



THE APPRENTICESHIP CONNECTORS

HOW DIFFERENT YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP  
INTERMEDIARY MODELS CAN SUPPORT STUDENTS,  
EMPLOYERS, AND COMMUNITIES



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# INTRODUCTION



Policymakers, employers, and educators have become increasingly invested in **youth apprenticeships** as a strategy for connecting students with high-wage, in-demand jobs and creating a more inclusive economy. [Youth apprenticeship programs](#) provide students with a pathway to a career through the combination of classroom-based instruction, paid on-the-job learning under professional mentors in the field, and ongoing assessments against relevant competencies and standards, all culminating in a portable industry-recognized credential and postsecondary credit.

To align all of the components of a youth apprenticeship, educators and employers must both be involved in its **design** and **implementation**. However, connection and alignment across the two groups can be difficult to coordinate, and building the capacity and infrastructure to support youth apprenticeship programs can be challenging. Thus, many communities rely on intermediaries to help build, run, launch, and scale programs.

Intermediaries' functions vary, but they often **act as the connector** between education and industry and are key to the operations of many youth apprenticeship programs. Education Strategy Group's (ESG) [research](#) outlines some of the various functions of intermediaries and their critical role in advancing youth apprenticeship.

ESG conducted a nationwide landscape scan of youth apprenticeship intermediaries to **outline different models** and provide a clearer understanding of their roles, functions, and impact on the youth apprenticeship ecosystem. Though youth apprenticeship intermediaries exist in a diverse array of forms, many can be categorized as:

- **Program implementers**, which primarily focus on supporting stakeholders through the design and implementation of youth apprenticeship programs often by convening key partners, overseeing program operations, supporting learners, and managing data collection and systems;
- **Field builders**, which primarily focus on strengthening the youth apprenticeship ecosystem and facilitating systems change by supporting stakeholder networks, providing technical assistance to program-implementers, aggregating and analyzing data across education and workforce systems, and engaging in research and advocacy; or
- **Hybrid intermediaries**, which prioritize activities related to both implementation and systems change and may equally focus on program implementation and field building.

While intermediaries do not always fit neatly into one of these three categories, articulating distinguishing factors between intermediaries, including their roles, impact, and functions, is important in helping leaders understand which type of intermediary could best meet their needs and strengthen their youth apprenticeship ecosystem. This understanding can also help leaders **tailor strategies, regulations, and investments** in youth apprenticeship to optimize the benefits and mitigate potential barriers associated with different intermediary models.

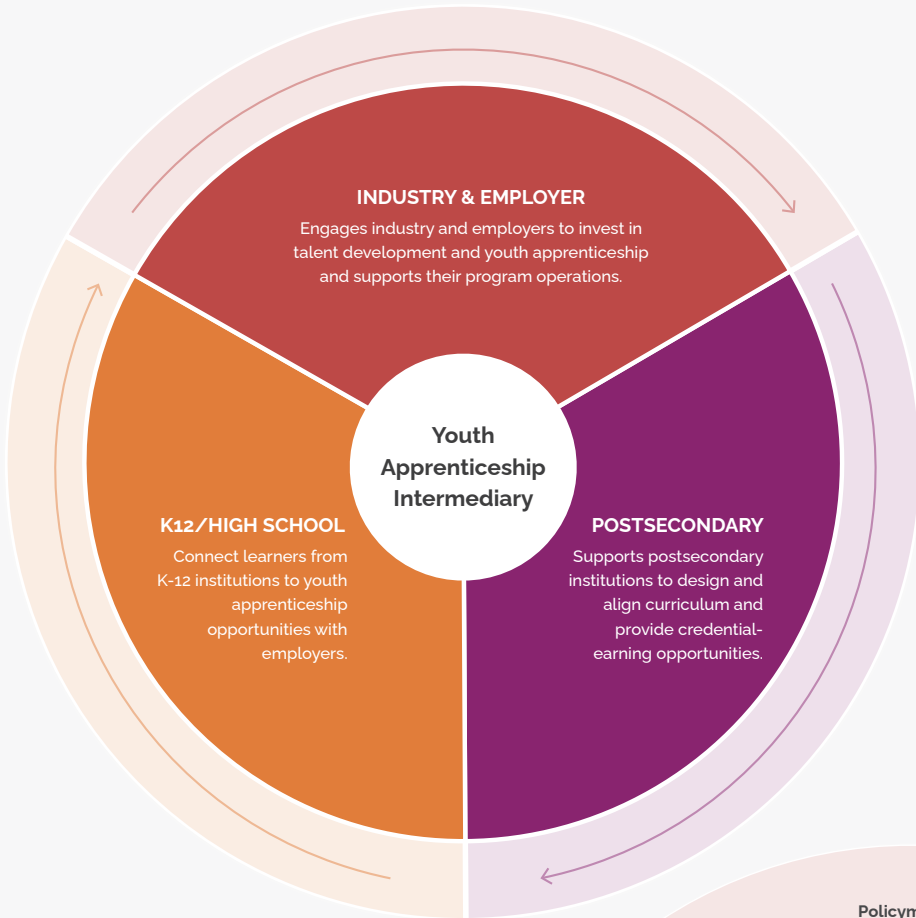
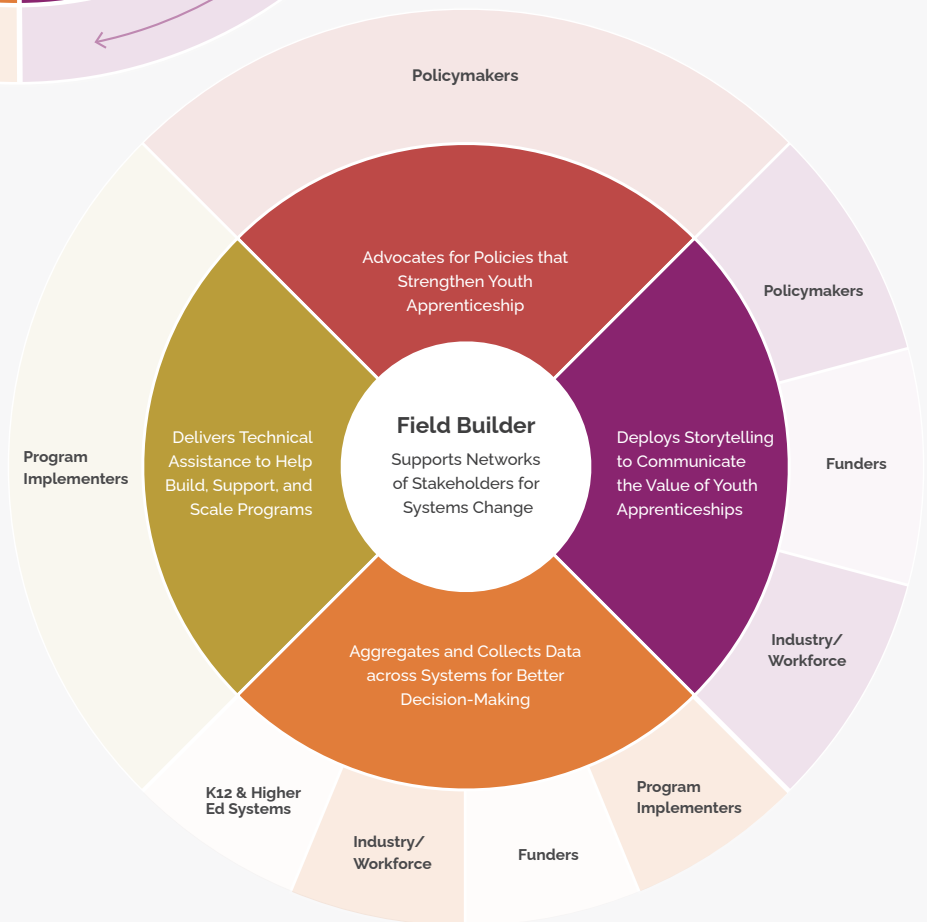


Figure 1

## Program Implementer Intermediary Model

Figure 2

## Field Builder Intermediary Model



# PROGRAM IMPLEMENTERS



**Program implementers** often take the form of community-based or nonprofit organizations or may be embedded within other local institutions, such as school districts, community colleges, or workforce boards. These intermediaries primarily support educational institutions, employers, learners, and other stakeholders with the goal of effective implementation of quality youth apprenticeship programs. Some may also aim to scale programs or to increase equitable access to youth apprenticeship. Program implementers are thus often responsible for connecting and convening key partners, program design and implementation, and adding administrative capacity, though different intermediaries may focus on one or more of these functions.

## CONVENING KEY PARTNERS

One of the main roles of an implementation-focused intermediary is to act as the **connective link** between key leaders and organizations across K-12, postsecondary, industry, and workforce development. They often act as the “[go-between](#),” bridging the gap between the historically siloed education and workforce systems and helping partners coalesce around goals and a shared vision. Importantly, intermediaries also drive stakeholders to focus capacity and resources around shared goals. Furthermore, program implementers frequently focus on bringing employers to the table, as engaging them is a recurring challenge. As a liaison between education and industry, intermediaries often are responsible for communicating the potential value of youth apprenticeship to employers and encouraging their investment.

## PROGRAM DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

Program implementers are typically deeply entrenched in the **design** and **implementation** of youth apprenticeship programs, carrying out functions at the intersection of education and workforce in service of educational institutions, learners, families, and employers.

Program implementers commonly **support partners** to design curriculum and training programs, map work experiences to relevant curriculum and industry standards, and offer training to employers to build their capacity to work with youth. They may also manage recurring processes, such as interviewing youth apprentices and matching them to employers, and drafting and completing necessary paperwork, such as MOUs or articulation agreements.

Program implementers might also **support learners and families** via a wide range of strategies, including providing online apprenticeship portals connecting learners to opportunities, offering mentorship, or subsidizing resources necessary for persistence and completion of youth apprenticeship programs. [Career Launch Kalamazoo](#), a program implementer embedded within Kalamazoo Public Schools, provides students with funding for uniforms and public transit cards based on student need. Program implementers embedded in a community may have a deep understanding of the resources youth apprentices need to access and persist through programs.

## DATA AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Program implementers often also play an important role in **aggregating data** across partners in K-12, higher education, and workforce to understand the impact of their programming and student outcomes. They also may be involved in standing up data collection infrastructure, driving data strategy, and guiding partners on how to use this information.

[Advance CTE's work on youth apprenticeship data quality](#) demonstrates that intermediaries can and should collect data for not only federal and state accountability, but also to measure performance, track apprentices' competencies, ensure equity, and support continuous improvement. Given their role in data collection and aggregation, program implementers are also in a position to hold partners accountable to goals and requirements, which is critical for quality assurance.



SPOTLIGHT

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTER:  
**CAREERWISE COLORADO, COLORADO**

[CareerWise Colorado](#), a **state-wide program implementer**, aims to build a sustainable and accessible youth apprenticeship ecosystem across the state, providing youth with economic opportunities and businesses with a talent pipeline. The organization provides direct services to **learners, K-12 institutions, and employers**. CareerWise Colorado is affiliated with [CareerWise USA](#), a field-building intermediary that supports the advancement of youth apprenticeship nationally.

Through CareerWise Colorado, learners can access **online resources** to support students with their resumes, cover letters, and interviews, as well as virtual mentorship and coaching. CareerWise Colorado also supports K-12 educational institutions by helping ensure that curriculum prepares students for youth apprenticeships and facilitating agreements with higher education institutions so students can earn postsecondary credit. Employers can also work with CareerWise Colorado to design their youth apprenticeships and pathways and align their training to relevant industry recognized credentials.

# FIELD BUILDERS



One of the main roles of a **field builder** is to help build, support, and in many cases, scale programs led by implementation-focused intermediaries. There may be various program implementers in one region or sector, and field builders might build coherence and collaboration across them. Field builders also have the loftier goal to **improve practice** and **affect systems change** to advance youth apprenticeship.

Thus, field builders focus on convening stakeholders and supporting networks, delivering technical assistance, conducting research and data collection, and ultimately affecting policy and systems change. While it is common for program implementers to serve a specific community, field builders commonly serve a region, state, or sector of work, with a few working across the country.

## SUPPORTING NETWORKS FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE

Both program intermediaries and field builders engage in convening key partners, but field builders' primarily **bring together stakeholders** with the goal of achieving impact at scale. For example, [Apprenticeship Carolina](#), an intermediary and division of the South Carolina Technical College System, focuses on engaging employers around youth apprenticeship, while relying on their local educational institutions to work directly with youth and provide wraparound services. In addition to convening stakeholders around implementation, field builders also have the influence and reach to bring together **practitioners, policymakers, and funders** to move the needle on policy change needed to advance youth apprenticeship and increase buy-in from stakeholders.

## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR PROGRAM IMPLEMENTERS

It is common for field builders to focus their efforts on **providing technical assistance** to program implementers and employers. Field builders often focus on providing technical assistance and coaching to support program launch and growth. They might also provide support around strategic planning, financial sustainability, systems-change theory, and employer engagement. Through the [Indiana Youth Apprenticeship Accelerator](#), [Ascend Indiana](#) allocates funds to sites across the state to launch youth apprenticeship programs, while providing those sites with technical assistance and connections to other youth apprenticeship partners. Another field builder, [Careerwise USA](#), helps local institutions in developing capacity to serve as their own intermediary through coaching, resources and technology.

## DATA, RESEARCH, AND POLICY

Another common function of field builders is **data collection** and **research** on youth apprenticeship more broadly. While some program implementers may engage in these activities, it is often at a smaller scale (they may be tracking their own program’s student outcomes), and they are generally more focused on program delivery and support. On the other hand, the data collection and research from field-building intermediaries is often tied to youth apprenticeship strategy at the state level. For instance, [Career Connect Texas](#) has built a [data dashboard](#), which combines federal and state data and acts as a centralized resource through which regional partners can access education training and labor market information. Partners can use this data to assess their own performance, make programming decisions, guide investment, and drive continuous improvement. [Ascend Indiana](#) conducts labor market research and disseminates best practices across practitioners and policy makers to positively impact people and systems across the state.



SPOTLIGHT

FIELD BUILDER:  
**CAREER CONNECT TEXAS (CCTX), TEXAS**

Beginning as a peer-learning network, [CCTX](#), part of [Educate Texas](#), CCTX is a **field builder** that supports a network of education and workforce leaders to advance equitable work-based learning, including youth apprenticeship. CCTX has goals to connect **work-based learning** with **employer needs**, increase access to work-based learning for underserved students, and scale and sustain programming in the state.

CCTX convenes leaders across education, workforce, industry, and government and facilitates peer learning across program implementers. The field builder provides its network members with **technical assistance** to design and scale work-based learning opportunities and infrastructure and a **centralized data dashboard** with education and labor market information to guide decision-making and continuous improvement. CCTX is also invested in the sustainability of its efforts and is working to sustain and scale its work through the use of data, common definitions, and the braiding of funding for work-based learning from different sources.

# HYBRID INTERMEDIARIES



If youth apprenticeship intermediaries lie along a spectrum with program implementers on one end and field builders on the other, **hybrid intermediaries** would lie somewhere in the middle. Many youth apprenticeship intermediaries fall into this category, and they may perform functions typical of both program implementers and field builders and may have goals that relate to implementation as well as systems change. Because of their role, focus area, and functions, hybrid intermediaries are uniquely positioned to **connect policy to practice** and **vice versa**. For example, [Future Focused Education \(FFE\)](#) in New Mexico is involved in the design and implementation of programs, including working with stakeholders to design community-embedded work-based learning opportunities and providing partners with administrative support. FFE additionally supports communities of practice and connects practitioners across the state in peer-learning opportunities, while also driving advocacy efforts for work-based learning, impacting the policy landscape in New Mexico.

## DETERMINING THE RIGHT FIT

Program implementers and field builders are both critical in the youth apprenticeship ecosystem and play different roles. While many intermediaries do not fit cleanly into the role of program implementer or field builder, understanding these archetypes and their goals can inform decisions on how best to invest in youth apprenticeship. As more communities invest in youth apprenticeship programs, there are different factors that may help leaders determine which kind of intermediary model would best meet their needs.

- **Goals and Fit:** Leaders should first consider the desired impact of the intermediary and the functions the intermediary would need to carry out to meet those goals, as well as the scale at which the intermediary would need to operate.
- **Existing Assets:** It is important to acknowledge the existing ecosystem that could support advancing youth apprenticeship, including assessing the assets of potential partners, such as educational institutions, employers, and existing intermediaries or institutions that execute or are well-positioned to execute the functions of an intermediary. [Mapping local assets](#) is a critical step to determining how an intermediary may fit into the existing ecosystem and strengthen it.



- **Enabling Conditions:** Leaders should consider the impact of current systems and policies on youth apprenticeship programs, prioritizing critical elements such as collaborative education–industry partnerships, a transparent regulatory framework encompassing guidelines on hours, wages, and safety, financial support, high–quality mentoring and training, flexible learning pathways, industry recognition, certification, and regular program evaluation. Deciphering the conditions that may impact youth apprenticeship programs can bring leaders closer to understanding the needs that communities have and how an intermediary might best plug in and serve community members.

Considering the ideal functions, scale, assets, and existing ecosystem and conditions may help communities envision the kind of intermediary that would help advance youth apprenticeship in their area. Furthermore, understanding how they function can **advance coordination** between **different kinds of intermediaries**, which is key to scaling programs and expanding access to youth apprenticeship.



SPOTLIGHT

HYBRID INTERMEDIARIES:  
**THE LAUNCH APPRENTICESHIP NETWORK,  
INLAND EMPIRE REGION, CALIFORNIA**

The [LAUNCH Apprenticeship Network](#), a product of the **Inland Empire Desert Region College Consortium**, is a youth apprenticeship hybrid intermediary that connects the education and workforce systems of the region, including community colleges, K–12 districts, two workforce development boards, and employers, with the goal of closing the skills gap in California’s Inland Empire. LAUNCH has a student application on their website, but their focus is to provide **direct services to employers** adopting the apprenticeship model and to build a regional strategy to advance youth apprenticeship.

The Network’s position and reach enable it to connect with and convene employers across various high–demand sectors in the Inland Empire. LAUNCH can then assess employer needs, provide them with relevant established program models, and connections to educational institutions, so that employers are not starting from scratch when starting a youth apprenticeship program. The Network also provides employers with **technical assistance**, supporting them throughout the apprenticeship process and providing tools to make their participation more manageable.



PARTNERSHIP TO ADVANCE YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP

Led by New America, the **Partnership to Advance Youth Apprenticeship (PAYA)** is a multi-year, multi-stakeholder initiative that aims to assist innovative organizations around the country in developing high-quality youth **apprenticeship programs** that serve students, employers and communities alike. PAYA is comprised of seven National Partner organizations: Advance CTE, CareerWise Colorado, Charleston Regional Youth Apprenticeship, Education Strategy Group, JFF, the National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity, and the National Governors Association. PAYA is supported by funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Bloomberg Philanthropies, Carnegie Corporation of New York, JPMorgan Chase & Co., Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation, Siemens Foundation, Smidt Foundation, and the Walton Family Foundation. For more information, click [here](#).



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**Education Strategy Group (ESG)** is a mission-driven, national consulting firm specializing in **K-12, higher education and workforce solutions**. ESG brings years of experience helping states and communities around the country devise and implement strategies to align education and workforce goals and implement strategies to meet those goals. ESG brings deep experience devising and implementing strategies to positively impact student success. For more information, click [here](#).