



FILLING CRITICAL POSITIONS AND INCREASING WORKFORCE DIVERSITY THROUGH REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIPS

A CASE STUDY OF THE BALTIMORE ALLIANCE FOR CAREERS IN HEALTHCARE

By James Bartlett and Karen Kahn

Introduction

In 2017, the Maryland Department of Labor announced the launch of the state's first competency-based registered apprenticeship program. Sponsored by the Baltimore Alliance for Careers in Healthcare (BACH, see sidebar), the apprenticeship program trains apprentices to fill roles as environmental care supervisors at two Baltimore hospitals, Johns Hopkins Hospital and the University of Maryland Medical Center. The Community College of Baltimore County partners with the hospitals to provide classroom training for apprentices, who also receive intensive on-the-job training working on a daily basis with individual mentors.

Apprenticeship is not new, but it is a new strategy for healthcare, where it builds on the tradition of clinical education. For non-clinical positions, apprenticeships enable more diverse candidates to "earn and learn," while also helping hospitals fill critical positions that are difficult to fill. Through apprenticeship programs, employers articulate career pathways that give more workers the opportunity to grow their skills, move into better jobs, and earn family-sustaining wages.

This case study focuses specifically on the competency-based environmental care supervisor apprenticeship at Johns Hopkins Hospital. Environmental care supervisors oversee housekeeping workers in all hospital areas and patient rooms. At Johns Hopkins, it had become challenging to find successful candidates for these positions. Contract workers, recruited through a staffing agency, had difficulty adapting to the organizational culture and the job requirements, creating tensions with the frontline workers they supervised. The apprenticeship program shifted the hospital strategy to one in which they would look to promote from within, while also recruiting new candidates from an untapped community: skilled immigrants.

The National Fund for Workforce Solutions invests in a network of 33 communities and supports more than 80 active industry partnerships in 26 states across more than ten sectors, including manufacturing, retail, hospitality, healthcare, and information technology. Work-based learning is one of the National Fund's key strategies to equip workers for success and fill high-demand jobs.

The Baltimore Alliance for Careers in Healthcare (BACH), an employer-led industry partnership dedicated to eliminating the shortage of qualified healthcare workers in the Baltimore area, is affiliated with the Baltimore Workforce Funders Collaborative, one of the National Fund's regional collaboratives. BACH is their healthcare industry sector partner and is a member of the National Fund's healthcare employer network, CareerSTAT.

The Origins of the Apprenticeship Program

When the state of Maryland received a U.S. Department of Labor grant to establish apprenticeship programs serving skilled immigrants, BACH approached select Baltimore area hospital partners, including Johns Hopkins, to assess their interest. The environmental care department at Johns Hopkins was particularly enthusiastic, having failed to fill critical supervisory positions using contract workers hired through a local staffing agency. The director of environmental care noted that external candidates often didn't have the necessary skills or didn't adapt well to the workplace culture, and turnover was high. At the same time, the hospital did not have a career pathway for entry-level workers, who needed significant skill development to move into supervisory roles.

At Johns Hopkins, it was decided that the apprenticeship program would recruit both new immigrants and incumbent workers. The goal was for 50 percent of participants to come from each group. In this way, the hospital could advance the careers of its current entry-level workers, while also preparing unemployed or underemployed skilled immigrants for good, family-sustaining jobs at the hospital. Hiring from the immediate Baltimore community is a key goal for Johns Hopkins, an important anchor institution in the local economy. By providing quality employment, the hospital achieves another goal: improving public health by addressing a key social determinant of health.

Skilled immigrants offered an untapped pool of job candidates that the hospital had failed to reach in the past. Research shows that 20 percent of the state's college-educated foreign-born population is underemployed or unemployed, earning an average hourly wage of only \$11.40. This compares to \$21.60 per hour for those who receive their college education in the United States, according to the Maryland Skilled Immigrant Taskforce. Among these skilled immigrants are many healthcare professionals, but they face significant barriers to employment, including limited English proficiency and the lack of social capital to connect to local employers. Licensing and credentialing, which can be complex for healthcare professionals, present another hurdle. Finally, the city's workforce systems lack of experience with immigrant populations poses another challenge for those seeking employment.

A Collaborative Approach

To establish the state's first competency-based apprenticeship, BACH first had to lobby the Maryland Department of Labor to change the state's apprenticeship statute to include this type of training. A competency-based model allows apprentices to move through the program as they demonstrate proficiency in required skills rather than completing a set number of classroom hours and tasks, which was the traditional model codified in law.

Once the new statute was in place, BACH became the apprenticeship sponsor. As an industry intermediary — instead of a single employer — BACH was in a good position to recruit various partners to collaborate in developing the program and recruiting candidates. Moreover, with BACH as the apprenticeship sponsor, employers across the state could customize and implement the program, without having to go through the arduous development and registration process.

In addition to recruiting healthcare providers to participate in the program, BACH enlisted community-based organizations, including the Maryland Skilled Immigrants Taskforce, a consortium of public and private workforce development organizations seeking to leverage the skills of immigrants to meet the needs of employers, and the International Rescue Committee, which serves the refugee and immigrant community.

These organizations identified and recruited the first candidates for the apprenticeship, while the Community College of Baltimore County partnered in developing the curriculum and providing classroom training.

BACH helped the employers set up administrative structures, market the program, and facilitated registration with the Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation. In addition, BACH helped guide the participating employers to define the necessary competencies for the environmental care supervisor position, and to coordinate with the community college around curriculum development and the integration of classroom instruction and on-the-job training.

Finally, because mentoring is an important component of successful apprenticeship, BACH built coaching support into the program. The coach serves as an advocate, helping the immigrant apprentices, in particular, navigate any barriers that they face, including job-readiness and understanding the U.S. hiring process. Coaches and mentors play a critical role in ensuring successful outcomes.

Environmental Care Supervisor Apprenticeship: Overview

As a competency-based apprenticeship, participants progress at their own pace as they demonstrate their ability to perform the required competencies. They have up to 18 months to complete the program.

Apprentices are paid to learn and work. Starting pay is \$15 an hour, but as apprentices complete each level of the program, their pay increases. A fully credentialed environmental care supervisor earns \$21.98 an hour (about \$45,000 annually), about twice the wages of frontline environmental care workers.

To develop a competency-based learning program, BACH and a multi-department team from Johns Hopkins worked together to define each of the competencies needed to be a successful environmental care supervisor. The occupation was broken into seven job functions:

- **Function 1: Delegation and staffing assignments**
- **Function 2: Quality assurance**
- **Function 3: Inventory management**
- **Function 4: Personnel management**
- **Function 5: Communication and record keeping**
- **Function 6: Safety**
- **Function 7: Fiscal management**

Apprentices must show competency in 20 skills related to each function. For each skill, they progress through four learning stages: basic understanding, demonstrated ability with supervision, demonstrated ability with minimal supervision, and demonstrated ability on one's own.

APPRENTICE RECRUITMENT



STEPS IN APPRENTICESHIP

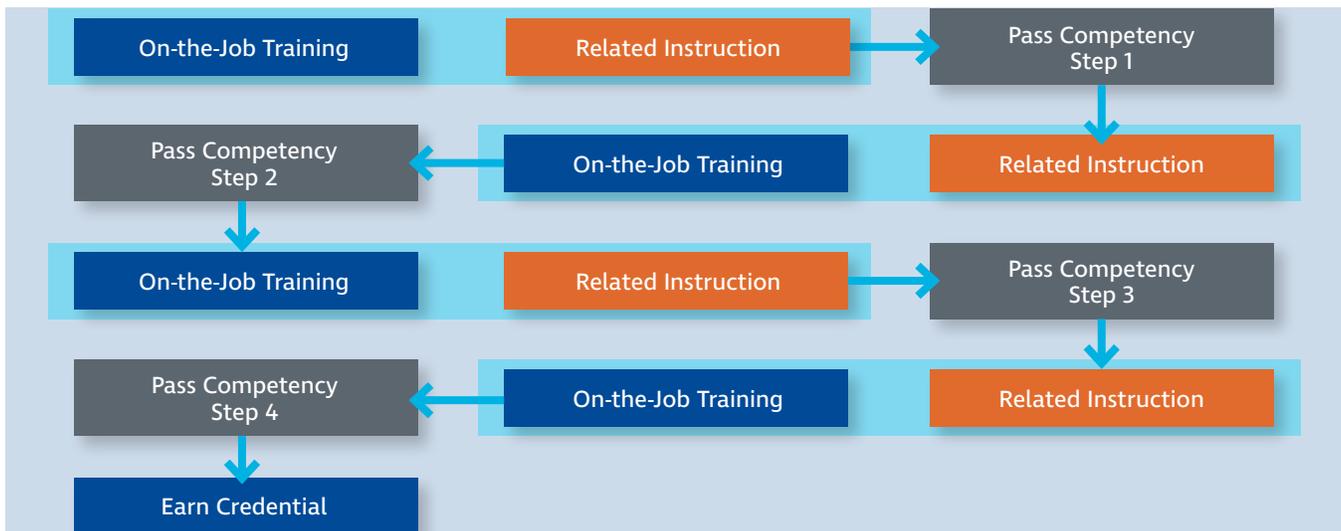


Figure 1. Model of Competency-Based Environmental Care Supervisor Apprenticeship Program

Figure 1 shows how individuals enter and proceed through the various levels of the program, beginning with the application process. Immigrant applicants must complete the essential skills course, which prepares them for the application and interview process; this step is not required for incumbent workers. Once in the apprenticeship program, when the apprentices meet a competency level, they proceed to the next level with increased responsibilities and an increase in pay.

Recruiting Apprentices

Immigrant Workers. Community partners such as the International Rescue Committee of Maryland were used to recruit immigrants for the apprenticeship. Many of the candidates were educated healthcare professionals in their countries of origin. All were required to pass eighth-grade reading and math tests, and to show confirmation of their legal status.

Immigrants recruited to participate had to complete a three-week essential skills course before completing the application process. The course, provided by BACH for no cost and taught by instructors at the Community College of Baltimore County, prepared candidates to

apply for the apprenticeship program by helping them develop their resumes, improve their English through contextualized English as a Second Language instruction, and practice for their interviews.

The apprentices who participated in the essential skills course described it as useful, providing knowledge and skills relevant to employment in the U.S. After the course, they felt more prepared for their interviews and for beginning work at a U.S. hospital. One apprentice noted that the interview preparation was so useful that, even if not selected as an apprentice, the training would be a great benefit in seeking other employment.

Incumbent Workers. Johns Hopkins recruited apprentices from their incumbent workforce by posting announcements and sharing the information widely among frontline environmental care workers. Managers and current supervisors also helped identify high-performing individuals who would make good candidates. The apprenticeship was marketed as a pathway for advancement and supported by the union, despite moving members to supervisory positions not subject to collective bargaining. Incumbent workers were hesitant

at first to join the program, unsure of how they would benefit. That fear dissipated as the program gained traction. Now former apprentices share their experience and the personal benefits as they recruit the next cohorts.

Those recruited for the apprenticeship program participate in a competitive selection process. For the first cohort, in 2017, 14 apprentices, evenly divided between incumbent workers and immigrants, were selected. The interview process was particularly challenging for the immigrant candidates. In reflecting back, the apprentices from immigrant populations stressed the importance of working hard to prepare for the application process—and also that the support they received through the essential skills course was crucial.

Earning and Learning

As noted earlier, the apprenticeship integrates classroom learning with on-the-job training. Apprentices are paid hourly throughout the training period, both when working and when participating in classroom learning. Each Monday, the training manager meets with the trainees, reviews their progress, and provides advice and support. On Saturdays, they attend classes at the Johns Hopkins campus. Every three months, there is a formal review of each apprentice's competency to determine if they are prepared to move to the next level.

On-the-Job Training. Each apprentice is assigned a current environmental care supervisor as a manager and mentor. Initially, apprentices shadow their managers. As they begin to learn the necessary skills, they work alongside the managers, and eventually, they become sufficiently skilled to work independently. This method of learning ensures that apprentices learn skills and

procedures accurately and safely, while also giving them a chance to show leadership as they grow in confidence. Regardless of learning style, on-the-job mentoring helps apprentices succeed.

Apprentices gained valuable experience by rotating to the different units of the hospital. They could apply their skills in various settings and gain a deeper understanding of the unique needs of each unit.

Classroom Instruction. To develop the leadership and management skills necessary to fill the supervisory role, apprentices attend Saturday classes at the Johns Hopkins campus. The Community College of Baltimore County provides non-credit classes in a wide range of subjects, including basic financial skills, managing conflict, teamwork, business writing, setting priorities, and understanding the role of a supervisor. Johns Hopkins provides content specific to environmental care—blood-borne pathogens and universal precautions, cleaning protocols, HR essentials, using the electronic medical records system, and communicating in ways that express compassion and care. Instruction is interactive, and according to the apprentices, immediately relevant. This contrasted with previous educational experiences, in which they had not felt successful.

Apprentices appreciated learning about “teamwork,” and how to communicate, provide support, and diffuse conflict. One apprentice emphasized how the change in roles required new communication skills. “[The courses taught us] how to supervise and communicate with direct reports who were previously peers,” the apprentice explained. Computer skills were also essential, and immediately applicable to the work apprentices were asked to do.

Apprentices

In their own words

“There are no upfront costs of any kind. There are no risks with trying; therefore, it is a risk free experience with nothing to lose, only to gain.”

“When we started classroom instruction, I was not sure of what to expect. Learning how to communicate with struggling employees and managing and defusing conflict was valuable.”

“My pay is 30% better, and the health insurance and benefits help. You can relax.”

“I was homesick and missed my country, my family, my friends, my former job. The apprenticeship program gave me hope.”

Success Factors

The environmental care supervisor apprenticeship has resulted in 15 supervisors at Johns Hopkins. Several key elements of the program—employer commitment, successful collaboration among community institutions, the competency-based approach, and recruitment of both immigrants and incumbent workers—have contributed to that success.

Employer Commitment. Johns Hopkins has made a significant commitment to this program, both in terms of time and financial resources. A hospital team collaborated with BACH to define the competencies for environmental care supervisors. Additionally, the hospital worked with the community college to develop the curriculum for classroom instruction.

Collaboration. By leveraging trusted relationships in the community, BACH played a crucial role in launching—and sustaining—the apprenticeship program. The effective collaboration between the employers, community college, community-based training organizations, and immigrant advocacy groups has created a solid foundation for the program.

Competency-Based Approach. As a competency-based program, the apprenticeship program allows individuals with a wide range of backgrounds and learning styles to progress at different paces. The progressive wage scale is a powerful incentive for participants to complete each stage of the apprenticeship, and the model rewards students for what they know and can do rather than for seat-time.

Participation of Incumbent Workers. Johns Hopkins used the apprenticeship to strengthen career paths for incumbent workers in housekeeping and maintenance positions. Prior to the apprenticeship, it was difficult for these workers to move into supervisory and management positions, which can double their wages. The apprenticeship program expands and diversifies the talent pipeline at the hospital and offers a path to upward mobility for committed workers who don't necessarily have the education to advance without structured supports. Incumbent workers have the added benefit of familiarity with the organization and its culture, and their opportunity to advance through the apprenticeship program plays a key role in improving retention.

Participation of Skilled Immigrants. Immigrants participating in this program were physicians, dentists, and other professionals with management experience. By tapping this pool of skilled workers, Johns Hopkins accessed human capital that was languishing in the community. With a tight labor market, accessing new workers is strategically important. These workers have a tremendous amount to offer—and providing a path to employment is a win-win for the hospital, the workers, and the community, which will benefit from families having greater financial stability.

Career Coaching. Coaching was an essential part of the process of bringing apprentices on board in the hospitals. Many of the immigrant participants had—or acquired—the relevant skills and education to complete the apprenticeship. However, they needed assistance to understand career readiness. In addition to advocating for apprentices generally, coaches help apprentices better understand the culture of the hospital and ensure they have what they need to be successful. Coaches work with apprentices to write resumes, improve interview skills, and learn how to network and market themselves to grow in their careers. Coaches also serve as a communications advocate and intermediary to resolve issues or problems. By helping apprentices overcome these career readiness and cultural barriers, coaches are able to set apprentices on a career path to success.

Apprentice's Perspectives

The success of any program is dependent on the experiences of those who participate. The apprentices shared their insights into how the program worked for them, and its impact on their lives.

Choosing to Become an Apprentice. The incumbent workers and immigrant apprentices had different views of the apprentice program, with incumbent workers initially much more ambivalent about joining the program. For incumbent workers, becoming a manager was awkward—workers and managers are often adversarial and they worried about supervising their peers. Some incumbent workers, however, saw the apprenticeship as an opportunity for growth in their current jobs.

For immigrants, the path to becoming an apprentice—especially the essential skills course—was challenging, but the apprenticeship offered a clear path to employment and greater financial stability.

Recruitment. The first apprentices had little understanding of what an apprenticeship is and what it would entail. Some reported being skeptical when hearing the word “supervisor” and worried about being in a position to manage their friends. However, after participating in the program, they now feel strongly that the program offers a great opportunity. All agreed that former apprentices are the best advertisement for the program. As supervisors, they can tell current employees about the program and how it has positively impacted their careers. As one apprentice noted, “There are no upfront costs of any kind, there are no risks with trying; therefore, it is a risk-free experience with nothing to lose, only to gain.”

Economic Stability. Probably the most important benefit for workers is increased financial stability. Incumbent workers noted that in their previous positions, they often had to work multiple jobs or overtime to make ends meet. Work ate into their time with their families, and even so they sometimes couldn't pay their bills. Upon completion of the program, individuals reported significant increases in pay.

One apprentice stated that their pay is 30 percent higher and “the health insurance and benefits help. . . .You can relax.” Another apprentice is no longer juggling bills and is now in the process of purchasing a house. Increased financial stability, said another apprentice, improved their quality of life, and their ability to join friends for vacations and other activities.

Immigrant apprentices reported that while their new jobs were not at the same level as their careers in their home countries, they were grateful to be able to earn an income and learn. Prior to entering the apprenticeship, one immigrant apprentice reported feelings of being homesick and wanting to return to her native country and her family, friends, and her former job. She reported relying heavily on her faith to move forward and found the apprenticeship program gave her hope.

Personal Growth. Overall, the program offered participants an opportunity for personal growth. The immigrants felt the essential skills course was valuable, providing the opportunity to learn about U.S. culture, develop English skills, and experience how to go through the employment application process in the United States. Almost all of the individuals had experience working in healthcare settings, but the apprenticeship allowed them to develop supervisory skills, including communication, management, and computer software skills. The apprentices described how their growth transformed their view of the workplace and their job, and many looked forward to continued learning and growth, a major achievement for workers who had previously felt undervalued and stuck in dead-end jobs.

Skills for the Future

The apprentices considered the program a valuable learning experience. It is however only the beginning. As one apprentice stated, they learned many valuable things during the apprenticeship program, but not all things can be learned in 9-18 months. Apprentices also shared that learning how to deal with employees, what to say and what not to say, was knowledge that would be applicable in other workplaces. They were pleased that their employer values and supports continuing education, and hoped to be able to continue to take advantage of such opportunities.

Conclusion

This case study highlights how a competency-based apprenticeship program can create a pipeline of diverse candidates for hard-to-fill positions, while also providing a pathway to good, family-sustaining jobs for new immigrants and low-wage workers often passed over for management opportunities. At the time of publication, the program has trained and registered 15 environmental care services supervisors.

As the sponsor of this apprenticeship program, BACH played a key role in bringing together the various partners to launch the program and ensure it offered career opportunities for new Americans who faced barriers in finding employment. The intermediary model has a distinct advantage over an employer-based apprenticeship program, in that the registered apprenticeship is now accessible to employers across the state. Employers that adopt the program may change up to 20 percent of the curriculum to meet their specific needs.

Impact on Apprentices. The greatest impact of the apprenticeship program is on the apprentices themselves. The starting annual salary of \$40,000 for a certified apprentice promoted to an environmental care supervisor position, in many cases, was as much as double their previous salary. This change significantly increased the apprentices' financial stability and quality of life, without having to incur any educational debt. In addition to the financial benefits, the apprentices felt a sense of accomplishment; they were pleased to have an opportunity for professional growth and praised their employer for making an investment in their improvement. For incumbent employees, participating in the apprenticeship was so positive that many encouraged colleagues to join the program, even before the first group finished. This dynamic helped to overcome skepticism about following a career path that would involve supervising fellow workers who had been peers.

Impact on Employer. Johns Hopkins Hospital has been pleased with the results of the program, which has created a diverse candidate pipeline for environmental care supervisors, diversified the employees in these positions, and increased opportunities for the hospital's incumbent frontline staff. In addition, the program has helped the hospital meet its commitment to hiring locally and to promoting internally, which has reduced the cost and burden of onboarding employees unfamiliar with the organizational culture and standards. By increasing employee engagement and retention, the environmental care department is now better equipped to meet the hospital's needs for a safe and clean environment.

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TEL 202-223-8994 | info@nationalfund.org
1250 Connecticut Ave NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20036
WWW.NATIONALFUND.ORG