Occupations with Apprenticeship Programs in New Mexico
Mark Flaherty, Economist

Apprenticeship is a proven training method whereby an apprentice, with the support and commitment of the employer and/or the training program, becomes proficient in a specific trade. Apprenticeship does not require that an individual have any experience in the occupation, so it is an excellent opportunity for individuals looking for a long-term career path, but who do not possess any specific training. The New Mexico State Apprenticeship Council within the Department of Workforce Solutions administers apprenticeship programs and the registration process.

An apprenticeship program covers all aspects of the trade and includes both on-the-job training and related instruction. The training typically lasts between one and five years. Related instruction generally takes place in a classroom, but may be offered through correspondence coursework or distance learning. The specific related instruction covers the techniques of the trade and will prepare apprentices to take any licensing exam that may be required. During on-the-job training, apprentices work under experienced workers known as journey workers. Under the journey worker’s guidance, the apprentice gradually learns the specifics and details of the trade and performs more and more duties individually. An apprentice’s pay starts out at about 45 percent to 50 percent of a journey worker’s wages and increases periodically throughout the apprenticeship. Increases in pay are based on the apprentice’s successful completion of the required related instruction and on-the-job training. After successfully completing their apprenticeships, apprentices will attain the status of journey worker.

The sponsor of the apprenticeship program plans, administers, and pays for the program. Sponsors can be employers, employer associations, and/or a union. When an apprentice is accepted into a program, he or she and the sponsor sign an apprenticeship agreement. Apprentices who successfully complete registered programs receive certificates of completion from the State Apprenticeship Council, and these certificates are honored and recognized throughout the country. Graduates of registered programs increase their potential job mobility because employers have greater confidence in the quality of the training received in registered programs. The qualifications for an apprenticeship program, the selection process, and applications are maintained by each of the programs and are unique to each program.
Employment in Occupations with Apprenticeship Programs

The number of existing jobs within occupations for which apprenticeship programs are currently available in New Mexico varies widely by occupation. Exhibit 2 shows that, in May 2013, the occupation with the most jobs was construction laborers. At that time, there were approximately 8,910 construction laborers working in New Mexico, though the pay for this occupation was quite low, relative to other apprenticeable occupations. Construction laborers perform tasks involving physical labor at building, highway, and heavy construction projects, tunnel and shaft excavations, and demolition sites. Duties involve the operation of hand and power tools, cleaning and preparing sites, digging trenches, setting braces, erecting scaffolding, and removing waste materials. The occupation with the next most numerous jobs in the state was operating engineers and other construction equipment operators. These workers operate motor graders, bulldozers, scrapers, compressors, pumps, derricks, shovels, and tractors to excavate, move, and grade the earth, erect structures, or pour concrete or other hard surface pavement. In May 2013, there were approximately 4,890 workers in this occupation in New Mexico. Of the 26 featured apprenticeship occupations, there were only four that did not fall within the construction and extraction occupational group. These were machinists; heating, air conditioning, and refrigeration mechanics and installers; telecommunications line installers and repairers; and electrical power-line installers and repairers. Machinists fall within production occupations and the others are all installation, maintenance, and repair occupations.

Wages in Occupations with Apprenticeship Programs

Exhibit 3 shows the annual median wages for occupations that have apprenticeship programs available in New Mexico. As of May 2013, the occupation with the highest wage was elevator installers and repairers, which had an annual median wage of $80,440. This occupation requires a high knowledge of electronics, hydraulics, and electricity. Most elevators today have computerized control systems, resulting in complex systems and requiring complex troubleshooting. Of those occupations with existing apprenticeship programs that contributed a thousand or more jobs to employment within New Mexico, three fell within the top six occupations with apprenticeships in terms of wage levels. These were machinists ($45,700); plumbers, pipefitters and steamfitters ($44,640); and electricians ($43,820). Other occupations that were ranked high in terms of wages were electrical power-line installers and repairers ($57,360); structural iron and steel workers ($51,920); and sheet metal workers ($42,680). The exhibit also shows the annual median wages across broad occupational groups, with installation maintenance and repair workers averaging the highest wage, at $37,980. Construction and extraction workers followed, with an annual median wage of $36,080, and production workers had the lowest wage, at $29,880.

For a list of programs that are currently registered by the State Apprenticeship Council and the organizations running these programs, visit http://www.dws.state.nm.us/careersolutions/CSS-Apprint.html. Not all programs will have openings for new apprentices or will be accepting applications throughout the year, so it is important for interested parties to contact the programs directly for specific information and opportunities that may be available.