

Scaling Apprenticeships for Small Businesses: Strategies That Work

Speaker Biographies

Bhavani Arabandi is a principal research associate in the Work, Education, and Labor Division at the Urban Institute. She is a labor sociologist with a focus on workforce development, apprenticeship, and strategies to address persistent inequities in the labor market. Her expertise spans qualitative research, policy analysis, and technical assistance to support evidence-informed practice. Prior to joining the Urban Institute, Arabandi worked as a program analyst at the US Department of Labor, where she was selected as a fiscal year 2020 CXO Fellow and received the Secretary's award for outreach and training. Before joining the federal service, Arabandi was an academic with extensive experience at public and private universities. She was a Fulbright-Nehru Academic and Professional Excellence Award recipient and a postdoctoral research fellow at Rice University. She has published in major journals and has received several awards recognizing her research contributions. Arabandi has a PhD in sociology from the University of Virginia.

Andrew Campbell is a Policy Program Manager in the Research to Action Lab at the Urban Institute, where he provides project leadership and subject-matter expertise across research, technical assistance, and philanthropic advising initiatives focused on workforce development and inclusive economic mobility. He is a core contributor to Urban's registered apprenticeship practice area, leading research, policy analysis, and program implementation efforts that support employer adoption of apprenticeship models and expand access to high-quality pathways to upwardly mobile careers. Andrew holds an MPP from the University of Edinburgh and a BA in Political Science from the College of Wooster. Prior to joining the Urban Institute in 2018, he completed a fellowship with the European Parliament. He is originally from northern Michigan.

Ashley Felton is the Chief Executive Officer at Technically IT. She founded a dynamic, full service IT firm that delivers a comprehensive range of services, including training, consulting, recruiting, and project management. Under her visionary leadership, Technically IT has grown into a leading Managed Service Provider (MSP), offering cutting-edge IT help desk and call center services, alongside a suite of IT solutions designed to enhance and streamline business operations. Ashley is deeply passionate about innovation, sustainability, and making a positive social impact. Beyond her work at Technically IT, she serves on the advisory boards of multiple academic institutions, where she helps colleges and universities enhance student retention and implement effective growth strategies. Her leadership philosophy is centered around compassion, transparency, and always putting people first. Through this approach, Ashley has helped countless individuals and businesses unlock their full potential, driving success and creating lasting positive change.

Dr. Chris Harrington is originally from Detroit, Michigan, and was appointed State Director of ApprenticeshipNC, North Carolina's State Apprenticeship Agency in January 2024. He earned a Ph.D. from North Carolina A&T State University (leadership studies), an M.B.A. from The University of Tennessee, and a B.S. in Organizational Management from Crichton College. His forty-year career spanned multiple industries and countries where he served in various executive and leadership roles including with the U.S. Army, Technicolor, Sony, Dräger, and Elastic Therapy (ETI). Just prior to his

appointment, he served as Professor of the Practice of Management at High Point University. Harrington started an apprenticeship program at ETI, was a founding leader of a youth apprenticeship consortium, completed his dissertation research on factors influencing whether firms would engage in apprenticeship, and sits on several executive boards focused on workforce and economic development.

Amanda Richardson has 20 years of work experience in higher education, including 12 years within the South Carolina Technical College System. As the Vice President for Apprenticeship Carolina™, Amanda is committed to advancing workforce development in the state of South Carolina through innovative apprenticeship programs and partnerships. Amanda received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Clemson University, her MBA from Southern Wesleyan University, and has completed the SC Economic Development Institute, the SCTCS Leadership Academy, and the Community College Leadership program through the University of South Carolina.