), and Southern California Apprenticeship Network (SCAN), exemplify replicable and scalable solutions to bolster regional apprenticeship expansion. These intermediaries play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between education and industry by fostering collaboration among diverse stakeholders, including support service providers, government, labor, and other apprenticeship stakeholders, reducing administrative burdens for employers, and promoting knowledge sharing.

By prioritizing a collaborative approach, these networks ensure that apprenticeship programs align with local economic and community needs, making it easier for employers to engage and see value in apprenticeship initiatives. The success of California's regional intermediary models demonstrates their potential for replication and adaptation beyond the state's borders, offering valuable blueprints for developing robust, employer-centric apprenticeship ecosystems nationwide.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Crucial Role of Intermediaries: Successful apprenticeship programs and sponsors
 may rely on intermediaries to bridge the gap between training providers, employers,
 and apprentices or apprentice candidates. Intermediaries are central to helping
 apprenticeship stakeholders connect and form complementary partnerships, fostering
 sustained growth, shepherding along registration processes, and ensuring that programs
 are responsive to the robust range of stakeholder needs.
- Responsive to Employer Needs: Effective intermediaries are attuned to the needs of
 employers, particularly in alleviating and streamlining administrative burdens and aligning
 training with in-demand job requirements.
- Strategic Collaboration: The consolidation of efforts and resources through regional
 networks and intermediaries can lead to a more streamlined and employer-focused
 apprenticeship system. Such networks can improve coordination among the vast
 landscape of apprenticeship providers, share best practices, and reduce duplication,
 creating a more efficient environment for apprenticeship programs to thrive and
 increasing employer support.

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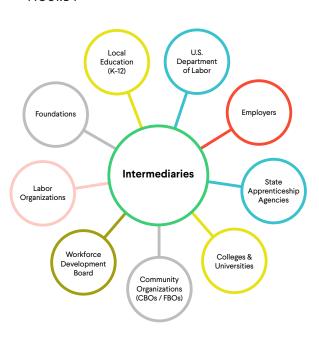
Introduction

Regional Intermediaries

In California, regional Registered Apprenticeship (RA) intermediaries¹ are pivotal for the growing success and expansion of apprenticeship programs. A regional RA intermediary is an organizational third party that supports RA sponsor(s) in convening and facilitating the development of a geographical collaborative ecosystem of partnering stakeholders in support of designing and/or implementing the RA program.² This report focuses on three unique regional intermediary models that are all stakeholder-facing, highlighting their crucial role in facilitating collaboration among a diverse range of stakeholders. Intermediaries can offer a range of services, including addressing high-priority employer needs, fostering employer engagement, providing sponsorship, coordinating and convening stakeholders, providing guidance on policies and requirements, and delivering programmatic support. RA Intermediaries, as we learn in this report, are the most effective when they are delivering services that meet the need of their region.



FIGURE 1



SERVICES MIGHT INCLUDE:

- Apprenticeship Registration & Compliance, Apprentice Data Reporting, Funding, Programmatic Guidance / Support & Resources
- High-Priority Employer Needs, Apprentice Hiring, Incumbent Worker Skills Development, Mentorship, OJT, Sponsor, Training Provider
 - Curriculum Development, Training Provider, Credits / Credentials, Apprentice Referral, Sponsor, Employer Engagement
- Funding, Apprentice Referral, High-Priority Employer Needs, Sponsor, Employer Engagement, Wraparound Support
 - Apprentice Referral, Wraparound Support, Training Provider, Sponsor
 - High-Priority Employer Needs, Employer Engagement, Sponsor
- High-Priority Employer Needs, Employer Engagement, Sponsor, Stakeholder Coordination & Convening, Programmatic Guidance / Support & Resources

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This report found that apprenticeship programs that engaged in the planning and program execution should avoid operating in isolation or competition. Rather, they should seek to leverage existing regional intermediaries to enhance coordination, share resources, and foster a unified approach to apprenticeship programs, while regions without existing regional intermediaries should seek to create one. Additionally, the regional intermediary model is a scalable and replicable model to streamline apprenticeship providers and employers within and beyond California.

Within this report, we will focus on the **three priority regions** with established intermediary networks and how their existence helped spur a movement in the state of California.





LAUNCH Apprenticeship Network



The LAUNCH Apprenticeship Network, established in 2018 by the Inland Empire Desert Region College Consortium, collaborates with local community colleges, K-12 districts, and two local workforce development boards to integrate apprenticeship programs. As an intermediary and education provider, LAUNCH supports businesses in adopting apprenticeships. It also offers regional resources to develop programs and expand apprenticeship opportunities, including traditional and innovative approaches, thereby simplifying, and enhancing the apprenticeship process for businesses and career builders in the Inland Empire region.³

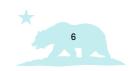
In its first year, LAUNCH faced a daunting challenge: despite their efforts, no employers signed apprenticeship agreements. Executive Director Charles Henkels found that while employers were receptive to the concept of apprenticeships, they were discouraged by the administrative burden and reluctant to be the first to engage, fearing the unknowns of being a figurative guinea pig. Most industry partners expressed indifference towards the training aspect of apprenticeships; their primary concern was whether the program could refer quality talent to address their human resources needs.



"We've had around 800 apprentices go through our programs, making it a successful effort in bringing new people into apprenticeships. Additionally, about 150 businesses have participated, many of which continue to do so, making it a sustainable initiative."

Charles Henkels Executive Director, LAUNCH





Recognizing these challenges, LAUNCH adopted a strategy that shifted much of the administrative workload and burden away from employers, understanding that reducing this burden was key to successful engagement and inevitably, apprenticeship adoption. The focus turned to creating meaningful, paid work-based learning opportunities, and understanding the specific experiences and qualifications employers sought in their roles. This approach necessitates that employers provide clear, detailed job descriptions for entry-level roles to facilitate a better match between apprentices and job opportunities. The most compelling value proposition for these employer partners was access to a pipeline of students, candidates, and talent-a direct solution to their major pain point of filling job vacancies with qualified individuals.





A prime example of this approach in action involved high school students in a credit recovery program who were learning janitorial work. LAUNCH effectively leveraged a high school credit recovery program as a talent pipeline by introducing students engaged in janitorial work to apprenticeship opportunities. This program involved after-school sessions where students learned janitorial skills. Upon completing the program, the students would graduate high school and be prioritized as eligible substitutes on the district's janitorial substitute employment line, paying approximately \$18/hour. Recognizing the potential in these students and their desire to work, LAUNCH worked with local employers and communities to coordinate apprenticeship opportunities for the students following graduation. LAUNCH facilitated this transition by offering comprehensive career navigation support, including interview preparation and resume review services. Through successful employer engagement, LAUNCH offered a structured pathway to employment postgraduation, and simultaneously demonstrated serious commitment to employers and provided valuable work experience and employment opportunities to students.

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In the initial stages, LAUNCH conducted numerous meetings with employers to grasp their human resources challenges and needs. A common theme emerged: employers were often confused about the apprenticeship process and hesitant to commit without seeing tangible results. Recognizing this, LAUNCH focused on understanding these concerns deeply, ensuring that their approach would be aligned with employer expectations. LAUNCH's strategy marks a departure from the notion that employer requests should be administratively intensive, which meant that LAUNCH themselves managed registration documents which can overwhelm employers. This proactive approach underscores LAUNCH's dedication to narrowing the gap between potential employees and industries and highlights how important it is for apprenticeship programs to be able to meet the urgent demand for skilled workers. The following elements of LAUNCH's industry engagement strategy are pivotal to the organization's success:

Reducing Administrative Burden

To alleviate this barrier, LAUNCH took on most of the administrative responsibilities, making it easier for businesses to participate. They established a regional program sponsorship model, allowing multiple businesses and colleges to share the responsibilities of the apprenticeship programs. This collaborative model ensures that no single entity bears the entire weight of building and registering the program.

Providing Meaningful Work-Based Learning

LAUNCH shifted the focus from purely academic curriculum to practical, careerenhancing, work-based learning experiences. By integrating additive and critical work-based learning experiences that exposed apprentices to facets of their chosen sector and career, apprentices could apply their classroom learnings in real-world application.

Building Long-term Relationships

Developing and maintaining strong, long-term relationships with industry partners has been a cornerstone of LAUNCH's strategy. They cultivated a roster of industry champions who are highly engaged and supportive, participating in committees and providing ongoing feedback. This network includes around 150 businesses with varying levels of engagement, from highly involved to those participating as needed.



Adapting to Feedback and Challenges

LAUNCH continuously adapts its strategies based on feedback and challenges encountered. For example, they identified a significant gap in youth participation in apprenticeship programs and to address this, they hired apprenticeship system navigators to introduce and guide young people into the system. By actively working to create more accessible pathways, they addressed barriers within the apprenticeship system.

Innovative Program Structures

Flexibility and adaptability are key features of LAUNCH's program design. They developed programs that allow apprentices to transfer between companies and educational institutions while maintaining their apprenticeship status. An illustrative example is an apprentice who started at a community college, transferred to a university's cybersecurity center, and secured a project with the Navy, all while continuing her apprenticeship. This innovative approach ensures that the programs meet the evolving needs of both apprentices and employers.



These strategic approaches have led to the ongoing support of employer partners, ranging from heralded all-star industry champions to those who would hire apprentices on occasion. This diverse range of engagement levels underscored the adaptability and flexibility required in business engagement strategies. LAUNCH's success illustrates the importance of tailoring apprenticeship programs to the specific needs of employers.

Building on this foundation of diverse and flexible engagement, LAUNCH has maintained consistent growth since its inception in 2018 by leveraging unique opportunities and funding. LAUNCH began with small seed funding and progressively braided additional funding sources to expand their operations and amplify their impact. Initially, LAUNCH utilized Strong Workforce funding which helped them build capacity within community colleges to coordinate apprenticeship programs. They supplemented this with philanthropic grants from organizations like the Irvine Foundation, in addition to federal grants, ensuring a diverse funding base to grow their programming. This past year, LAUNCH transitioned to fiscal sponsorship under the Foundation for California Community Colleges which has allowed them to grow their organizational capacity, and they have since expanded their team to 10 people who can focus on creating new programs in various sectors. LAUNCH serves as a strong example of a regional intermediary, bridging gaps between education and workforce systems through adaptive, cooperative, and strategic design.

Northern California Apprentice Network (NCAN) and Southern California Apprenticeship Network (SCAN)





Apprenticeship programming looks different from region to region, as providers range in offerings, sectoral focus, and types of training used to support apprentices,

which creates a challenge for employers when trying to understand how apprenticeship providers can support their talent demand needs. Employers are often overwhelmed by the multitude of pitches from various apprenticeship and workforce development organizations, which has resulted in some employers rejecting apprenticeship through a public provider altogether. Or, on the other hand, some employers are in desperate need of a talent pipeline but may be a smaller or less visible business. In an effort to solve for this problem, the Northern California Apprentice Network (NCAN) and the Southern California Apprenticeship Network (SCAN), bring together leadership from major employers, the public sector, colleges and universities, nonprofit training providers, wraparound support service providers, apprenticeship intermediaries, and funders to share information, access resources, and work together to grow apprenticeship programs across California, creating a more uniform voice and shared pulse about apprenticeship for all stakeholders involved.



"SCAN's primary role is convening potential complementary partners for building successful apprenticeship programs...and the second role is engaging employers...

There are enough people looking for jobs, there are enough training programs ready to train people, but there are just not enough businesses ready to bring on apprentices."

Alex Hussain, Director, Southern California Apprenticeship Network (SCAN)

"We want apprenticeship to succeed so we created this network to give the employers information about apprenticeship and then let them make decisions."

Orrian Willis, Founder, Northern California Apprentice Network (NCAN) and Manager, TechSF



Funding Models

The information presented here reflects the personalized approaches of each network, SCAN and NCAN, which, while sharing the common goal of expanding and accelerating the adoption of apprenticeship programs, operate with unique functions and needs. Each network builds its programming around the specific designs and demands of its regional stakeholders, necessitating a focus on different financial and programmatic priorities. This table highlights how each network allocates resources and emphasizes various aspects of their operations to best serve their respective communities.

FRAMEWORKS	NCAN (NORTHERN CALIFORNIA APPRENTICE NETWORK)	SCAN (SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA APPRENTICESHIP NETWORK)
Fiscal Agent and/or Host Organization	TechSF , a mayoral initiative housed within San Francisco's Office of Economic and Workforce Development is the fiscal agent and host organization.	South Bay Workforce Investment Board (SBWIB) is the fiscal agent.
Seed Funding	Launch: NCAN was primarily funded by a grant from the California Workforce Development Board, a multi-year apprenticeship network and registration grant that launched a partnership with the Bay Area Council and utilized the Bay Area Video Coalition as the registration support organization. Support: Key founding members included large corporations such as LinkedIn, Aon, Accenture, Twilio, and other tech companies that were invested in creating a robust apprenticeship ecosystem. Nonprofit, government, and education partners were brought into the network after it was designed and launched.	Launch: SCAN was seed funded through the Irvine Foundation and other grants, all aimed at supporting regional apprenticeship initiatives. Support: Similar to NCAN, SCAN was heavily supported by large corporations such as Aon and Accenture. These employers provided strategic leadership and resources for the networks development and launch. Their ongoing commitment gave the apprenticeship model a regional muscle as it went to launch.
Sustainability	Ongoing Funding: NCAN has received support from public grants for both its launch and ongoing work, and has since received hearty support from the Irvine Foundation. NCAN continues to submit applications to federal and state opportunities to sustain and enhance existing activities, as all funding is aligned with advancing apprenticeship opportunities in the region. Ongoing Support: Employers are still vital partners of the network. While these corporations do not provide funding, their ongoing participation and engagement have increased apprenticeship opportunities in the region and gained national attention for the network.	Ongoing Funding: SCAN leverages SBWIB for their fiscal agent duties, which allows SCAN to receive ongoing funding to grow its programming. Otherwise, SCAN continues to receive substantial funding from foundations and pursues national and state grant opportunities when it can, a key strategy for both networks. Ongoing Support: Similar to NCAN, employer voice and guidance opens the door for more employer engagement efforts and entices other employers to the network, which in turn advances opportunities for regional apprenticeship growth.





Resource Allocation

Operational Costs: Funding is allocated towards operational costs, which supports personnel to support coordination of quarterly meetings, strategic planning, and data collection.

Employer Engagement: Personnel time can be used to facilitate employer engagement, providing employers with support and information on local apprenticeship programs, connections to employers in the network who have success stories, apprenticeship resources and fact sheets, connections to existing apprenticeship programs, and one-to-one registration support.

Program Development: NCAN is invested in developing and expanding apprenticeship programs, ensuring they meet high-quality standards, and provides resources towards growing apprenticeship statewide to all publicly or privately funded apprenticeship providers in the region.



Convening Stakeholders: Funding covers the costs of organizing various stakeholder convenings, connecting member organizations with complementary partners, strategic planning sessions, and other operational activities.

Employer Outreach and Engagement:

Significant resources are dedicated to outreach efforts, engaging new employers, building partnerships with employer aggregators (such as chambers of commerce and industry associations), and connecting employers to the appropriate partners to begin their apprenticeship journey.

Community-Based Organization (CBO)
Outreach: One of SCAN's primary goals is connecting people from marginalized communities to quality jobs through apprenticeship. One of the ways that SCAN accomplishes this is through its CBO Outreach Program in partnership with LAUNCH and UNITE-LA, where staff reach out to CBOs (nonprofit and social services) and connect them to RAs to build accessible pathways to quality jobs for their participants.

Support Services and Program

Expansion: Partnerships and connections are made with support service providers that improve the accessibility and inclusivity of apprenticeship programs. This includes partnerships with training providers and support service providers.



As regionally focused intermediaries, NCAN and SCAN facilitate effective collaboration and knowledge sharing to create a more cohesive, employer-centric, and effective approach to apprenticeship programs, ultimately leading to better outcomes for all stakeholders involved.

They do so by utilizing the following strategies:

Enhanced Coordination

Employers can be overwhelmed by the numerous apprenticeship programs and workforce development entities, ranging from nonprofits to for-profits, colleges and universities, workforce boards, and organizations—all potentially offering apprenticeship as a product to the employer consumer. Because they are regional networks, NCAN and SCAN are able to connect employers with the right partners from a network of dozens of options, based on the specific needs of each employer. By consolidating these organizations under one regional umbrella organization, employers receive clear and consolidated information from one centralized source, thereby enabling them to make informed partnership decisions and to understand which entities are offering which services in their region. Employers of course can pursue a specific apprenticeship program rather than go through the regional intermediary, however if an employer needs guidance, NCAN and SCAN will provide referrals. Regional intermediaries like NCAN and SCAN prioritize the success of apprenticeship as a whole and provide employers with transparent information and the autonomy to make their own choices about apprenticeship providers. Beyond using this arrangement for showcasing apprenticeship providers from the region, the networks provide opportunities to share policy changes, showcase best practices and partnerships, and to elevate needs from local employers, so that apprenticeship providers can work around growing demand as they grow their programs.



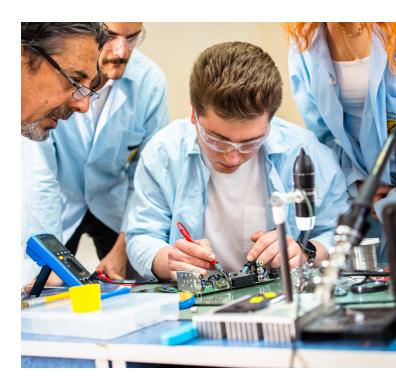


Leveraging Diverse Expertise

By convening a range of complementary partners from within their respective regions, apprenticeship providers gain access to expertise they can leverage to enhance and scale their apprenticeship programs. Additionally, NCAN and SCAN leadership will bring in guest speakers from around the country to share updates and best practices on apprenticeship or industry, uniformly elevating the value of the network for stakeholders. Other state intermediaries, researchers, past apprentices, representatives from the U.S. Department of Labor, and industry members have joined meetings to share experiences and best practices. This creates a level terrain for all members. Immediately, industry isn't out of reach and apprenticeship providers can personalize their program in the same space.

Avoiding Duplicative Efforts

Through active knowledge sharing, the networks minimize competition and duplication, fostering a unified approach to engaging employers and enhancing the efficiency of the apprenticeship programs. Programs can share events and consider collaborating while employers can leverage other employers. As a result, the networks are catch-all forums for all stakeholders to stay actively informed in their regions.



The cross-regional collaboration between NCAN and SCAN serves as a compelling example of the benefits of partnership and shared knowledge in the apprenticeship ecosystem and underscores the value of unified communication, collective expertise, and cooperative engagement for scalable and sustainable apprenticeship programs. However, these intermediaries and networks were thoughtfully funded and built to address a vast range of needs in unifying and informing the apprenticeship landscape in California. Hundreds of new programs have sprung up over the past five years-some sustained past initial grant funds, others not. Regional intermediaries help to make sense of the state and regional landscapes and provide support for programs that are personal and relevant to the culture of their region.



Replicable Network Commonalities



Collaborative Approach

All three networks emphasize the importance of collaboration among various stakeholders, including employers, educational institutions, support service providers, workforce development entities—and themselves. This collaborative approach ensures that apprenticeship programs are aligned with the needs of the local economy and community. Additionally, each regional network collaborates with one another to better align efforts and discuss trends. Their commitment to apprenticeship does not stop in their region—these networks are dedicated to strengthening and growing existing apprenticeship programs and seeding new sustained programs and intermediaries.



Employer- Centric Focus

Each network prioritizes the needs of employers, focusing on providing them with clear, consolidated information and reducing administrative burdens. By doing so, they simplify information shared with employers and provide a non-biased approach to apprenticeship benefits. The networks can help employers make educated decisions around apprenticeship training providers and intermediaries. Having an employer-centric approach, however, does not remove a workercentered approach. Networks commonly come together to talk about program quality and share practices that support apprentice retention and success with the employer at the table, which is a win for the employer and the apprentice alike.



Knowledge Sharing

Through the networks, active sharing of best practices and expertise among apprenticeship providers enhances the effectiveness and scalability of apprenticeship programs, ensuring that they can be successfully replicated in different regions. Examples of best practices include how to engage employers, navigating the funding landscape, how to build inclusive apprenticeship programs, and more. Individual apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs in each region know that each regional intermediary offers many resources and expertise that are user-friendly, accessible, and builds community.









Efforts to minimize competition and duplication are critical. By fostering cohesion among the network members, these networks ensure individual programs are aware of one another. Each network attempts to build collaboration rather than drive competition, which is key for growing apprenticeship across the state.

To maximize the success of apprenticeship programs, it's crucial not to work in isolation. Many effective work processes and employer engagement strategies have already been established, either locally or in other regions, and can be replicated within individual programs. Utilize available technical assistance by participating in apprenticeship-related webinars and conferences to network and collaborate with leaders in the field.



Innovative and Layered Utilization of Funding and Resources

All three networks leveraged all available resources creatively, such as Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) dollars, foundation funding, and other grants, supportive services, and employer incentives to create and sustain themselves. Whenever possible, it is vital to maximize creativity in the braiding and leveraging of funds to cover the costs associated with running apprenticeship intermediary network, and the help of a strong fiscal agent makes a world of difference.

Collaboration and seeking guidance are essential; many individuals and organizations are willing to help. Don't hesitate to reach out for assistance, as success is a collective effort.

Conclusion

California's regional intermediary networks support essential scaffolding that educational and other institutions need to scale apprenticeship programs, thereby creating more opportunities for students and employers alike. The state's unwavering commitment to building a robust intermediary infrastructure emblazons its leadership as an exemplar in the United States as adopting a regional approach has proven crucial for the scalability and success of apprenticeship programs. Within California, each region has its own specific set of industries, cultures, commute norms, and feeder institutions. By fostering strong local buy-in and integration of apprenticeship programming through the networks, California enhances the adaptability and effectiveness of apprenticeships across diverse regions.

California's regional intermediary models— LAUNCH Apprenticeship Network, Northern California Apprentice Network (NCAN), and Southern California Apprenticeship Network (SCAN)—serve as replicable frameworks for enhancing the success and sustainability of apprenticeship programs. Each network offers unique approaches that can be adapted and scaled beyond California's borders. As other states look at growing apprenticeship opportunities, the key lies in establishing strong regional intermediaries that facilitate cohesive, employer-centric, and collaborative apprenticeship ecosystems. By embracing these best practices, states can build robust apprenticeship programs that meet the evolving needs of the workforce, drive economic growth, and provide meaningful career opportunities for individuals across diverse communities.

This model of regional collaboration and comprehensive support can serve as a valuable blueprint for other states aiming to replicate and expand successful apprenticeship initiatives.

CONCLUSION 17

Endnotes

- The U.S. Department of Labor offers the following definition of an intermediary: "An intermediary provides industry and/or occupation-specific expertise to support employers in a particular industrial sector, coordinate partner responsibilities, provide program administration to aggregate demand for apprentices, particularly for small and medium-sized employers that may not have the capacity to operate programs on their own, and assist with instruction and supportive services." U.S. Department of Labor, "Join a Registered Apprenticeship Program," Apprenticeship.gov, accessed July 26, 2024, https://www.apprenticeship.gov/employers/registered-apprenticeship-program/build/join.
- 2 Jobs for the Future. "Registered Apprenticeship Roles: Sponsors and Intermediaries." April 12, 2022. Accessed July 1, 2024. https://www.jff.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/RA_Roles_-_Sponsors_and_Intermediaries_-_4-12-2022.pdf.
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Building a Future That Works **For Everyone**