

Apprenticeship: Industry Driven, Made to Scale

Speaker Biographies

Zach Boren is a senior fellow in the Work, Education, and Labor Division at the Urban Institute. He is a highly experienced workforce development professional, with more than 15 years of expertise in shaping government policies on workforce development and apprenticeships and building training programs with employers and labor. Since 2020, he has directed projects for Urban to expand and modernize apprenticeships and has written extensively on policies to improve the labor market and conditions for business and workers. Before joining Urban, Boren was the director of registered apprenticeship and policy in the US Department of Labor's Office of Apprenticeship. He is a frequent presenter, trainer, and author, lending his expertise on apprenticeships, equal employment opportunity, and labor issues. His work has been featured with Bloomberg, NPR, NBC News Radio, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, and the Public News Service. He has a bachelor's degree from Indiana University and a master's degree from the Catholic University of America.

Ashlee Fitch is the Director of the United Steelworkers' Steelworkers Charitable and Educational Organization and oversees their federal and state grants. She is dedicated to expanding apprenticeship programs, creating upskilling opportunities, and increasing access to career development initiatives across the union. Before joining the United Steelworkers, Ms. Fitch worked in a rolled aluminum plant in Ravenswood, WV, where she served as a union health and safety committee representative. She is a Certified Safety Professional through the Board of Certified Safety Professionals and holds both an MBA and a master's degree in Safety from West Virginia University.

Maegan Godoy is a student at Friendship Technology Preparatory Academy in Washington, DC and is the project coordinator youth apprentice at the Partnership to Advance Youth Apprenticeship (PAYA) at New America. Maegan previously worked for the District of Columbia Housing Authority, as well as the Wards 7 & 8 Prevention Center. Maegan is going to continue her education in the fall of 2025, and she plans to major in political science and minor in ethics and philosophy.

Annelies Goger is an economic geographer focused on developing innovative policy solutions to increase economic opportunity in the U.S. Dr. Goger's recent work investigates how to [align](#) education systems and employer demand to [scale earn-and-learn opportunities](#) in the U.S.; how to improve labor and education [data systems](#) to promote [skills-based practices](#) in hiring; and how to improve [economic mobility for youth](#) through human-centered program design. She is an expert in U.S. workforce development policy, apprenticeships, global supply chains, and economic development. Dr. Goger's work has been prominently featured in [TEDx San Quentin](#), CNN, NPR, Washington Monthly, The Hill, and a number of local outlets and podcasts. Dr. Goger's work has challenged the dominant "skills gap" narrative, arguing that building stronger education and labor market institutions, addressing information asymmetries about careers and resulting patterns of occupational segregation, and making long-term investments in talent development are the key to unleashing regional innovation and addressing racial and gender inequities in the labor market.

Deborah Kobes is a senior fellow for apprenticeship and workforce in the Work, Education, and Labor Division at the Urban Institute, where she advances the expansion of diverse, inclusive, and high-quality registered apprenticeship programs and researches their impact on financial stability. Her other research interests include drivers of labor market inequity and the intersection of workforce development and labor market policy. Kobes has testified before Congress about youth apprenticeship programs, and she has authored numerous reports and book chapters on innovations in apprenticeship and workforce development. Before joining Urban, Kobes was the interim vice president for the Center for Apprenticeship and Work-Based Learning at Jobs for the Future. She was the first employee of the Emerald Cities Collaborative, a research affiliate in the Community Innovators Lab at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and a Brookings Institution research fellow. Kobes started her career in the Income and Benefits Policy Center at the Urban Institute, supporting the launch of the Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center. Kobes received a BSE in civil engineering from Princeton University and a PhD in urban political economy and governance from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Vinz Koller is a national expert on US career education and workforce policy and a thought leader in adapting a European dual professional education system for the US. As a Swiss-American dual national, he has deep understanding of the Swiss and the US systems. Through project work for the US Department of Labor, Education and Housing and Urban Development, he has also developed particular expertise in developing career pathway and apprenticeship programs, improving reentry programs for ex-offenders in education and workforce development. He and his SPR team, in collaboration with the Foundation for California Community Colleges are coaching the California Apprenticeship Initiative grantees throughout California. Mr. Koller combined his undergraduate work at the University of Zurich with graduate work in International Policy Studies from the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey.

Brent Orrell is a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), specializing in job training and workforce development with a special focus on disconnected and disadvantaged populations, including youth, justice-involved, veterans, and neurodivergent persons. His recent work has focused on the workforce opportunities and challenges resulting from generative AI and automation, as well as strategies for improving economic mobility in rural, redeveloping, and non-metropolitan areas throughout America. Brent has spearheaded AEI's involvement with the Workforce Futures Initiative, in collaboration with the Brookings Institution and the Harvard Kennedy School, which has produced multiple reports, working group sessions, and interest from communities across the US.

Nicole Overley is the Commissioner of Virginia Works, the Commonwealth's new agency focused exclusively on workforce development. Nicole leads an incredible team of professionals across a multitude of programs and services that support the needs of employers and job seekers of Virginia and coordinate across the broader Commonwealth-wide workforce ecosystem. Serving the Commonwealth fulfills a lifelong dream of public service for Nicole. Previously, in over a decade spent with Deloitte Consulting in Northern Virginia, Nicole incubated and scaled the firm's Future of Work practice for government, nonprofits, and higher education, spoke and published frequently on workforce & workplace trends, was named to Consulting Magazine's "35 under 35," and worked with public and private sector clients across the nation. Nicole holds two degrees from Johns Hopkins University. In her free time, she can be found exploring places she hasn't been before across Virginia and beyond.

Brent Parton is the President of CareerWise, leading strategic partnerships, community engagement, and growth, with a particular focus on the development of CareerWise's largest market, New York City. With a background in both the public and private sector, Brent is a key player in shaping national policies to align education and workforce systems to improve outcomes for youth, industry, and communities. He comes to CareerWise with a strong track record of leadership in workforce development and a distinguished career in public service, leading workforce efforts in both the Obama and Biden-Harris Administrations. Most recently Brent was the Acting Assistant Secretary for the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) at the U.S. Department of Labor, leading the ETA and leading change across federal training, unemployment insurance and foreign labor certification systems. In this role oversaw more than \$3 billion of annual federal investment in workforce development and apprenticeship, working closely with federal, state, local and private sector partners to advance strategies connecting all communities to good jobs in critical and growing sectors. Brent has a wealth of experience working alongside and advising governments, industry, labor and philanthropy in the design and implementation of workforce initiatives and coalitions. He was the Deputy Director of the Center on Education & Labor at New America, where his research led to the founding of the Partnership to Advance Youth Apprenticeship (PAYA). He also developed and led a portfolio of workforce research and technical assistance efforts at the National Governors Association and in the education sector of the World Bank.

Erin Roth serves as the Maryland Department of Labor's Assistant Secretary of the Division of Workforce Development and Adult Learning. In this role, she leads efforts to support jobseekers and businesses through the public workforce system. Roth leads the division, which oversees an annual budget of approximately \$230M and over 400 employees, spanning critical work in the American Job Centers, correctional education within the State's prisons, and adult education to support English Language Learners and individuals who do not yet possess a high school diploma. In her role, she is also responsible for oversight of signature initiatives, such as EARN Maryland, Registered Apprenticeship, and Maryland Works for Wind. Roth is deeply committed to delivering on workforce solutions that are responsive to the needs of both businesses and jobseekers. Throughout her 15+ year tenure with the Department, Roth has led major initiatives involving sector partnerships, unemployment insurance, and supporting historically underserved populations. She has also spearheaded critical disaster response efforts, launching key resources to minimize or eliminate the need for layoffs in times of crisis, including the State's COVID-19 Layoff Aversion Fund and the Port of Baltimore Worker Retention Fund. Roth holds a Bachelor of Arts in Global Studies from Loyola University Maryland, a Master's in Public Policy from Johns Hopkins University, and is a proud graduate of Leadership Maryland.

Daniel Serota is the Vice President of Government and Public Affairs at Aon, a leading global professional services firm, Daniel creates meaningful and sustainable connections with a wide variety of stakeholders to further Aon's public service mission and community outreach activities. With over ten years of experience in this role, he leads US public policy and political initiatives for Aon at the federal, state, and regulatory level, and directs Aon's Political Action Committee. He also empowers the Latino Professional Network within Aon as an Executive Sponsor. Daniel was appointed to the Illinois Workforce Innovation Board by Governor J.B. Pritzker of Illinois and sits as the chair of the Apprentice Illinois Committee, which

is focused on growth of apprenticeship programs in Illinois, and advises the U.S. secretary of labor on the national apprenticeship system as part of the Advisory Committee on Apprenticeship. Daniel has garnered recognition from some of the top leadership groups in Chicago, including Crain's Chicago Business 40 Under 40, which highlights professionals who have reached the top of their fields before the age of 40; Edgar Fellows, a leadership development program that fosters bi-partisanship; and Leadership Greater Chicago, a year-long leadership development program that includes the top leaders from the business, government, and civic communities in the Chicago-area. Among other civic leadership roles, Daniel is the Treasurer for the Chicagoland Chamber PAC and serves on the Breakthrough T1D Illinois Chapter Board.

Erica Simon is Deputy Director of the Partnership to Advance Youth Apprenticeship (PAYA) within New America's Center on Education & Labor. Her work builds on successful cohorts of national partners that elevate youth apprenticeship as a model for students to explore and enter in-demand industries with economically viable and available jobs. Simon has over a decade of experience in higher education strategy and workforce development spaces, where she has worked to foster career-connected learning and partnerships with communities and employers across Texas and the Southwest. Through her work as Deputy Director at Educate Texas, the education arm of the Communities Foundation of Texas, Simon launched and led a statewide cohort of community college and workforce leaders in building capacity for and equitable access to work-based learning models to advance learners toward family-sustaining wage careers. The uptake of youth apprenticeships and registered apprenticeships in Texas continues to gain momentum across high-growth sectors and is a national exemplar of ways students can earn and learn while reaching their career goals. Simon is a subject matter expert on youth apprenticeship and speaks regularly on panels. Simon sits on the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas Steering Committee for Advance Together, an initiative that supports the work of community partnerships to address education and employment challenges that connect Texans and residents of the 11th District with quality jobs.

Cody Waits serves as the Executive Director of the Arkansas Department of Commerce, Division of Workforce Connections. This division was created due to the Department of Commerce's realignment, which reorganized the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services into three new divisions: Re-employment, Workforce Connections, and Workforce Policy and Innovation. Director Waits is responsible for executing state and federal workforce development programs and coordinating with local workforce development boards. Additionally, he is responsible for Titles I-IV of WIOA, the Office Skills Development and a newly created business engagement and training solutions group that supports new and expanding businesses to meet their workforce needs as well as the states Manufacturing Extension Partnership working closely on economic development projects. Executive Director Waits previously served as the director of the Arkansas Office of Skills Development, a division of the Department of Commerce, from 2019 to 2023. He also served as deputy director of the Department of Career Education from 2017 to 2019. Most recently, he served as Senior Government Engagement Manager for Transfr, a virtual reality vocational career exploration and training company. Cody currently co-chairs NASWA's Registered Apprenticeship & Work-Based Learning committee with Tonya Neely of Mississippi. Cody is the husband to his Wife Anna Waits and father to their four children Ava, Mia, Willow, and Hudson.