



Unlocking Opportunities through Youth Apprenticeships in Utah: A Multi-Agency Analysis



THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH
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Executive Summary

Study Overview

The Utah Education Policy Center (UEPC) was commissioned by Talent Ready Utah (TRU)¹ and the Utah System of Higher Education to examine the landscape of statutory responsibilities for youth apprenticeships in Utah to identify opportunities for improved alignment, efficiencies, and interagency collaboration among agencies, including USHE (TRU), DWS, USBE, and the Governor's Office (GO). This study was conducted in response to Senate Bill 122 (2024) mandate (see Utah Code section 53B-34-111), which called for the "*design of a framework and system for maximizing efficiencies and expanding youth apprenticeship opportunities for students.*" Utah Code offers two sections with definitions for youth apprenticeships:

- (1) Utah Code, [Section 35A-6-102](#) (DWS statute, also referenced as the definition in [USBE Administrative Rule R277-915-2](#)), defines youth apprenticeships as: *A program or set of strategies that combines academic and technical classroom instruction with work experience through an apprenticeship program and which provides the foundation for youth in high school to choose among multiple pathways, including enrolling in college, beginning full-time employment, or a combination of college and employment.*
- (2) Utah Code, [Section 53B-34-101](#), defines it as: *A program that: combines paid on-the-job learning with formal classroom instruction to prepare students for careers; and includes: structured on-the-job learning for students under the supervision of a skilled employee; classroom instruction for students related to the on-the-job learning; ongoing student assessments using established competency and skills standards; and the student receiving an industry-recognized credential or degree upon completion of the program.*

The Governor's Office (GO), Utah State Board of Education (USBE), the Department of Workforce Services (DWS), TRU, and relevant employers were charged with examining framework and system design recommendations to advance statewide goals for youth apprenticeship in Utah.²

This UEPC's commissioned qualitative study, which occurred from October 2024 through April 2025, was guided by the following four research questions:

1. How do TRU, DWS, USBE, and the Governor's Office understand their **roles, responsibilities, and duties** for youth apprenticeships?
2. How are TRU, DWS, USBE, and the Governor's Office efforts for youth apprenticeships **aligned**?
3. What are the current logistical, regulatory, and financial **barriers** to student, LEA, and employer participation in youth apprenticeships in Utah?
4. What are the **opportunities for improved alignment, efficiencies, and interagency collaboration** among TRU, DWS, USBE, and the Governor's Office to do the following:
 - a. Increase youth apprenticeship offerings.

¹ Senate Bill 122 tasked TRU with staffing the study (<https://le.utah.gov/~2024/bills/static/SB0122.html>).

² This report along with the [workforce alignment report](#) prepared by the Cicero Group (2024) for TRU respond to the legislative mandate.

- b. Increase student and employer participation in youth apprenticeships.
- c. Formalize roles and streamline the use of existing infrastructure
- d. Leverage secondary and post-secondary educational programs.
- e. Identify metrics to assess the success of youth apprenticeships (e.g. Department of Labor resources, Advance CTE); and
- f. Potential state appropriations for youth apprenticeship specialists for scalability.

This research study was designed to provide actionable insights to state agencies, policymakers, and stakeholder groups in Utah, including research-informed recommendations to support Utah's efforts to develop opportunities for YA. Consistent with UEPC research partnerships, UEPC maintained regular meetings with representatives from TRU and included representatives from other partner agencies and state-level youth apprenticeship partners in January 2025.

Methods

To address the study questions, the UEPC team employed a comprehensive qualitative methodology that included multiple data sources from across participating agencies and stakeholders (e.g., secondary and post-secondary education institutions, industries, and current apprentices). The study began with an extensive review of the literature to inform data collection, data analysis, and final recommendations.

Primary data collection occurred in January and February 2025, during which researchers conducted 18 in-depth interviews and 11 focus groups with 38 participants representing state agencies, industry partners, K-12 school districts, higher education institutions, and current youth apprentices. The interviews and focus groups were guided by semi-structured protocols designed to gain insights on participants' understanding of youth apprenticeship roles and responsibilities, perceptions of interagency alignment and collaboration, experiences with implementation barriers, and recommendations for system-wide improvement. Protocols were developed by the UEPC research team in alignment with the study's purpose and refined with input from representatives at study partner agencies to ensure relevance, clarity, and coverage of key topics across participant groups.

Interview and focus group data were supplemented with policy documents, additional stakeholder artifacts, and field notes from observations. These included 27 formal policy documents (e.g., administrative rules, legislative statutes), 36 supplemental artifacts from state agencies (e.g., MOU templates, job descriptions, FAQs and agency-based playbooks for stakeholders, related reports), 17 supplemental artifacts from participating stakeholders (e.g., apprentice agreements and policies, degree maps, career pathway continuums), and observation notes of an industry roundtable and the 2024 Apprenticeship Utah Summit. These data provided additional context on agency responsibilities, stakeholder engagement strategies, and general efforts to support youth apprenticeships.

The data analysis employed both deductive and inductive coding approaches of all data sources to balance the systematic examination of the sought dimensions—governance roles, interagency alignment, and participation barriers—with the emergence of Utah-specific patterns and insights. The dual analysis approach enabled the identification of cross-cutting themes across multiple stakeholder groups while remaining open to perspectives grounded in the unique Utah context. Moreover, the combination of data sources supported trustworthiness and triangulation of findings and provided multiple forms of contextual evidence for findings used to strengthen the applicability of the study's findings.

Key Findings

The UEPC team's analysis generated a set of key findings in response to the research questions that informed the subsequent recommendations. The following summarizes the key findings around the roles and responsibilities of state agencies to support YA in Utah, the ways in which there is interagency alignment among efforts for YA across the agencies, and the barriers affecting participation in and coordination of YA programs in Utah.

Roles and Responsibilities

Analysis revealed seven key dimensions of roles and responsibilities distributed across state agencies. Agencies collectively contribute to a spectrum of responsibilities where not all agencies fulfill all roles, and in some cases, responsibilities are intentionally shared to meet diverse stakeholder needs and local contexts. The seven dimensions include: leadership and policy governance; program development and standards setting; stakeholder partnership development; intermediary functions; funding and resource management; technical assistance; and data accountability and reporting.

Interagency Alignment

- Analysis identified ten dimensions of interagency alignment across Utah's state agencies. These exist on a spectrum from strong alignment to areas with notable opportunities for improvement for interagency alignment: governance and leadership structures; shared purpose and aims; shared definitions of youth apprenticeship; shared standards; role clarity and formal agreements; communication and collaboration mechanisms; funding coordination; shared data systems and metrics; stakeholder engagement processes; and policy development and advocacy.

Barriers

Agency representatives and key stakeholders from across the system (e.g., education systems, employers) discussed barriers to YA in Utah that represented six interrelated categories of barriers affecting participation in youth apprenticeship programs across students, employers, and educational institutions, as well as barriers to efficient state agency coordination. These include: logistical and implementation barriers; regulatory and policy barriers; financial barriers; governance and coordination barriers; awareness and perception barriers; and participation and opportunity barriers.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, UEPC offers a framework of levers designed to strengthen Utah's youth apprenticeship system while leveraging existing resources and infrastructure. The recommendations captured in this framework reflect both immediate opportunities and long-term systemic changes needed to support the sustainability and scaling of youth apprenticeships in Utah. Governance levers lead the recommendations as we see these as a foundation for role clarification, coordination and collaboration, strategic decisions, resource allocations, accountability, and coherence in efforts.



GOVERNANCE LEVERS

Establish joint governance structures and clear roles across agencies to support coordinated YA implementation. Key actions include creating a statewide coordinating council, defining agency responsibilities through formal agreements, and developing consistent definitions and program quality standards.

STRUCTURAL LEVERS

Develop standardized infrastructure and shared data systems to support efficient YA implementation. Key actions include creating visual role maps, standardizing partnership documentation, establishing shared metrics and cross-agency data systems, and establishing seamless educational and career pathways.

OPERATIONAL LEVERS

Strengthen stakeholder implementation supports and assessment tools (e.g., readiness rubrics, diagnostics) that enable coordinated YA delivery across agencies and programs. Key actions include launching joint planning teams across stakeholders, developing diagnostic tools to evaluate readiness at both state and local levels, coordinating employer outreach, and designing resources for school-based staff to effectively implement programs.

COMMUNICATION LEVERS

Create consistent messaging and information-sharing to enhance awareness of and engagement with YA. Key actions include developing a unified approach to marketing, leveraging existing networks to amplify success stories, creating implementation playbooks to meet the needs of different sectors, and coordinating communication timelines.

STRATEGIC INVESTMENT AND CAPACITY LEVERS

Build sustainable funding and resources to support long-term YA program sustainability and growth through investment and capacity building. Key actions include establishing blended funding streams, creating employer incentives, developing single access point digital navigation portals, and supporting critical staff positions for school-based implementation.

Introduction

Youth apprenticeships (YA) have gained increasing momentum and investment both nationally and across Utah in recent years. YAs are considered a powerful strategy to create career pathway opportunities for youth, meet changing workforce needs, and bolster economic prosperity by developing a skilled talent pipeline for industry, strengthening regional economic development, and reducing youth unemployment (e.g., AASA, 2020; Baddour & Hauge, 2020; Lerman, 2013). In Utah, a focus on YAs has led to the development of YA programs and includes the work of multiple state agencies, each working to expand opportunities for YA in Utah to meet student, workforce, and industry needs. In 2024, Senate Bill 122 by the Utah Legislature established a mandate³ to “*design a framework and system for maximizing efficiencies and expanding youth apprenticeship opportunities for students*” in Utah (see [Appendix A](#). Relevant Utah Legislation and Code for a list of relevant legislation and code). This legislative directive tasked Talent Ready Utah (TRU) with staffing this study, in collaboration with the Utah State Board of Education (USBE), the Department of Workforce Services (DWS), and the Governor's Office (GO), to accomplish these aims.

Throughout this report, we refer to the work of four Utah state agencies to support YA in different capacities. To support understanding who these key players are, the following briefly describes the broad role of each agency and how YA factors into the scope of these organizational duties:

Talent Ready Utah (TRU)	TRU, housed within the Utah System of Higher Education (USHE), focuses on developing industry-aligned talent pipelines with youth apprenticeships as a core component of their work, particularly through their Talent Ready Apprenticeship Connection (TRAC) program.
Department of Workforce Services (DWS)	DWS serves as Utah's comprehensive workforce agency supporting job seekers and employers, with youth apprenticeships forming one segment of their broader registered apprenticeship portfolio.
Utah State Board of Education (USBE)	USBE oversees all aspects of K-12 public education in Utah, with youth apprenticeships integrated as one component of their broader Work-Based Learning initiatives for secondary students.
Governor's Office (GO)	GO advances the Governor's policies across state systems, aligning youth apprenticeships with the office's broader efforts to connect education to workforce development priorities.

TRU commissioned the Utah Education Policy Center (UEPC) to conduct this study examining the landscape for youth apprenticeships in Utah. The study addressed the following research questions, which operationalized the legislative expectations:

1. How do TRU, DWS, USBE, and the Governor's Office understand their roles, responsibilities, and duties for youth apprenticeships?
2. How are TRU, DWS, USBE, and the Governor's Office efforts for youth apprenticeships aligned?

³ See Utah Code section 53B-34-111, effective May 2024

3. What are the current logistical, regulatory, and financial barriers to student, LEA, and employer participation in youth apprenticeships in Utah?
4. What are the opportunities for improved alignment, efficiencies, and interagency collaboration among TRU, DWS, USBE, and the Governor's Office to do the following:
 - Increase youth apprenticeship offerings;
 - Increase student and employer participation in youth apprenticeships;
 - Formalize roles and streamline the use of existing infrastructure;
 - Leverage secondary and post-secondary educational programs;
 - Identify metrics to assess the success of youth apprenticeships (e.g., Department of Labor resources, Advance CTE); and
 - Potential state appropriations for youth apprenticeships specialists for scalability.

This study was designed as a research-focused inquiry intended to inform agencies, stakeholders, and policymakers about the current state of YA governance, identify opportunities for alignment, and offer research-informed recommendations for systemic and systematic improvement. It is imperative to note that this study is not an evaluation of specific programs nor an audit of agency engagement or performance. The findings should not be interpreted as such or used to assess the effectiveness or compliance of individual agencies or their initiatives.

Throughout this research partnership, the UEPC employed its five principles of interaction in the partnership with the state agencies: promoting inquiry and shared understanding, building and sustaining trust, promoting effective communication and coordination, respecting the expertise and experience of each partner, and advancing continuous improvement through research insights. These principles grounded the UEPC team's engagement with representatives from TRU, DWS, USBE, and GO during regular meetings and ensured that multiple perspectives informed the research process and strengthened the applicability of findings.

This report balances comprehensive analysis with accessibility and usefulness. Qualitative research generates large quantities of text data that the UEPC team then analyzed and interpreted. To support the accessibility and usability of this information and to provide clear and actionable insights with respect to the research questions, the main body of the report presents the synthesized narrative of the findings. Evidence of findings in the form of participant quotes was provided in a supplementary report to youth apprenticeship partners.

The report begins with essential background information on youth apprenticeships nationally. Next, we provide a detailed description of the study's methodology. The core of the report presents key findings organized to respond to the study's research questions. Consistent with the scope of this study, the report culminates with recommendations for strengthening Utah's youth apprenticeship system. By examining how state agencies understand their roles and responsibilities, assessing current alignment across agencies, and identifying barriers to participation and associated participant-identified opportunities for improvement, this study fulfills the aim of providing actionable insights to support Utah's continued work to advance YA as a component of the state's education and workforce development strategy.

Youth Apprenticeships: Evidence from the Field to Inform System Design and Implementation

This study began with an extensive review of existing literature on youth apprenticeships. This review critically shaped the study design, and informed interview and focus group protocols, the coding framework for the deductive qualitative analysis, and the final recommendations. This background literature review synthesizes research on youth apprenticeship programs' foundations, value propositions, governance structures, and participation barriers. The UEPC expanded its search for existing literature to consider a wide range of sources, including existing empirical research, research reviews, and grey literature (e.g., policy briefs, white papers, working papers, agency reports and thought pieces). This research provided the conceptual and practical context necessary for understanding Utah's existing efforts, challenges, and opportunities for youth apprenticeships.

Foundations of Youth Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships have deep historical roots in medieval guild systems. Modern programs, however, have evolved. Today, youth apprenticeships are paid, structured initiatives that combine on-the-job training with classroom instruction, specifically designed for high school students and recent graduates (Freyer et al., 2019; Bailey, 1993). Key apprenticeship components include paid workplace learning, under-skilled employee mentors, related classroom-based instruction, ongoing assessment against established competencies, progressive wage scales, and culmination in portable, industry-recognized credentials and postsecondary credit (Conrad et al., 2020; AASA, 2020).

There are other apprenticeship distinguishing features today. Registered apprenticeship programs through the U.S. Department of Labor require a minimum of 2,000 hours of on-the-job training and 144 hours of related technical instruction (Jones & Lerman, 2017). Youth apprenticeships focus on youth (typically ages 16-24) and intentionally structure partnerships across employers, high schools, and postsecondary institutions (Parton, 2017; Hawkins & Kobes, 2024). These programs create structured pathways from education to employment while providing skills training and career advancement opportunities (Hamilton & Boren, 2021). They aim to bridge education-workforce gaps (Hauge et al., 2020), help youth gain occupational skills and credentials, expand postsecondary opportunities through portable college credits, and create affordable pathways to careers through structured work-based learning (Hwang, 2021; Lerman & Tyson, 2023; Steedman, 2012).

Over time, apprenticeship models have included coordination between government, industry, and education partners. For instance, European models like Switzerland's (with nearly two-thirds of youth ages 16-18 participating) and Germany's apprenticeship programs feature balanced integration of work and classroom learning with strong employer engagement (Jenkins, 2021; Katz & Elliott, 2020). U.S. adoption of apprenticeships has historically focused on adult workers and construction trades rather than youth (Gallup, 2024). Less than half a percent of American workers participate in registered apprenticeships, compared to approximately 4% in Germany and Australia (Jones & Lerman, 2017). Early U.S. adoption in states like Wisconsin aimed to address non-college-bound pathways and economic competitiveness concerns (Bailey, 1993).

Despite limited participation in apprenticeships within the U.S. to date, there has been substantial growth in federal and even state investments. For example, there was an infusion of \$440 million to expand registered apprenticeship capacity under the Biden administration (The White House, 2024) and \$175

million in American Apprenticeship Initiative grants (Gardiner et al., 2021). States like South Carolina have demonstrated successful expansion through initiatives like Apprenticeship Carolina (Lerman, 2014). Continued legislative support at the state level has supported growth into non-traditional sectors like healthcare, IT, and financial services (NCSL, 2024).

Understanding these foundational elements and purposes provides essential context for examining how youth apprenticeship programs have evolved, particularly when considering their historical roots and current implementation relevance as a workforce development strategy, while also highlighting opportunities for growth and improvement in the American context.

Value Proposition of Youth Apprenticeships

As youth apprenticeship models have evolved from their historical origins and gained renewed traction through federal and state investments, it is important to consider how not only how they are structured but why they are worth the investment. Youth apprenticeships offer compelling value propositions across multiple stakeholder groups—students, employers, education systems, and the broader economy.

- For students, apprenticeship benefits include earning wages while learning without accruing student debt, gaining college credits and industry-recognized credentials, accessing clear career pathways and professional networks, experiencing significant earnings growth (potentially \$440,000 more than non-apprentices by age 65), and improving employment outcomes (AASA, 2020; Baddour & Hauge, 2020; Lerman, 2014; Gallup, 2024).
- Employers also can see substantial returns, with an average return on investment of \$1.44 for every \$1 invested (Kuehn et al., 2022). Benefits for employers who engage in apprenticeships include reduced turnover and recruitment costs, development of skilled workforce pipelines, increased productivity, enhanced workplace diversity, improved company culture, and increased employee loyalty (Boren & Lerman, 2024; Marotta et al., 2022).
- Meanwhile, educational institutions can benefit from apprenticeships through increased student engagement, stronger industry partnerships, improved secondary to postsecondary connections, improved employment rates and wages for students completing programs, and support for meeting performance metrics and workforce development goals (AASA, 2020; Gardiner et al., 2022; Parton, 2017).
- The broader economic and social benefits of youth apprenticeships are also substantial, including addressing critical workforce skills gaps, promoting economic mobility, reducing youth unemployment, creating pathways to family-supporting wages, and generating social benefits that outweigh costs by ratios of 20:1 to 30:1 (Aivazova, 2013; Baddour & Hauge, 2020; Lerman, 2014; Kuehn et al., 2023).

These compelling benefits across stakeholder groups underscore why establishing effective and robust apprenticeship programs, including governance structures and systems of support and partnerships, is a worthwhile investment of resources.

Turning Promise into Practice

While youth apprenticeships offer clear benefits across stakeholder groups, attention is needed to coherent governance, well-aligned policies, and intentional coordination between sectors. Here we provide an overview of the key roles that public agencies and intermediaries serve in ensuring scalability and sustainability of apprenticeship programs.

Governance and Support Systems for Youth Apprenticeships

Effective youth apprenticeship programs require well-structured governance at multiple levels. Typically, well-structured governance models include collaboration among departments of workforce development or labor, departments of education, higher education or community college systems, and/or economic development agencies (e.g., Kuehn et al., 2023; Lerman & Tyson, 2023; Matthews, 2022; Mollica & Simon, 2021).

At the policy and regulatory level, YA programs are registered with the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) or State Apprenticeship Agencies (SAA). Generally, federal (e.g., DOL) or state (e.g., SAA) regulations establish minimum standards for training hours, wage progression, and quality. Currently, state policies vary significantly in approaches to both registration and oversight (e.g., Jones & Lerman, 2017; Kuehn et al., 2023). State education agencies also often play key roles in governance for YA by taking on alignment of apprenticeships with K-12 education, CTE pathways, and graduation requirements in addition to providing supports for school-based elements of policy and implementation (Baddour, 2024; Matthews, 2022; Parton, 2017).

Though approaches to governance can vary, states must intentionally decide on the degree to which their governance for YA will be (de)centralized and who will be part of the governance structure. State agencies, for example, can play key roles in program implementation through program registration, oversight, standards setting, raising awareness among stakeholders, and quality assurance monitoring. They may. Independently or collaboratively, provide technical assistance to employers and program partners, coordinate between education, workforce, and economic development systems, and manage funding streams and resources (Baddour, 2024; Copson et al., 2021; National Governor's Association [NGA], 2022; Arabandi & Marotta, 2024).

Governance structures that formalize roles, oversight, and accountability are necessary for effective quality assurance. Without governance authority, quality assurance may operate optionally or inconsistently. Ultimately, states have to determine their tolerance level for the tradeoffs inherent at either end of the (de)centralized spectrum. For example, a completely centralized structure may be unrealistic given the need for coordination across stakeholders, while a decentralized structure can lead to inconsistencies and inefficiencies in programming (Baddour, 2024). On the other hand, a decentralized system may have quality assurance issues. Yet, quality assurance is another critical component of developing and scaling YAs. Quality assurance encompasses the development of clear standards and definitions, regular program evaluation processes, alignment with federal guidelines, partner accountability and performance measures, and common occupational skill or credentialing standards across employers and regions, which are responsibilities of governance bodies—centralized or decentralized (NGA, 2022; Conrad et al., 2020; Lerman & Tyson, 2023; PAYA, n.d.).

The governance and support system for youth apprenticeships may also include intermediaries. An apprenticeship intermediary “...helps to build, launch, and run apprenticeship programs in collaboration

with other apprenticeship partners like employers, educators, labor unions, and more” (New America citing ApprenticeshipUSA materials). Intermediary organizations serve as essential bridges between stakeholders by building and managing apprenticeship programs, matching students and employers, managing relationships, recruiting participants, handling liability issues, managing administrative responsibilities, and supporting data collection and reporting (Arabandi & Marotta, 2024; Baddour, 2024; Kuehn et al., 2023).

Interagency Coordination and Alignment in Youth Apprenticeships

Effective state YA systems require coordination across multiple agencies and stakeholders to create coherent pathways that meet the needs of students, employers, and K12 and higher education systems. Extant literature on interagency alignment for YA provides insights into how to define it, what forms it takes on, and the factors that can support or hinder interagency alignment.

Conceptualizing Interagency Alignment. While there is no single and commonly agreed upon definition of “*interagency alignment*”, the literature provides insight into related concepts that can support conceptualizing interagency alignment within the YA context. The Partnership to Advance Youth Apprenticeship (PAYA) (2022), for instance, refers to improving systems alignment “*across K-12 education, postsecondary education and workforce development to support greater access to opportunity, improved career readiness and equity among high school graduates*” (p. 5). Similarly, Baddour (2024) does not directly define interagency alignment but highlights that, “*A clear system vision, an aligned governance structure, and the purposeful distribution of system functions allow state youth apprenticeship systems to support the success and growth of programs at the local level*” (no page, website).

From research in related fields, interagency alignment has been described as “*the extent to which these commonalities manifest across organizations in key implementation constructs and across system or organizational levels*” (Lyon et al., 2018, p. 3). The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) (2023) characterizes interagency collaboration as involving “*coordination between two or more federal entities*” where collaboration is “*broadly defined as any joint activity that is intended to produce more public value than could be produced when the entities act alone*” (p. 1).

In the context of youth apprenticeships, research indicates that interagency alignment may encompass the following features to enable education and workforce agencies to collaborate effectively in creating and sustaining quality YA programs. Yet, context also varies by state, meaning that approaches to aligning governance also vary (see [Appendix B](#). Selected Examples of Interagency Alignment from Other States for more details on examples from other states). The following 10 dimensions are relevant to interagency alignment in the context of YA:

- **Develop Shared Statewide Vision and Definitions:** Shared vision and definitions for youth apprenticeships creates clarity of direction and expectations for development, implementation, and improvement aligned to statewide vision for YA (GAO, 2023; NGA, 2022; Hauge et al., 2020; Hwang, 2021; PAYA, 2022)
- **Identify and Sustain Organizational or Executive Leadership:** Stable organizational leadership from executive roles (e.g., governors or agency heads) who serve as key champions for YA and prioritize apprenticeship as a cross-agency initiative and mandate collaboration (Baddour & Hauge, 2020; GAO, 2023; Hauge et al., 2020)

- **Coordinated Central Governance Structures for Cross Agency Collaboration:** Multiple agencies may share oversight and decision-making authority through dedicated coordinating bodies to ensure alignment and support effective implementation and collaboration (Baddour, 2024; Copson et al., 2021; NGA, 2022).
- **Dedicated Staff Positions Serving as Statewide Intermediaries:** Having statewide intermediary or other dedicated staff focused on coordination and partnership development across agency boundaries (Baddour, 2024; Freyer et al., 2019; Kuehn et al., 2023; Mathie, 2021)
- **Formal Agreements for Collaborative Work with Clearly Defined Roles and Responsibilities:** Structured agreements such as MOUs or collaboration agreements that clearly delineate roles, responsibilities, and shared goals among partner agencies (Baddour, 2024; GAO, 2023; Gardiner et al., 2023; Hauge et al., 2020)
- **Regular Cross-Agency Communication Mechanisms:** Ensuring including regular formal meetings to share information, identify challenges, and develop collaborative solutions (Arabandi et al., 2021; Copson et al., 2021; Payne & Kuehn, 2023; White, 2023)
- **Common metrics for success and data sharing systems:** Agreed upon metrics and a data collection system to support formative and summative evaluation of objectives and partner tracking of outcomes and data sharing agreements between partners that facilitate tracking apprenticeship outcomes across education and employment sectors (Advance CTE, 2019; Building a Youth Apprenticeship Data Ecosystem, 2022; Crumb, 2017; Hwang, 2021; Kuehn et al., 2023)
- **Integration with Existing Systems:** Integrate YA governance with existing systems rather than creating parallel structures, which improves efficiency and sustainability while reducing duplication (Hauge et al., 2020; Gardiner et al., 2021)
- **Diversified Funding Strategies:** Efforts should diversify funding for YA programs (e.g., block grants, competitive grants, formula distribution, line-item appropriation, performance-based funding, and allocation to intermediaries) to ensure that YA is embedded within career preparation pathways (Crumb, 2017; Hauge et al., 2020)
- **Complementary Policies:** Ensuring that policies (e.g., workforce development, education, economic development) across agencies are intentionally aligned to support youth apprenticeship goals (Crumb, 2017)

Factors Hindering Interagency Alignment. Despite the benefits of alignment and the various forms it can take on to be responsive to state and local context, significant barriers exist that can detract from efforts towards interagency alignment across agencies involved in youth apprenticeships:

- **Staff turnover** in key positions that disrupts established coordination mechanisms and institutional knowledge (Griffin, 2024; White, 2023)
- **Inconsistent policies** between agencies, particularly around youth labor laws, credential recognition, and academic requirements (Matthews, 2022; Kuehn et al., 2023; Tran, 2023)
- **Limited communication** between agencies and stakeholders across different systems, especially between education and workplace settings (Mooney & Scholl, 2004)

- **Bureaucratic complexity** reflected in different regulatory frameworks, approval processes, and reporting requirements across agencies (Copson et al., 2021; Fuller et al., 2022)
- **Data system incompatibility** and privacy restrictions that prevent sharing information between education and workforce partners (Hwang, 2021; Advance CTE, 2019)
- **Misaligned performance metrics and accountability systems** between education and workforce agencies that create competing priorities (Building a Youth Apprenticeship Data Ecosystem, 2022; Kuehn, 2021)
- **Siloed funding streams** with different requirements and restrictions that limit program flexibility (NGA, 2022; Matthews, 2022; Lerman & Tyson, 2023)
- **Separation between education and workforce development systems** that creates organizational culture barriers to collaboration (Bailey, 1993; Payne & Kuehn, 2023)

The complex interplay of these different dimensions of YA and the variety of supporting and hindering factors underscores why achieving meaningful interagency alignment remains challenging yet essential for establishing sustainable youth apprenticeship programs as states consider how to design governance systems for YA (Baddour, 2024).

Increasing Participation in and Removing Barriers to Youth Apprenticeships

Effective governance and interagency alignment create conditions for developing successful youth apprenticeship systems. However, structures alone are insufficient to increase student participation in youth apprenticeships. Moreover, despite their many benefits, research demonstrates that significant barriers can hinder participation in youth apprenticeships across different stakeholder groups—students, employers, and education institutions. Here, we address some of the most prevalent barriers that currently hinder participation in youth apprenticeships.

- **Students** face numerous challenges including transportation and logistical issues (particularly for disadvantaged urban and rural students), financial constraints related to program costs and the need for higher immediate wages, stigma and parental skepticism about non-college pathways, academic preparation gaps, difficulty balancing multiple responsibilities, and limited awareness of opportunities (Freyer et al., 2019; Katz & Elliott, 2020; Bailey, 1993; Gallup, 2024; Griffin, 2024).
- **Employers** encounter barriers such as administrative burden and complex registration requirements, uncertainty about returns on investment and resource commitments, limited understanding of program requirements and benefits, and concerns about youth readiness and workplace liability (Boren & Lerman, 2024; Gardiner et al., 2021; Jones & Lerman, 2017; Arabandi et al., 2021).
- **Education institutions** struggle with schedule alignment between academic requirements and work placements, inadequate staff capacity for program support, a prevailing college-focused culture and competing educational priorities, and challenges with credit transfer and recognition of work-based learning (AASA, 2020; Katz & Elliott, 2020; Jenkins, 2021; Freyer et al., 2019; Matthews, 2022).
- **Broader systemic** barriers include limited and disconnected funding streams that complicate program sustainability, the complexity of coordinating multiple partners and systems, lack of

consistent data collection and reporting systems, traditional separation between education and industry sectors, and fragmented governance across education and workforce systems (Gallup, 2024; Hauge et al., 2020; Hwang, 2021; Parton, 2017).

This research synthesis demonstrates both the potential of youth apprenticeships and the complex challenges (e.g., structural and logistical) that must be addressed to support effective and scalable implementation of YA programs. As Utah seeks to expand youth apprenticeship opportunities, understanding the opportunities and barriers and how they could be addressed to meet the state's context (e.g., governance, interagency dynamics) and needs is crucial for developing effective solutions.

Study Design

Based on the request for a qualitative study, the UEPC used a comprehensive and rigorous qualitative approach to understand how Utah's youth apprenticeship system currently operates and how it might be strengthened. To ensure the study design met the needs of all stakeholders, the UEPC team regularly collaborated with representatives from TRU, DWS, and USBE to review the study design, data collection instruments, and attain the participation of individuals who would represent the multiple perspectives and experiences of YA partners. The following sections describe data collection and analysis to support developing actionable recommendations.

Data Collection

The UEPC team leveraged multiple rich qualitative data sources to inform the study, which included a combination of a series of in-depth interviews and focus groups with representatives of state agencies working to support YA and across stakeholder groups, a variety of documents and artifacts, and field notes from select observation opportunities.

Key Stakeholder Interviews and Focus Groups

In collaboration with the TRU team and with input from the representatives from DWS and USBE, UEPC identified and recruited a sample of participants representing state agencies and key stakeholder groups. The UEPC team conducted a series of 18 in-depth interviews and 11 focus groups during January and February of 2025. In total, 38 participants from across the participating state agencies and representatives of key stakeholder groups participated in the interviews and focus groups. Participants signed a participation consent form prior to the interview/focus group. Participants included industry partners, K-12 school district partners, higher education partners, and current youth apprentices (aged 18-24). **Table 1** shows the distribution of interview and focus group participants. Interviews and focus groups ranged from 35 to 65 minutes (an average of 49 minutes) and were guided by semi-structured interview protocols developed by the UEPC team. Protocols were designed to yield data to answer the research questions. Both primary questions and prompts were informed by the review of literature conducted by the UEPC. The protocols were reviewed with TRU, DWS, and USBE representatives to ensure focus and clarity.

Table 1. Distribution of Interview and Focus Group Participants by Stakeholder Group

Stakeholder Group	Participant Counts
State Agencies	9
TRU	< 5*
DWS	< 5*
USB E	< 5*
Governor’s Office	< 5*
Industry Partners	11
K-12 School District Partners	6
Higher Education Partners	7
Current Apprentices (ages 18-24)	5

**Participant counts are suppressed in cases where the count is fewer than five to support the protection of participant confidentiality.*

Documents

The TRU team and their colleagues from DWS, and USB E provided a set of 27 policy documents. These documents included state code, house and senate bills, and agency administrative rules that set forth each agency’s statutory roles and responsibilities and established key aspects of the framework for youth apprenticeship in Utah. The data also included an additional 36 documents and artifacts collected from the partnering state agencies and through open-source research conducted by the UEPC team. These additional documents included reports, position descriptions, course code descriptions, guidebooks, FAQs for stakeholders, and example lessons and MOUs. These data were supplemented further with artifacts (e.g., apprentice agreements, program overviews, and career pathways) provided by stakeholders (e.g., industry, LEA, or IHE partners) throughout the interview process.

Observation Field Notes

TRU also invited members of the UEPC team to conduct observations and generate field notes during two unique opportunities in November 2024—a closed-door meeting with prospective industry partners and the 2024 Apprenticeship Utah Summit, hosted by DWS as a part of National Apprenticeship Week in Utah. The meeting was approximately 1-hour in duration, while the Summit was an all-day event. The UEPC team member was identified as an outside researcher who attended in the capacity of an observed, taking detailed notes on the contents of conversation that related to the purposes of the study and collecting additional relevant printed material as a reference.

Data Analysis

The UEPC team used a rigorous qualitative analytic approach—structural coding (Saldaña, 2021)—to analyze the interview and focus group transcripts, the policy documents, and stakeholder artifacts collected for this study. This approach uses both deductive and inductive coding. UEPC researchers deductively developed an initial set of codes based on research questions and informed by the extensive review of literature on youth apprenticeship. The UEPC team piloted the preliminary codebook with a subset of transcripts to refine the initial codebook and code definitions, improve clarity, and reduce redundancy.

During the full coding process, the UEPC team remained attentive to emergent themes by applying inductive structural coding to data that did not align with the initial codebook. This process allowed the

team to retain a structured framework for the analysis and remain open to new and unexpected insights within and across participants and stakeholder groups. The UEPC team engaged in an iterative process of analysis, moving between the data and sensemaking to strengthen the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

Trustworthiness

To develop a comprehensive understanding of Utah's youth apprenticeship system, the UEPC team used a cross-source analytic strategy that triangulated evidence from interviews, focus groups, policy documents, and stakeholder artifacts. This approach allowed us to identify meaningful patterns that appeared across multiple stakeholder groups and data sources, while also highlighting unique perspectives or experiences that might otherwise be overlooked. Moreover, our analysis deliberately explored both confirming and disconfirming evidence as findings emerged to build confidence, and the UEPC team used multiple coders to reduce potential bias throughout coding and analysis.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the UEPC team also implemented several quality assurance strategies throughout the research process. Since the study's launch in October, the UEPC team maintained regular biweekly meetings with our partners at TRU. These meetings supported transparency in all phases of data collection and shared understanding of the research process, which included updates and analysis to support shared understandings of the research process. To further support communication about the study, the TRU team extended participation in these meetings since January 2025 to representatives from DWS, USBE, and a representative from their partner at the National Governor's Association. These joint meetings offered critical opportunities to share information, provide study clarifications, and seek stakeholder feedback. This collaborative and thorough approach ensured that the findings presented in this report accurately represent the current state of youth apprenticeship governance in Utah. Additionally, the UEPC team provided additional participant quotes to youth apprenticeship partners in a supplementary report to establish and confirm the evidence base for the study's findings and subsequent recommendations.

Limitations

While this study leveraged multiple data sources and perspectives across state agencies and key stakeholder groups to develop a comprehensive understanding of Utah's youth apprenticeship system, several limitations should be noted. First, participant recruitment relied primarily on referrals through existing agency networks, which may not capture the full diversity of stakeholder experiences across the state. Additionally, the sample of current apprentices was limited to five individuals aged 18-24 (given restrictions on the participation of students in research in Utah). Due to limited access and the need to seek assent for persons who were minors, this study excluded younger apprentices (e.g., aged 16-18). In doing so, study findings for understanding factors that may challenge participation for students in this group are limited.

Key Findings

The following sections present the key findings of the study, organized around the primary research questions. To enhance the accessibility and utility of the findings for a range of audiences, each section begins with a high-level summary of findings, followed by a more detailed explanation of the themes and

patterns identified through the qualitative data analysis. The findings reflect evidence from the interviews, focus groups, and documents collected during the study. Key areas of focus include an overview of key elements of YA in Utah (e.g., history, approaches), how state agencies understand their roles and responsibilities for YA, how state agencies' efforts for YA are aligned across agencies, and the barriers to participation in YA.

Youth Apprenticeships in Utah

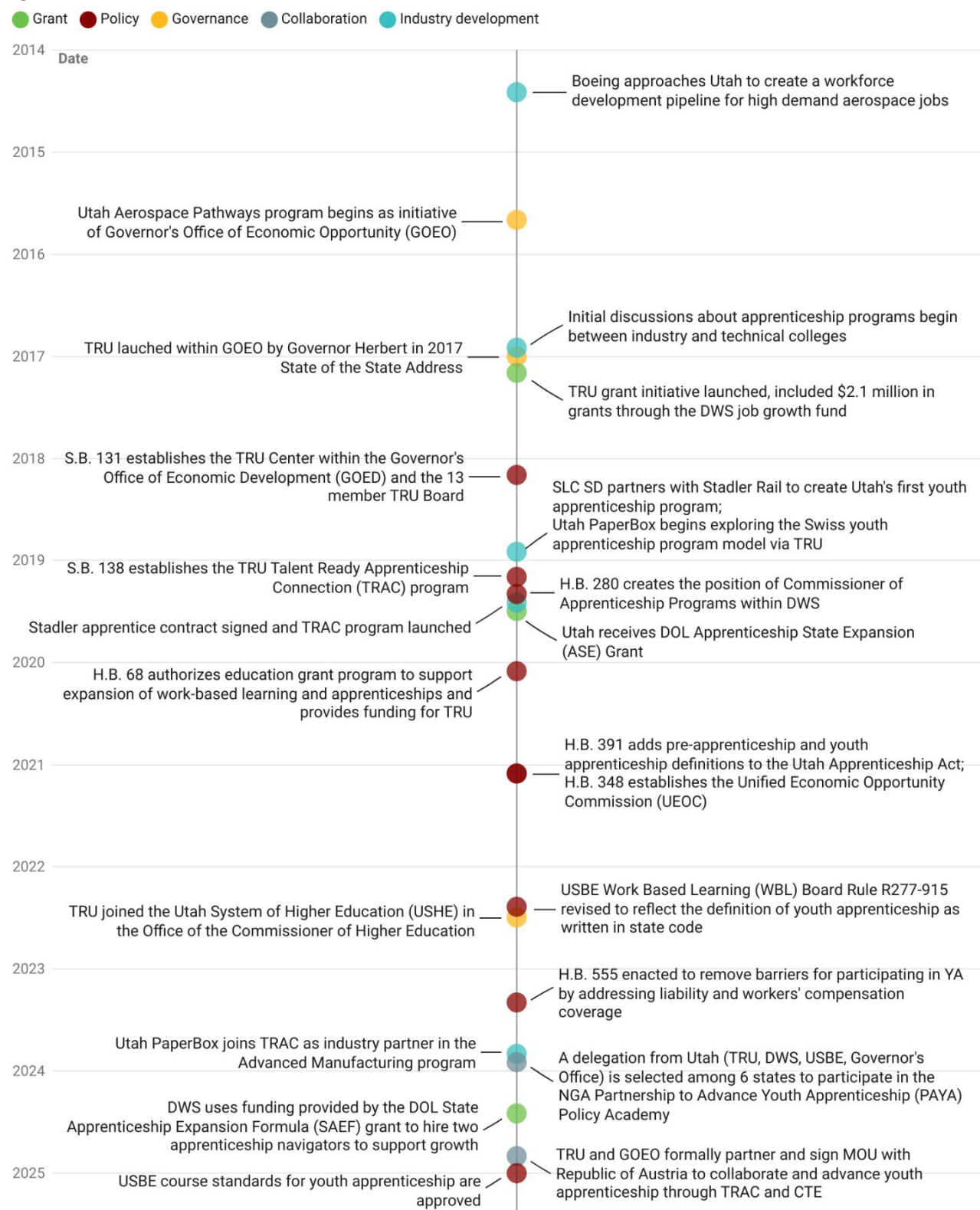
The following sections support understanding an operational definition of YA, the approaches to offering YA programs, and the historical context of YA in Utah specifically, as revealed by the analysis. These are important antecedents to understanding the key findings around the core research questions for the study presented in later sections.

Historical Overview of Youth Apprenticeships in Utah

The landscape for Utah's youth apprenticeship “ecosystem”⁴ has undergone substantial growth and development in the last decade. **Figure 1** illustrates the progression of key policies, grants, governance structures and roles, and industry partnership developments that have advanced Utah's youth apprenticeship work between 2014 and 2024.

⁴ The term ecosystem was used to describe the system for YA in Utah by a participant and is also widely used throughout the literature. It captures the dynamic and interactive nature of the broader YA system.

Figure 1. Timeline of Key Dates of YA History and Development in Utah



Source. State agency representative interview transcripts, associated policy documents, state agency websites, and publicly available news articles.

Operationalizing Youth Apprenticeships in Utah

Utah Code contains two distinct statutory definitions for youth apprenticeships:

- (1) Utah Code, [Section 35A-6-102](#) (DWS statute, also referenced as the definition in [USBE Administrative Rule R277-915-2](#)), defines youth apprenticeships as: *A program or set of strategies that combines academic and technical classroom instruction with work experience through an apprenticeship program and which provides the foundation for youth in high school to choose among multiple pathways, including enrolling in college, beginning full-time employment, or a combination of college and employment.*
- (2) Utah Code, [Section 53B-34-101](#), defines it as: *A program that: combines paid on-the-job learning with formal classroom instruction to prepare students for careers; and includes: structured on-the-job learning for students under the supervision of a skilled employee; classroom instruction for students related to the on-the-job learning; ongoing student assessments using established competency and skills standards; and the student receiving an industry-recognized credential or degree upon completion of the program.*

In exploring how YAs are implemented in Utah, the UEPC found that despite having multiple statutory definitions, state agency officials and stakeholders broadly share a common understanding of youth apprenticeship's intended purpose. Youth apprenticeships in Utah are generally understood as a structured career pathway that combines paid, supervised, on-the-job learning with aligned classroom instruction for students between the ages of 16 and 24, resulting in nationally industry-recognized credentials and forging connections between education and workforce needs.

While there are key elements that appear consistently across all partner settings—dual learning structure, high school integration, employer-driven experiences, credentials, and career pathway—closer analysis revealed inconsistencies between statutory and operational definitions. As one participant noted, "*I think there's a definition of a youth apprenticeship, and then I think there's the youth apprenticeship program that we administer.*" These differences in definitions will be explored further in the interagency alignment and barriers key findings sections of this report. See **Table 2** for a description of each of the common elements found across youth apprenticeship programs in Utah.

Table 2. Core elements of youth apprenticeship definitions in Utah

Element	Description
Dual Learning Structure	YA integrates structured workplace training under employer supervision with concurrent related academic and technical instruction.
High School Integration	Unlike traditional apprenticeships, youth apprenticeships specifically target students while they are still in high school, creating early career pathways.
Employer-Driven Experiences	Employers provide paid, meaningful work experience with direct mentorship and supervision.
Credentials	Programs lead to industry-recognized credentials or certifications that validate skills and experience.
Career Pathways	Youth apprenticeships function within broader career pathway systems that can lead to continued education or direct employment to support industry workforce demands.

Source. State agency representative interview transcripts and associated policy documents.

Complementary and Concurrent Approaches to Offering Youth Apprenticeships in Utah

Utah currently offers two distinct but complementary and concurrent approaches to apprenticeship that serve youth (ages 16-24)—the **Talent Ready Apprenticeship Connections (TRAC) model** (aligned to the Swiss approach to apprenticeships) and the federally **Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAP)**. While these approaches differ in their structures, administration, and requirements, they both address the shared goal of connecting young people with economically viable career pathways through work-based learning while supporting a robust workforce and economy in Utah. Understanding these approaches in Utah provides essential context for examining how different state agencies collaborate to implement youth apprenticeship opportunities throughout Utah.

The **TRAC model**, established and operated by TRU, follows a Swiss/European-inspired approach that is specifically designed for youth apprenticeship, emphasizing group programs and industry flexibility. Established in 2019, TRAC focuses on building broad, transferable skills through partnerships between high schools, employers, and postsecondary institutions, primarily targeting students while they are still enrolled in high school. TRAC creates industry-aligned pathways that do not require U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) registration.

The **Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAP)** follow the U.S. DOL standards for apprenticeships across all age groups, though youth can participate. RAPs offer nationally recognized credentials and structured progression paths to careers in many industries. While not specifically designed for youth, RAPs feature standardized documentation, specific hour requirements, guidelines for program quality and structure, and emphasize portability across employers and states. **Table 3** summarizes the key features and differences between these two approaches, which together provide Utah employers and students with flexible options for establishing and participating in apprenticeship programs that serve youth.

Table 3. YA Program Approaches in Utah

Feature	TRAC	Registered Apprenticeship Programs
Administering State Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Led by Talent Ready Utah (TRU) Includes a state intermediary role established by H.B. 555 (2023) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Led by Department of Workforce Services (DWS) Includes apprenticeship navigators who serve as intermediaries
Program Origins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established in Utah in 2019 Modeled after Swiss/European apprenticeship systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The National Apprentice (Fitzgerald) Act authorized and established a national apprenticeship system within the U.S. DOL in 1937
Target Age Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exclusively focused on YA with students aged 16-24 Primarily focused on initiating YA with high school students (16-19) through concurrent enrollment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apprentices from ages 16 to 81 Youth apprentices are defined as those aged 16-24, with most apprenticeship participants in RAPs being older (average age 30)
Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focuses on group apprenticeship programs organized around industry clusters (e.g., advanced manufacturing) Emphasizes broad skill development with on-the-job training and classroom instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focuses on individual company programs with direct registration for one, or smaller groups of apprentices Highly structured with specific time/hour requirements (2,000 work hours, 144 education hours)
Credentialing and Registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offers industry-recognized credentials Prioritizes flexibility over formal federal registration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides nationally recognized, portable credentials with documented skill attainment Formally registered with the U.S. DOL as a RAP
Portability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasizes transferable skills and competencies over company-specific certifications Culminates with an Associate's degree and is fully transferable across the Utah System of Higher Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offers formal documentation and national recognition for skill portability within and across states and employers
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funded with employer investments and grant support with a focus on industry investment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eligible for some federal grants and subsidies for tools, tuition, and wage reimbursement
Flexibility vs Standardization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritizes flexibility and reduced regulation to encourage employer participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasizes standardized processes and documentation for quality assurance
Industry/Sector Focus & Growth/Expansion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Started in advanced manufacturing with European companies, expanding to additional industry sectors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well-established in trades (electrical, plumbing) and expanding across new industry sectors Expanding through individual company programs and reducing barriers to early career entry

Source. State agency representative interview transcripts and associated policy documents.

How State Agencies Understand their Roles, Responsibilities, and Duties for YA

As Utah's youth apprenticeship ecosystem continues to grow and evolve, it is critical to understand how key state agencies interpret and fulfill their roles to support YA. Furthermore, this understanding is essential for creating coherent governance structures that can sustain and expand YA offerings and participation in Utah.

The UEPC's analysis of the qualitative data collected for the study identified seven dimensions of agency roles and responsibilities that representatives of state agencies described as central to their work in supporting youth apprenticeship in Utah. These dimensions represent a spectrum of functions needed for a comprehensive youth apprenticeship system that occur *across* Utah state agencies (e.g., TRU, DWS, USBE, and GO). Indeed, some agencies do not fulfill all seven dimensions of roles and responsibilities for YA or only fulfill some roles indirectly. Conversely, there are also cases where multiple agencies discussed contributing to the same role dimension. However, these overlapping efforts should *not* be interpreted as a duplication of efforts. Rather, they often reflect parallel efforts that serve different stakeholder groups or address other local needs within the broader YA ecosystem. The dimensions of how state agencies understand their roles and responsibilities include leadership, governance, and policy; program development and standards setting; stakeholder partnership development; intermediary functions; funding and resource management; technical assistance supports; data accountability, and reporting. The seven dimensions are listed and summarized in **Figure 2** below.

Figure 2. Dimensions of State Agencies' Roles and Responsibilities for YA

Leadership, Governance, & Policy	Setting direction and ensuring coordination through vision-setting, policy development, board participation, legislative reporting, and strategic alignment of youth apprenticeships with state workforce goals.
Program Development and Standards Setting	Creating and maintaining quality frameworks, educational standards, competency requirements, and curriculum models that define what constitutes a high-quality youth apprenticeship experience.
Stakeholder Partnership Development	Identifying, recruiting, and maintaining relationships with key stakeholders (employers, LEAs, IHEs) through strategic outreach, relationship management, and understanding partner needs and context
Intermediary Functions	Serving as a convener and building bridges between employers, education systems, and students by facilitating connections, and helping stakeholders navigate the apprenticeship system.
Funding and Resource Management	Securing, allocating, and administering financial resources, grants, and incentives to support program development, employer participation, and student engagement in youth apprenticeships.
Technical Assistance Supports	Providing technical assistance supports for the operational details of program registration and implementation, and assistance in managing risk and liability concerns and documentation (e.g. MOUs, workers' compensation)
Data, Accountability, & Reporting	Tracking participation, measuring outcomes, ensuring accountability, analyzing program effectiveness, and using data to inform continuous improvement of youth apprenticeship initiatives.

Source. State agency representative interview transcripts and associated policy documents.

The following sections describe how each state agency understands its roles and responsibilities in terms of these seven dimensions. As the UEPC analysis examines how TRU, DWS, USBE, and GO collectively contribute to the youth apprenticeship ecosystem in Utah, it is again important to note that this analysis does not evaluate agencies on the extent to which they fulfill these roles but aims to describe how these roles and responsibilities are collectively distributed and shared across the agencies. This descriptive approach supports identifying areas of strong coverage, potential overlaps, and possible gaps in the system that could be addressed through future coordination efforts.

At the conclusion of the descriptions by agency, **Table 8** summarizes which roles and responsibilities are present across agencies, providing a succinct overview of the distribution of youth apprenticeship roles and responsibilities within the Utah governance structure.

Talent Ready Utah

Talent Ready Utah (TRU), which is housed within the Utah System of Higher Education (USHE), partners with education and industry to offer a variety of programs aimed at creating a highly-skilled workforce. Apprenticeships are a major component of TRU’s work. TRU serves as a key intermediary for YA programs in Utah through its Talent Ready Apprenticeship Connection (TRAC) program. TRAC focuses on YA programs that begin in high school. Representatives from TRU describe operating from an industry-driven perspective and work to, *“convene industry, government, and education for the purpose of workforce alignment”* to develop group apprenticeship programs organized around industry clusters (e.g., advanced manufacturing), as opposed to programs with individual employers. TRU’s approach emphasizes industry sector-focused initiatives (e.g., TRAC, Deep Tech, Utah Works, Pathways) to support statewide initiatives by strategically addressing workforce gaps (e.g., advanced manufacturing, diesel technology, aerospace) across industries and creating talent pipelines that can simultaneously support multiple employers.

The TRAC program, developed by TRU and modeled after European youth apprenticeship programs, offers high school students a structured pathway through concurrent education and paid work-based experiences. The program continues into higher education, with students earning industry-recognized credentials through the process. TRU representatives describe their roles as encompassing all seven dimensions of the roles and responsibilities. They particularly emphasized their role as an intermediary for stakeholders, explaining that they are there to, *“really help employers join youth apprenticeship programs and act as a liaison within, for education and employers to really ease employers mostly into joining these type of programs.”* This industry-aligned approach reflects TRU’s vision of its role in relation to Utah’s comprehensive workforce development strategy.

Table 4 summarizes the ways in which representatives of TRU describe how they fulfill their roles and responsibilities:

Table 4. Roles and responsibilities of TRU

Leadership, governance, and policy	TRU sets strategic vision and direction for youth apprenticeships through their TRAC program and their approach of offering a pathway for employers to establish group apprentice programs that do not require registration with the U.S. DOL, coordinates stakeholders (e.g., education, industry, students) to develop and advocate for policy (e.g., H.B. 555), works to represent industry voice as they seek to expand YA in Utah, participates on multiple state boards and committees to advocate for YA (e.g. Talent Board), and is responsible for legislative reports.
Program development and standards setting	TRU supports collaborative development of curriculum and competencies for youth apprenticeships with partners, focusing on alignment with current industry needs for employee knowledge and skills and regularly revisiting curriculum to support continued relevance.
Stakeholder partnership development	TRU works to identify and recruit industry partners for both current and targeted sectors, maintains relationships with participating employers, and sustains and cultivates educational partnerships with school districts and post-secondary institutions.
Intermediary functions	TRU serves as a central convener for industry, education (K12 and higher education), and students to facilitate connections and communications across stakeholders, with a dedicated state intermediary role that was established in state policy (H.B. 555) to manage relationships and partnerships and assist with navigating the complexities of implementing YA across different stakeholder groups.
Funding and resource management	TRU administers grant programs and funding streams specifically designed to increase YA offerings and participation aligned with their broader WBL initiatives, directing resources to both educational institutions and employers. For example, one grant has funded K-12 school coordinator positions to support YA.
Technical assistance supports	TRU provides comprehensive technical assistance and administrative support for their partners, including implementation support, such as developing mentor training materials or drafting training plans. Additionally, TRU supports partners in developing safety agreements (e.g., workers comp, liability) and/or shared agreements between stakeholders (e.g., MOUs).
Data, accountability, and reporting	TRU collects and analyzes data on their apprenticeship programs, for example, tracking participation and placement of apprentices in their cohorts by employer, with the aim of developing better metrics for continuous improvement.

Source. State agency representative interview transcripts and associated policy documents.

Department of Workforce Services

Department of Workforce Services (DWS) is a state agency with multiple responsibilities to serve the economic needs of job seekers and employers, and registered apprenticeships are one component of this work. DWS representatives describe the agency as oriented toward workforce development across Utah with expertise in establishing Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs) that meet U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) quality standards. Representatives of DWS characterize their purpose and efforts as, *“fostering and trying to promote apprenticeship across the state in every industry, and in every asset of what apprenticeships can do for our employers and for our job seekers.”*

Their work to offer RAPs spans all age groups (e.g. from ages 16 to 81), with youth apprenticeships being one component of a broader apprenticeship strategy. DWS leaders and staff possess specialized knowledge in how to manage federal requirements to secure DOL approvals for their stakeholders, with an emphasis on the "five components" of registered apprenticeships (e.g., on-the-job training, related technical instruction, wage reimbursement, employer participation, and then a nationally recognized certificate) while connecting their programs to broader employment and economic development goals in Utah in addition to being able to provide substantial financial support to employers and apprentices through various funding streams. As one participant described, *“We manage the two big grants [State Apprenticeship Expansion Formula (SAEF) grants] ...that's money that can go directly to the employer to help offset the cost of bringing on, and paying for an employee, the wages for up to six months of a new apprentice.”* Stakeholders benefit from DWS's expertise in setting up RAPs and the resources they can provide to support them; while often appreciating the additional assurance of the widespread recognition and portability of the credentials they earn through RAPs.

Table 5 summarizes the ways in which representatives of DWS describe how they fulfill these roles and responsibilities:

Table 5. Roles and responsibilities of DWS

Leadership, governance, and policy	DWS provides formal leadership for RAPs in Utah through the Commissioner of Apprenticeship position, established in state code (Utah Code § 35A-6), and structured participation in state workforce development boards. They engage in strategic promotion of apprenticeship aligned to workforce needs, legislative reporting requirements, and leading and participating on statewide boards (e.g., State Workforce Development Board Apprenticeship Committee, Talent Board).
Program development and standards setting	While DWS does not directly develop in-house apprenticeship standards, they play a key role in ensuring RAPs meet the high-quality standards required by the DOL (e.g., on-the-job training, related technical instruction, wage reimbursement, employer participation, and then a nationally recognized certificate). DWS also will leverage the USBE-developed strands and standards to meet DOL requirements.
Stakeholder partnership development	DWS identifies and cultivates partnerships with employers and educational institutions who could benefit from registered YA programs. DWS is currently strategically developing connections with non-traditional industries and underserved populations (e.g. leveraging virtual reality tools to provide access to YA youth in JJS aimed to reduce recidivism) to expand YA offerings and access.
Intermediary functions	DWS deploys two apprenticeship navigators that collectively serve the full geographic range of Utah to connect employers, education partners, and potential apprentices. They provide hands-on support for program development and implementation with a focus on registered pathways.
Funding and resource management	DWS administers substantial federal and state funding for apprenticeships, providing multi-faceted financial support through grants, wage subsidies, and support services that benefit both employers and apprentices. For example, the SAEF grant allows DWS to offer up to \$6,000 for apprentice training costs, \$5,000 for employer wage reimbursement, and \$2,000 for support services like tools and transportation assistance.
Technical assistance supports	DWS navigators utilize structured work processes to help programs meet DOL requirements and regulations, providing technical assistance throughout the registration and implementation process. They manage the complex administrative elements of federal compliance (e.g., apprenticeship duration/hours, progressive wage scales, classroom and on-the-job educational requirements).
Data, accountability, and reporting	DWS collects data related to reporting requirements (state and federal) for tracking their RAPs which can be accessed through a searchable database on their website, though cross-agency data sharing remains challenging.

Source. State agency representative interview transcripts and associated policy documents.

Utah State Board of Education

Utah State Board of Education (USBE) is the state agency responsible for providing quality public education for all Utah students from pre-K through high school; this includes Work-Based Learning opportunities, which includes youth apprenticeships. Representatives of USBE view YA through an educationally oriented lens, focusing on how they can ensure that these are high-quality student experiences. This sentiment was underscored when a USBE participant explained, *“That is first and foremost in my mind, the main thing. These experiences have to be quality experiences.”* Their work centers on aligning YA with graduation requirements, developing and supporting the use of appropriate course codes and standards (e.g., strands and standards for the YA course code), and connecting YA to career pathways (e.g., CTE integration). Their approach emphasizes educational quality, school-based implementation support, and integration with existing educational structures to *“ensure that we are growing the work-based learning program and working with partners to ensure that we can add new experiences and that we have opportunities and work-based learning that really reflect on not only industry demands and needs, but also our LEAs and their communities.”* This captures how USBE representatives understand their focus as ensuring quality YA programming while also intentionally aligning to the needs of a broader collection of stakeholder groups.

Table 6 summarizes the ways in which representatives of USBE describe how they fulfill these roles and responsibilities:

Table 6. Roles and responsibilities of USBE

Leadership, governance, and policy	USBE provides leadership in aligning apprenticeships with graduation requirements and setting educational standards to support program quality across YA programs, including those organized by TRU and DWS. They ensure YA fits coherently within the educational landscape while speaking to the needs of interagency structures for YA, USBE representatives participate on relevant statewide boards (e.g., Talent Ready, State Workforce Development Board) in addition to providing vision and leadership for their LEAs.
Program development and standards setting	USBE collaboratively develops and shares educational standards and competencies for YA programs through their course code, ensuring these experiences meet high quality criteria for student learning. They are also working to strategically integrate YA options into CTE existing pathways.
Stakeholder partnership development	USBE primarily develops and maintains working relationships with LEAs to build their capacity to establish, sustain, and/or grow YA programs that meet their quality standards. They help educational stakeholders understand WBL requirements and connect to appropriate partners to serve as intermediaries (e.g., TRU, DWS).
Intermediary functions	USBE indirectly helps connect LEAs or schools with employers and other state agencies for apprenticeship implementation, often leveraging the functions of TRU and DWS in this work.
Funding and resource management	USBE distributes educational funding for WBL to LEAs according to established formulas and criteria for approved funding uses. They ensure resources are allocated appropriately and used according to program guidelines.
Technical assistance supports	USBE ensures programs comply with education policies regarding safety, credit awarding, and quality standards. They provide school-based WBL coordinators with regular training and implementation support.
Data, accountability, and reporting	USBE collects student participation data through course enrollment systems, using their newly established YA course code, while working to improve data quality around use of the code across LEAs. They focus on educational outcomes and participation metrics within the school context, for example tracking how WBL funds are being utilized.

Source. State agency representative interview transcripts and associated policy documents.

Governor's Office

The **Governor's Office (GO)** is tasked with advancing the Governor's education policies as they relate to broader policy agendas and working to support alignment between those priorities and state education systems. While this is a broad purview, the GO includes YA as aligned to this policy agenda, expressing that *"...as the Governor's Office is concerned, we need to see more of these opportunities, not less. And so it is a priority to create these types of experiences for our students."*

Representatives of GO bring a system-level perspective to YA, focusing on broad strategic alignment, policy development, and governance across multiple agencies rather than direct program implementation. Their work emphasizes connecting disparate initiatives, shaping legislative action, and ensuring youth apprenticeships align with broader state workforce and educational priorities. The office operates at the intersection of executive and legislative branches priorities in what they describe as, *"a delicate balance of local control versus statewide effort"* while representing the Governor's workforce development and education priorities through YA programming.

Table 7 summarizes the ways in which representatives of GO describe how they fulfill these roles and responsibilities:

Table 7. Roles and responsibilities of GO

Leadership, governance, and policy	GO provides high-level coordination and strategic vision across state agencies, working through boards, legislative initiatives, and executive branch leadership to shape apprenticeship direction and priorities. For example, GO works across DWS, USHE, TRU, USBE, in addition to playing a role on Talent Board.
Program development and standards setting	GO has limited direct involvement in program development, though they play an important role in working with and through other agencies and ensuring alignment with broader educational and workforce priorities.
Stakeholder partnership development	GO primarily maintains relationships with agency leadership and key stakeholders at a systems level rather than directly engaging with individual employers or educational institutions.
Intermediary functions	GO facilitates connections between different agencies and stakeholders at a high strategic level, focusing on system alignment and policy coordination rather than direct program connections. For example, GO works between the legislative and executive branches on policy initiatives that support YA development and implementation.
Funding and resource management	GO helps direct resources to YA priorities through board participation and legislative advocacy, influencing funding decisions and priorities without directly administering most funding streams. For example, GO participated in a recent Talent Ready Board meeting that approved over \$1 million for partnership efforts.
Technical assistance supports	GO has very limited direct involvement in program implementation or compliance, delegating these responsibilities to implementing agencies while providing strategic oversight.
Data, accountability, and reporting	GO leverages data from other agencies for strategic analysis rather than conducting primary data collection, focusing on system-level performance metrics to guide policy decisions.

Source. State agency representative interview transcripts and associated policy documents.

Summary of Roles and Responsibilities Across Agencies

The UEPC's analysis of both interview and policy data sources reveals how agencies perceive and engage in these key roles and responsibilities for YA. It is important to understand that although some roles are fulfilled by more than one agency, it does not imply that there is duplication of efforts. For example, as elaborated previously, while both TRU and DWS serve intermediary functions for stakeholders engaged in YA, they often do so differently given the differences in the program approaches they are offering to their stakeholders and what they require. Alternatively, each agency fulfills leadership and governance roles,

although they sometimes function within different spheres of influence. **Table 8** summarizes the key dimensions of roles and responsibilities for YA as they are distributed across state agencies. A checkmark (✓) indicates that an agency directly fulfills a given role or responsibility in some capacity for YA while a red diamond (◆) indicates that a particular role or responsibility is most prominent or emphasized by that agency.

Table 8. Roles and responsibilities for YA by state agency

Roles and Responsibilities	TRU	DWS	USBE	GO
Leadership, Governance, and Policy	✓	✓	✓	◆
Program Development and Standards Setting	✓	✓	◆	
Stakeholder Partnership Development	✓	✓	✓	
Intermediary Functions	◆	✓		
Funding and Resource Management	✓	✓	✓	✓
Program Implementation and Compliance Support	✓	◆	✓	
Data, Accountability, and Reporting	✓	✓	✓	

Note. ✓ indicates that an agency directly fulfills a given role or responsibility in some capacity for YA; ◆ indicates that a particular role or responsibility is most prominent or emphasized by that agency

Multiple agencies fulfilling a given role should not be interpreted as a duplication of efforts as many key functions are supported by more than one agency meeting the needs of different program types and stakeholder groups.

Source. State agency representative interview transcripts and associated policy documents.

Examining Alignment of State Agencies' Efforts for YA

Effective and efficient implementation of YA in Utah also depends on strong interagency alignment. While the previous section looked *within* state agencies to describe how they understand their roles and responsibilities for YA, examining the alignment of state agencies' efforts for YA requires looking *across* agencies.

The UEPC analysis revealed multiple dimensions of interagency alignment that vary in strength. As one agency representative reflected, there is strong alignment in some areas like shared purpose, *"We all want to help the students and we all want to help the employers, those are our real customers on everybody's front,"* yet another participated noted that there are opportunities for improved alignment in that *"... there are noticeable siloed efforts and there are noticeable collaborative efforts on the other side of that coin."*

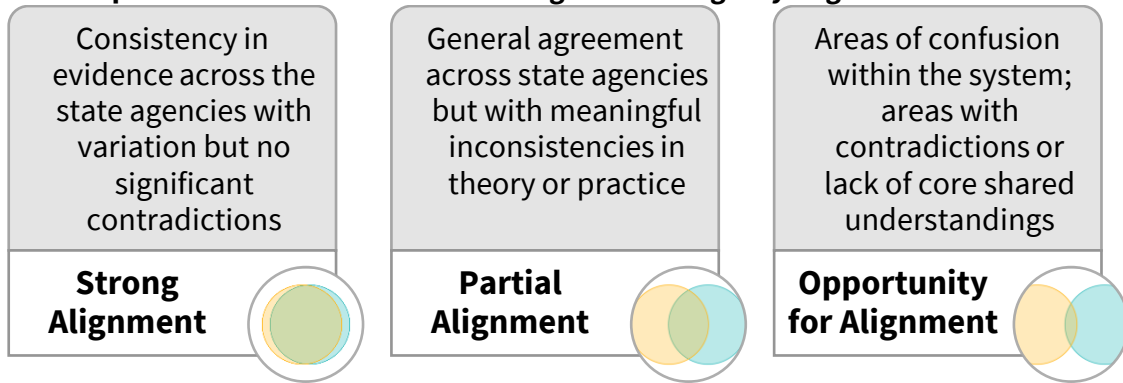
Dimensions of Interagency Alignment

Agencies exhibit alignment along the lines of many of their core roles and responsibilities. However, alignment goes beyond functions and includes conceptual dimensions such as, shared understandings of definitions, standards, and purpose or vision. Based on the analysis of the qualitative data from this study, the UEPC team identified 10 dimensions of interagency alignment across state agency efforts for and understandings of YA. These 10 dimensions include:

- Governance and leadership structures
- Shared purpose and aims for YA
- Shared definitions of YA
- Shared YA standards
- Role clarity and formal agreements
- Communication and collaboration mechanisms
- Funding coordination
- Shared data systems and metrics
- Stakeholder engagement processes
- Policy development and advocacy

Findings from the analysis reveal that there is a spectrum of interagency alignment for youth apprenticeships across these 10 dimensions. Some areas show strong alignment, while others are partially aligned or present opportunities for improvement. A guide to interpreting these categories is shown below in **Figure 3**.

Figure 3. Interpretation Guide for Relative Strength of Interagency Alignment

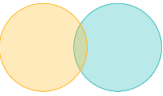


Source. State agency representative interview transcripts and associated policy documents.

Table 9 organizes these dimensions in terms of their relative strength of alignment across TRU, DWS, USBE, and GO and describes the application of this dimension relative to interagency alignment built on participant discussion. Then, we discuss the system-level conditions that promote or detract from alignment. These sections offer the UEPC team’s synthesized insights, while [Appendix C](#) offers additional supplementary narrative descriptions of the dimensions of interagency alignment.

Table 9. Dimensions of Interagency Alignment for YA Efforts

	Dimension	Description from Across Agency Participants
Areas of Strong Interagency Alignment		
	Shared Purpose and Aims for Youth Apprenticeships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Common understandings of the purpose of YA in Utah to benefit students and industry for statewide economic good Alignment of organizational goals and missions around YA Unified vision across agencies providing shared motivation towards common goals for YA
	Policy Development and Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared, collaborative approaches to developing policy Mutual support in legislative advocacy Coordinated policy initiatives
Areas of Partial Interagency Alignment		
	Communication and Collaboration Mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How agencies facilitate formal or informal communication and coordination Regular cross-agency meetings and information sharing Ad hoc/informal versus structured/formal coordination and collaboration approaches Relationship-driven v. institutionalized collaboration
	Stakeholder Engagement Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordination of outreach to employers and education partners to expand stakeholder participation in YA and to support implementation and avoid confusion Complementary versus competitive approaches to establishing and maintaining stakeholder relationships Clear pathways and points of entry for stakeholders to navigate the YA system across agencies

	Dimension	Description from Across Agency Participants
	Governance and Leadership Structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role of key executive leaders/"champions" across all agencies supporting YA • Presence (or lack) of dedicated coordinating roles/entities/mechanisms across state agencies • Leadership stability/instability issues
	Shared Youth Apprenticeship Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common program quality standards and requirements • Consistency in how programs are measured against standards • A shared understanding of what constitutes quality
	Shared Definitions of Youth Apprenticeships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of a single, shared statutory definition of YA • (In)consistency in how agencies operationally define YA • Alignment in terminology • Variation in statutory versus operational definitions
Areas of Opportunity for Strengthened Alignment		
	Role Clarity and Formal Agreements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly defined agency roles and responsibilities for key functions within and across agencies • Presence of formal agreements (MOUs, collaboration agreements) vs. informal arrangements to establish joint role clarity and structure coordination • Division of labor based on statutory roles and expertise
	Funding Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint/pooled or complementary v. fragmented and competitive approaches to funding • (In)Ability to leverage shared resources across agencies • Alignment versus competition for YA funding streams
	Shared Data Systems and Metrics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presence/absence of common metrics, data collection, and reporting mechanisms • (In)Consistent ways to measure success across agencies • Ability to track student and employer participation/outcomes

Source. State agency representative interview transcripts and associated policy documents.

Conditions that Promote Alignment

Beyond understanding the dimensions of interagency alignment, the UEPC analysis also identified conditions that both support and limit interagency alignment in governance for YA in Utah. Several conditions appear to facilitate alignment between the agencies involved in youth apprenticeships in Utah. These supporting factors strengthen alignment between agencies despite other challenges in the system.

- **Strong working relationships between key personnel** across agencies form the foundation for much of the current collaboration. Agency representatives frequently mentioned knowing and trusting their counterparts at other organizations, with some having previously worked together or in different roles within the YA system. These personal connections enable informal coordination and problem-solving when formal structures might not be nimble or flexible enough.
- **Shared commitment to youth apprenticeship value for Utah** provides common ground across agencies. Agency representatives expressed strong belief in the importance of youth apprenticeships for Utah's economic, workforce, and educational future. This shared conviction

generates motivation to work through challenges and find ways to collaborate despite competing priorities.

- **Recent policy achievements** demonstrate the capacity for successful cross-agency collaboration and action. The passage of legislation addressing liability concerns for employers taking on youth apprentices represents a significant collaborative win that multiple agencies supported, contributed to, and benefited from. These successes build momentum for further coordination.
- **Emerging formal structures** like the USBE's newly approved youth apprenticeship course code with strands and standards and regular cross-agency meetings show progress toward institutionalization of key collaborative mechanisms. While still developing, these structures provide frameworks for ongoing alignment and represent intentional efforts to move beyond relationship-dependent collaboration.

Conditions that Detract from Alignment

Despite collaborative efforts and the presence of a variety of conditions that support interagency alignment for YA, several conditions also appear to limit or detract from alignment between agencies. These factors emerge from both structural and organizational characteristics of the current approach.

- **Reliance on relationships rather than institutional structures** creates vulnerability to leadership changes. The functioning of the system currently depends on the connections and goodwill between specific individuals, with several respondents noting that personnel changes have already affected coordination in the past. This dependency limits long-term stability and institutional memory while introducing precarity for continued work.
- **Competing priorities and reporting requirements** tied to different funding streams create tensions between collaboration and agency-specific goals. Each agency must respond to its own stakeholders, accountability systems, and funding requirements, sometimes incentivizing competition and territorial or siloed behaviors rather than collaboration for resources and recognition.
- **Inconsistent definitions and data systems** prevent establishing shared metrics and tracking short- and long-term outcomes for YA programs across Utah. Without common ways to identify, count, and measure YA programs and participants, agencies struggle to establish baselines, measure impact, or understand the full scope of activities across the state. This gap makes it difficult to coordinate efforts effectively.
- **Lack of formalized role clarity** creates occasional competition for building stakeholder relationships. While informal divisions of responsibility have emerged, boundaries remain unclear in practice. This ambiguity can lead to inefficiencies, duplication of efforts, and confusion for employers and education partners trying to navigate the system.
- **Separate administrative structures** without a designated coordinating entity mean that cross-agency initiatives depend on voluntary cooperation rather than defined responsibility. Despite some collaborative forums like the Talent Board or the State Workforce Development Board Apprenticeship Committee, no central entity has clear authority to align efforts across the entire YA system.

Exploring Barriers for YA in Utah

The UEPC analysis of data across stakeholders revealed an interrelated set of barriers affecting participation in YA for students, employers, and educational institutions, in addition to barriers affecting the efficiency of and alignment of state agencies in their work to coordinate YA. These barriers fell into six broad categories: **logistical and implementation barriers**, **regulatory and policy barriers**, **financial barriers**, **governance and coordination barriers**, **awareness and perception barriers**, and **participation and opportunity barriers**. **Figure 4** offers an overview of these categories of barriers and a broad definition of each.

Figure 4. Defining the Types of Barriers to YA in Utah



Source. State agency representative and stakeholder interview transcripts.

It is important to note that in many cases the barriers discussed by participants were cross-cutting—reflecting multiple barrier types rather than cleanly falling into just one. We offer these findings in two ways to capture this nuance while continuing to organize our insights for ease of interpretation. First, **Table 10** provides a comprehensive matrix of the kinds of barriers participants noted with barrier types. In this matrix, the barriers cut across barrier types is readily visible, while the asterisk by the indicators in the matrix (●*) reflects what the UEPC team identified as the primary barrier categorization for each barrier.

Then, the sections that follow then offer a deeper discussion of the dimensions that comprise each category of barrier, organizing barriers by their primary barrier type. While these barriers are not insurmountable for skilled intermediaries and willing collaborative partners, they will require intentional strategies, coordination, and resources to overcome.

Table 10. Matrix of Barriers and Barrier Types

Barrier	Logistical & Implementation	Regulatory & Policy	Financial	Governance & Coordination	Awareness & Perception	Participation & Opportunity
Transportation challenges	●*		●			●
Scheduling coordination	●*					●
Program structure and design disconnects	●*					
Employer readiness for supporting YA	●*					●
Rural locale implementation challenges	●*		●	●		●
External regulatory or policy constraints	●	●*			●	
Institutional or organizational policy constraints	●	●*	●			
Program alignment and articulation issues	●	●*				●
Adequate program funding for sustainability and growth		●	●*			●
Adequate staffing and personnel turnover	●		●*			
Employer ROI concerns			●*		●	
Apprentice Compensation Issues			●*			●
Lack of role clarity and confusion for stakeholders	●	●		●*		
Competing priorities and territorialness		●		●*		
Personnel turnover and precarity of dependence on relationships and informal coordination	●		●	●*		
Data and information sharing gaps	●	●		●*		
Awareness and information gaps (YA offerings and value)	●			●	●*	●
Preconceived notions about education and career paths				●	●*	
Industry perceptions	●			●	●*	
Workplace culture challenges	●				●*	●
Student motivation and commitment challenges	●				●*	●
Geographic challenges	●		●			●*
Socioeconomic pressures and barriers	●		●			●*
Demographic or cultural challenges					●	●*

Note. ● indicates the barrier is associated with the barrier type (column), ●* indicates the primary barrier type a given barrier falls into.

Source. State agency representative and stakeholder interview transcripts.

Logistical and Implementation Barriers



Participants discussed a variety of logistical and implementation barriers, which present significant challenges to participation in YA programs and were among the most cited barrier categories across participants in the study. These barriers are often structural in nature and can persist even among the efforts of willing and engaged stakeholders who are acutely aware of their presence. These logistical and implementation barriers encompass five interconnected domains: transportation challenges, scheduling coordination, program structure and design disconnects, employer readiness for supporting YA, and rural locale implementation challenges. Examples of each dimension of this barrier are provided below in **Table 11**:

Table 11. Dimensions and Examples of Logistical and Implementation Barriers

Barrier Dimension	Examples Provided by Participants
Transportation challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited public transit infrastructure Access to and costs of personal vehicles Distances between school, work, and home Financial burdens associated with transportation Time constraints related to commute times and work-school-life balance Unsustainable transportation support systems Rural isolation and travel distances
Scheduling coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complex schedule integration Administrative burden associated with managing irregular school schedules School calendar misalignment (e.g., summer, school closure days) Challenges of very early start times for apprentices LEA support staff contract hour limitations
Program structure and design disconnects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Misalignment between classroom curriculum and performance expectations Inconsistent performance expectations for apprentices Insufficient mentorship supports for apprentices Equipment relevance gaps between training and workplace Communication breakdowns between stakeholders
Employer readiness for supporting YA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inexperience with mentoring youth Role ambiguity for apprentices Workplace culture challenges for youth in adult workplaces Workplace buy-in gaps between executive leaders and mid-level managers/foremen Inadequate training infrastructure for employers
Rural locale implementation challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Geographic isolation and remoteness of rural communities Limited industry presence within a region Constraints in low population density areas Distance from higher resource concentration areas Greater upfront investment required to establish

Source. State agency representative and stakeholder interview transcripts.

The logistical and implementation barriers represent some of the most cited challenges across participant groups. They represent meaningful structural and process barriers that will require a coordinated approach to address.

Regulatory and Policy Barriers



Regulatory and policy barriers noted by participants can present structural impediments to YA implementation that can constrain program development. These barriers can emerge from external policy or legislation (e.g., federal or state policies), institutional practices, and requirements that shape and limit how YA programs can be designed and operated. Unlike barriers that might be addressed through improved coordination or additional resources, regulatory and policy barriers are often beyond the direct control of stakeholders. The UEPC analysis found that regulatory and policy barriers fell into three main dimensions: external regulatory requirements imposed by governmental entities, internal policy decisions made by educational institutions, and program articulation challenges between secondary and post-secondary systems. Examples of each dimension of this barrier are provided below in **Table 12**:

Table 12. Dimensions and Examples of Regulatory and Policy Barriers

Barrier Dimension	Examples Provided by Participants
External regulatory or policy constraints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labor law constraints for youth in workplaces • Administrative burden of registration requirements • Employer resistance to government oversight • Safety and liability concerns • Complexities of managing insurance/worker's compensation for youth across stakeholders • Delicate tensions between local control vs. statewide policies
Institutional or organizational policy constraints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational funding disincentives when students are off-site • Resource allocation restrictions across credit-bearing and non-credit bearing program • Policy constraints on course offerings across IHEs limiting program development • Challenges to sustainability with one-time v. ongoing funding streams • Implementation restrictions on when classes can occur
Program alignment and articulation issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum misalignment between K-12 and higher ed • Credit transfer limitations from apprenticeship course work to other degree programs • Pathway discontinuity between YA programs and other degrees (e.g., AS, BA) • Program duplication restrictions for higher ed limiting regional ability to meet industry needs for apprentice RTI • Inconsistent information about program requirements for apprentices • Coordination gaps between K-12 and higher ed for course offerings and alignment

Source. State agency representative and stakeholder interview transcripts.

The regulatory and policy barriers described above create structural constraints that can limit the flexibility and effectiveness of YA programs.

Financial Barriers



Study participants described financial barriers that constrain program sustainability, personnel capacity, and student and employer participation in YA. These barriers reflect both direct costs of program implementation and operation as well as opportunity costs for participating stakeholders. Financial barriers impact every level of program implementation, influencing both the availability of opportunities and the ability of stakeholders to participate effectively. Financial barriers span four dimensions: program funding and sustainability challenges, personnel funding gaps, employer return-on-investment concerns, and apprentice compensation issues. Examples of each dimension of this barrier are provided below in **Table 13**:

Table 13. Dimensions and Examples of Financial Barriers

Barrier Dimension	Examples Provided by Participants
Adequate program funding for sustainability and growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient sustainable funding sources for YA programs • Reliance on grants of short-term funding sources • Competition for the same set of limited resources across educational priorities and between organizations • Challenge of meeting funding needs in rural areas without economies of scale • Program expansion limited by funding despite supply of YA programs often not meeting demand • Misalignment between funding mechanisms and YA program structures
Adequate staffing and personnel turnover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate compensation for professional work-based learning coordinator positions in LEAs • Part-time positions in LEAs for full-time workloads that spill into time outside of contract hours • Reliance on passionate individuals instead of establishing sustainable roles to support growth • Overextension of existing personnel managing multiple duties and priorities • YA program growth constrained by staffing capacity
Employer ROI concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investment in apprentices without guaranteed retention/hire: • Initial lower apprentice productivity • Resource investment (e.g., time, personnel, money) required to train and mentor apprentices • Commitment of resources required to train mentors • Long-term ROI uncertainty
Apprentice Compensation Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short-term opportunity cost pressures • Challenges of transitioning to adult financial responsibilities on apprentice wages • Retention challenges when apprentices can earn higher wages in other entry-level jobs • Apprentice income threatening access to essential public benefits programs

Source. State agency representative and stakeholder interview transcripts.

The financial barriers outlined above create significant constraints on program sustainability, staffing capacity, and stakeholder participation in YA programs. These funding challenges affect not only the availability of opportunities but also the ability of students, schools, and employers to engage effectively in apprenticeship programs.

Governance and Coordination Barriers



Governance and coordination barriers discussed by study participants can undermine the collaborative processes necessary for the sustainability and growth of YA programs, creating systemic confusion and inefficiencies that can frustrate and deter potential stakeholder partners. These barriers reflect the inherent complexity of programs that require cooperation across multiple organizational boundaries, including educational institutions, government agencies, and private sector employers. The UEPC analysis identified a set of interconnected dimensions to these governance and coordination barriers that included interagency role confusion, competing agency priorities, personnel relationship dependency, and data system limitations. Examples of each dimension of this barrier are provided below in **Table 14**:

Table 14. Dimensions and Examples of Governance and Coordination Barriers

Barrier Dimension	Examples Provided by Participants
Lack of role clarity and confusion for stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unclear agency responsibilities • Multiple point-of-contact confusion • Process navigation challenges • Employer relationship management issues • Stakeholder communication gaps • Coordination complexity consequences
Competing priorities and territorialness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divergent success metrics across agencies discourage collaboration (i.e., zero-sum game) • Inconsistent definitions (e.g., YA, programs) generating confusion among stakeholders • Organizational goal misalignment when agencies report to different boards/commissions • Competing enrollment incentives between stakeholders • Siloed operational approaches among agencies in the context of competing priorities • Territorial program operations
Personnel turnover and precarity of dependence on relationships and informal coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High staff turnover in key agency roles disrupting continuity • The precarity of dependency on personal working relationships • Personality-dependent collaboration • Verbal and informal rather than written and formal agreements • Informal coordination mechanisms instead of structured processes • Cross-agency relationship gaps resulting in blind spots for coordination and shared understandings
Data and information-sharing gaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data system limitations for tracking YA program quality and outcomes • Inconsistent data definitions • Lack of shared data systems to share key information and coordinate efforts • Longer-term apprentice outcome tracking challenges • Real-world challenges of data quality and fidelity of metrics

Source. State agency representative and stakeholder interview transcripts.

The governance and coordination barriers described by participants represent an array of complex challenges regarding effective governance for YA in Utah, as they involve multiple stakeholders across organizational boundaries with different reporting structures and priorities. These barriers can create systemic inefficiencies and confusion that frustrate implementation efforts.

Awareness and Perception Barriers



Awareness and perception barriers are downstream of more deeply rooted awareness, attitudinal, and information-based obstacles that limit YA participation even when programs are available. These barriers reflect a combination of perceptions of and attitudes towards certain educational and career pathways and information gaps about existing YA offerings and the potential value of participating in YA. These awareness and perception barriers came up across five related dimensions: awareness gaps, educational pathway perceptions, industry resistance factors,

workplace culture misalignments, and youth commitment challenges. Examples of each dimension of this barrier are provided below in **Table 15**:

Table 15. Dimensions and Examples of Awareness and Perception Barriers

Barrier Dimension	Examples Provided by Participants
Awareness and information gaps (YA offerings and value)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General lack of awareness about YA opportunities and value propositions for students and stakeholders • Insufficient program marketing to engage potential participants (e.g., students, employers) • Employer information deficits around available supports for YA and potential benefits • Confusion about YA as a viable long-term career pathway option
Preconceived notions about education and career paths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persistent college-centric orientation among students, families, and culture • Stigmas around vocational/CTE education and the trades • Outdated stereotypes/misconceptions about what apprenticeships are
Industry perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confusion for industry in the context of incomplete multi-agency coordination without a clear single entry point • Implicit employer associations of apprenticeship with unionization in the context of anti-union sentiment • Government (e.g., federal or state) oversight concerns • Reluctance due to perceptions of administrative burdens of offering YA programs
Workplace culture challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competition vs. collaboration mindset towards talent development • Mismatches in the pace of activities/changes between stakeholder groups (e.g., education and industry) • Workplace cultural and language barriers for youth on job sites • Communication mismatches between education and industry
Student motivation and commitment challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term commitment hesitation for prospective youth apprentices • Challenges for maintaining student motivation for academics for the duration of the program • Difficulty of managing work-education-life balance for apprentices • Pressures for greater career certainty and commitment at a relatively young age

Source. State agency representative and stakeholder interview transcripts.

While these awareness and perception barriers present significant challenges to expanding YA participation, participants in the study also identified several promising opportunities to address them. By focusing on strategic communication, earlier exposure to career pathways, and expanding the range of industries involved in YA, stakeholders believe these perceptual barriers can be overcome.

Participation and Opportunity Barriers



Participants also noted participation and opportunity barriers that tend to have uneven impacts, more often affecting students from traditionally underrepresented populations in YA and resulting in access and opportunity gaps for participation in YA programs. These barriers reflect social and structural hindrances to participation in YA that may unintentionally exclude some student populations. These participation and opportunity challenges reflected two main dimensions that share some overlap with previous categories but merit attention as a separate barrier category given their implications for expanding participation: socioeconomic barriers and demographic/cultural barriers. Examples of each dimension of this barrier are provided below in **Table 16**:

Table 16. Dimensions and Examples of Participation and Opportunity Barriers

Barrier Dimension	Examples Provided by Participants
Geographic challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limited public transit infrastructure• Access to and costs of personal vehicles• Rural isolation and travel distances• Distance from higher resource concentration areas
Socioeconomic pressures and barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Apprentices from low-income families experiencing economic pressures that limit participation• Additional education and workplace navigation support needs for first-generation students
Demographic or cultural challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Residency status limitations on participation for students who want to explore career paths• Workplace gender bias affecting experiences of women in apprenticeships• Multilingual program needs to meet the needs of students and industry

Source. State agency representative and stakeholder interview transcripts.

The participation and opportunity barriers described by participants highlight how socioeconomic pressures and demographic factors can create uneven access to YA programs for certain student populations. These barriers represent substantive challenges that, if unaddressed, may limit the growth of YA opportunities for some Utahns.

Recommendations: A Framework for Unlocking Opportunities through YA in Utah

This UEPC study provided a statewide multi-agency analysis of:

- The current roles, responsibilities, and duties of TRU, DWS, USBE, and the Governor's Office relative to youth apprenticeships in Utah.
- The alignment of efforts among TRU, DWS, USBE, and the Governor's Office.
- The logistical, regulatory, and financial barriers to student, LEA, and employer participation in youth apprenticeships in Utah.

A key finding of this study demonstrates that agency partners in YAs—TRU, DWS, USBE, and the GO—share a common goal for increasing participation in and the vitality of the youth apprenticeship programs in Utah. Each agency contributes unique perspectives and capacities essential to the growth and accessibility of YAs. For instance, TRU brings a focus on aligning programs with industry demand; DWS emphasizes workforce development and employer engagement; USBE prioritizes the educational quality of the student experience; and the GO brings a cross-sector perspective that emphasizes the importance of system-wide coordination across education, workforce, and economic development and alignment with statewide priorities.

Despite the shared goal and investment in youth apprenticeship by individual agencies, this study also sought to understand how to strategically align YA efforts, reduce fragmentation and inefficiencies, and foster deeper collaboration across YA partners to:

- Increase youth apprenticeship offerings;
- Increase student and employer participation in youth apprenticeships;
- Formalize roles and streamline the use of existing infrastructure;
- Leverage secondary and post-secondary educational programs;
- Identify metrics to assess the success of youth apprenticeships (e.g. Department of Labor resources, Advance CTE); and
- Potential state appropriations for youth apprenticeships specialists for scalability.

To make sense of the complex, multi-level factors influencing youth apprenticeship implementation and to inform the development of a coherent system, this report organizes the recommendations into a framework consisting of five overarching levers: **Governance, Structural, Operational, Communication, and Strategic Investment and Capacity Building**. Each of these levers reflects a critical dimension needed to address the identified six improvement priorities.⁵ The proposed recommendations attend to both immediate needs and longer-term approaches that will support scaling up and sustainability.

We begin with a discussion of governance levers. We intentionally begin here as governance is a foundation for role clarification, coordination and collaboration, strategic decisions, resource allocations, accountability, and coherence in efforts. The subsequent recommendations address the remaining levers that support expanding YA offerings, participation, and scalability. Moreover, we believe these recommendations are essential to elevating existing youth apprenticeship efforts to the next evolutionary

⁵ As identified in Utah Code § 53B-34-111 (2024).

phase—a Youth Apprenticeship Ecosystem—where attention is given to the agencies, their interaction, and their collective outcomes.

Governance Levers

To achieve improved alignment, efficiencies, and interagency collaboration, findings from this study underscore the critical importance of clearly establishing a shared governance structure to support youth apprenticeship sustainability and growth in Utah. Evidence from this study consistently demonstrates similarities in goals and purpose among partner agencies. However, evidence indicates that operational misalignment may also lead to fragmented efforts and unattained objectives. Moreover, misalignment resulted in barriers, particularly when the misalignment resulted from differences in perceived roles, responsibilities, and decision-making authority.

There are multiple governance levers to support progress on the six statewide priorities. **Table 17** provides a summary of the identified key actions to support improved governance. These actions include establishing a statewide governance coordinating council, clearly defining and formalizing core agency responsibilities through Memoranda of Understandings (MOUs) and collaboration agreements, and developing consensus around operational definitions and experiential and quality standards. Convening regular cross-agency implementation meetings with decision-makers and stakeholders across the system will further promote coherence in efforts, transparency, and accountability. These governance levers reflect nationally recognized models that forefront clear role definition, shared accountability, and infrastructure needed to support system-wide coordination and collaboration for sustained impact.

Structural Levers

This study highlighted several existing structural gaps that may limit coherence and scalability of youth apprenticeships in Utah. These gaps include disconnected data systems across agencies, undefined and/or inconsistently articulated credentialing pathways, limited access to modular instructional options aligned to student and/or industry needs, and challenges in ensuring the availability of apprentices in certain geographic areas (e.g., rural, remote) and trades with fewer employer partnerships.

To address opportunities for achieving the priorities identified, the actions provided in the structural levers category in **Table 17** offers a framework for addressing core infrastructure needs. These actions include standardizing partnership templates (e.g., mentor training materials, MOUs), strengthening articulation agreements between secondary, post-secondary and workforce agencies, implementing unified performance monitoring systems that integrate data across agencies to track YA progress and outcomes, and reducing barriers and redundancies. We suggest establishing a comprehensive feedback system informed by multiple data sources (e.g., qualitative, quantitative, and survey data) and key performance indicators to engage in program improvement and strengthening alignment.

Operational Levers

Operational levers refers to the processes, tools and day-to-day necessary for effective and coherent YA implementation and growth. These types of levers strengthen coordination, streamline operations, and enhance accessibility and engagement for those who support and participate in these programs. Evidence from the study indicates a number of logistical and implementation barriers (e.g., transportation

infrastructure and access, fragmented communication channels, employer readiness to support YA, challenges with program onboarding and navigation, scheduling, outreach issues, partnership development) that currently limit participation, expansion, and stakeholder engagement.

To address these issues, the operational levers outlined in **Table 17** propose intentional actions that contribute to system-level coherence, communicate the value of youth apprenticeship, and support YA implementation. These actions include launching joint stakeholder planning teams across LEAs, IHEs, and agencies to align program design and delivery, co-developing tools and training for school-based professionals such as counselors, establishing work-based learning coordinators and career coaches, and coordinating employer outreach to avoid duplicative efforts. This study also suggests that there is an opportunity to expand YA offerings by leveraging existing relationships with employers and within the partner networks and with partners who have other types of apprenticeship programs (e.g., existing adult apprenticeship programs). This action could further leverage resources, as it may reduce startup burdens and accelerate access in new sectors or geographic regions.

Communication Levers

Effective communication is a foundational component of a coherent YA system, including one that can increase participation, leverage K12 and higher education, and strengthen alignment between education and workforce. Findings from this study revealed inconsistent and sometimes siloed communication across agencies. Moreover, the study identified an absence of a unified message about YA purpose, design, and, unintentionally, value of YAs. Interview and focus group data highlighted that key stakeholders often received information late, encountered conflicting messages from different entities, or were unaware of available resources. These communication barriers hindered awareness, created confusion, and limited broader participation in youth apprenticeships—particularly for first-generation students, rural communities, and employers.

To address these challenges, the communication levers outlined in **Table 17** identify actionable strategies to build a shared language, enhance stakeholder understanding, and ensure more coordinated messaging across the system about YAs. These actions include developing and implementing a cross-agency communication strategy with consistent branding and messaging, leveraging existing communication platforms and coordinated timelines for outreach, and amplifying success stories demonstrating the value and impact of youth apprenticeship participation. Additionally, the study supports the development of tailored playbooks or blueprints for stakeholders at different entry points⁶ and digital navigation portals that serve as centralized access points for exploring and engaging with youth apprenticeship programs. These actions can streamline and create alignment, build trust and engagement among key stakeholders (students, families, employers, educators, and system leaders), more efficiently use resources, and promote more effective outreach efforts.

Strategic Investment and Capacity Levers

Coherent, sustainable, and scalable youth apprenticeship systems require long-term investment and capacity building across agencies and stakeholder groups. Evidence from this study reveals that current funding for youth apprenticeship efforts is often grant-dependent or has insufficient or unpredictable

funding and is often distributed in a fragmented way across agencies. Participants emphasized that limited dedicated staff, including available staff to support LEAs, employers, and partnership development, and uneven access to employer incentives create major barriers to expansion, which ultimately impacts student, employer, and sector participation in the YA programing. Additionally, inadequate capacity for data analysis, cross-agency coordination, and regional implementation support contributes to inconsistent delivery and missed opportunities for growth.

To address these issues, the strategic investment and capacity levers in **Table 17** outline key priorities for action. These action steps include allocating recurring funding for interagency governance, cross-agency staffing, communications infrastructure, and data analysis of key performance indicators; creating blended or braided funding streams to support youth apprenticeship across agencies; and dedicating state investment to expand LEA and school-level capacity (e.g., work-based or apprenticeship learning coordinators). The findings also suggest that creating additional incentive structures to offset student wage loss and employer costs, integrating youth apprenticeship infrastructure into broader workforce development plans, and reviewing policies that currently restrict collaboration between credit and non-credit programs in higher education could support YA implementation and growth. The data also suggest that expanding youth apprenticeships into nontraditional sectors and revising restrictive funding or policy barriers such as limitations between credit and non-credit program collaboration, can increase programmatic offerings and expansion.

Table 17. Framework of Levers and Key Actions for YA in Utah

Lever Type	Focus	Key Actions
Governance Levers	Roles, responsibilities, authority, and decision-making alignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a statewide YA Governance coordinating council to promote collaboration, alignment, coherence, shared accountability, and growth areas across agencies. • Define and formalize each agency's core and supporting responsibilities through MOUs and/or collaboration agreements. • Reach consensus on the common operational definitions and experiential and program quality standards for YA. • Convene regular cross-agency implementation meetings with decision-makers and operational leads. • Clarify communication responsibilities across agencies and intermediaries to minimize duplication and prevent conflicting messaging to students, families, LEAS, and employers.
Structural Levers	Systems, information and data infrastructure, and standards for program development and implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create visual role maps or flow charts for agency and IHE stakeholders. • Standardize YA partnership templates (e.g., implementation guidelines, mentor training materials, MOUs) to streamline processes and support efficiency. • Implement unified performance monitoring supported by an integrated data and information system. • Establish and implement a comprehensive feedback system that uses both quantitative and qualitative measures, as well as, short- and long-term outcomes, to capture program outcomes and stakeholder experiences. • Adopt a model of continuous improvement informed by key performance indicator monitoring. • Develop and streamline seamless educational and career pathways through strengthened articulation agreements between secondary, post-secondary institutions, and workforce that include pathways from apprenticeships to career (e.g., AS, BS). • Identify ways to increase access (e.g., transportation, coordinated support and investment, employer partnership developments, virtual options) to YA for students, particularly those in rural or more remote geographic locations. • Leverage the strength of existing apprenticeship networks (e.g., employers with adult apprenticeships) and relationships to expand YA offerings rather than starting from scratch.

Lever Type	Focus	Key Actions
Operational Levers	Processes, tools, and day-to-day implementation supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create comprehensive joint planning teams that span stakeholder groups, including LEAs, IHEs, and agencies and workforce sectors to ensure aligned implementation. • Develop and implement a statewide YA system diagnostic tool to assess agency alignment and readiness across the five system levers and identify shared priorities for improvement across agencies. • Create a local implementation readiness rubric as a developmental tool to help LEAs, intermediaries, and employer coalitions evaluate their implementation capacity and readiness to launch or expand YA efforts. • Collaboratively develop tools and training for school-based staff (e.g., WBL coordinators, school counselors, career coaches). • Coordinate employer outreach efforts across agencies to avoid duplication and present a unified value proposition for YA participation. • Leverage the strength of existing apprenticeship networks (e.g., employers with adult apprenticeships) and relationships to expand YA offerings rather than starting from scratch.
Communication Levers	Awareness, understanding, and engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement a comprehensive and coordinated cross-agency communication strategy with consistent branding and messaging to introduce YA earlier in students' educational experiences and to market to employers and the broader public. • Develop a phased implementation and resource allocation plan to guide investments and support implementation and growth. • Leverage existing communication platforms (e.g., statewide and across stakeholder groups) and a coordinated timeline for information dissemination. • Amplify success stories and bolster related marketing efforts. • Develop tailored cross-agency YA “playbooks,” “blueprints,” and/or “starter kits” to support stakeholders beginning to implement YA across industry sectors and locales. • Develop digital navigation portals that can serve as a single access point for stakeholders (e.g., students, employers, schools) to explore opportunities for YA across Utah agencies.
Strategic Investment and Capacity Levers	Funding, staffing, and long-term sustainability efforts for stakeholder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocate recurring funding for sustained interagency governance, coordination, communication infrastructure, cross-agency staffing, and data analysis of key performance indicators. • Create a blended or braided funding stream to support the various agencies involved and aspects of youth apprenticeships.

Lever Type	Focus	Key Actions
	engagement and outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create incentive opportunities to address both student wage needs and employer financial supports to encourage greater participation. • Provide dedicated funding to support LEAs and schools in implementing and sustaining YA programs, particularly for critical staff positions like work-based learning coordinators. • Explore integration of YA governance structures and implementation support into broader state workforce development investments. • Include governance infrastructure in broader workforce investments. • Expanding YAs to new industries and beyond “traditional trades.” • Review and revise policies that restrict resource sharing between credit and non-credit programs in higher education institutions.

Conclusion

This UEPC study offers a comprehensive analysis of the landscape of youth apprenticeships (YAs) in Utah. The analysis is grounded in the perspectives of multiple state agencies, education and industry partners, and youth participants. Across the findings, a consistent theme emerges: Utah has made substantial progress in developing youth apprenticeship opportunities. The current system indicates some fragmentation in structure, uneven in access that hinders participation, and limited in alignment across partners, although partners are supportive and collegial with one another. To fulfill the promise of youth apprenticeships as a scalable and sustainable pathway for students, educational opportunities, and workforce development, Utah now has the opportunity to address system-level challenges through intentional coordination, shared governance, and targeted investment.

The recommendations in this report are organized around five core system levers: governance, structural, operational, communications, and strategic investment and capacity. These levers are designed to work in concert, creating a cohesive framework where improvements in governance drive structural changes, to enable operational effectiveness, support strategic communication and are sustained by intentional investment. Together, these levers offer a framework for strengthening interagency coordination, addressing YA participation barriers, and leveraging Utah's existing infrastructure to expand access and impact. Findings suggest that achieving greater system coherence will require clearly defined roles and responsibilities, aligned communication strategies, improved data infrastructure, and sufficient capacity to support both local implementation and statewide coordination.

As Utah continues to invest in building a robust youth apprenticeship ecosystem, the insights and recommendations offered here provide evidence-informed insights that can guide coordination, innovation, and improvement. By aligning efforts across education, workforce, and industry and by centering implementation on shared goals and data-informed decision-making, Utah can optimize and expand existing infrastructure needed to ensure youth apprenticeships are not just available—but impactful and enduring.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Relevant Utah Legislation and Code

- DWS statute
 - Department Authority, Utah Code Ann. § 35A-1-104 (2020).
 - Apprenticeship Act: Title, Utah Code Ann. § 35A-6-101 (1997).
 - Apprenticeship Act: Definitions, Utah Code Ann. § 35A-6-102 (2021).
 - Apprenticeship Agreements—Terms and Conditions, Utah Code Ann. § 35A-6-101 (1999).
 - Youth Apprenticeships -- Workers' Compensation -- Risk Management, Utah Code Ann. § 35A-6-104.5 (2023).
 - Commissioner of Apprenticeship Programs, Utah Code Ann. § 35A-6-104.5 (2022).
- Talent Ready Utah and Talent Board statute
 - Technical Colleges -- Duties, Utah Code Ann. § 53B-2a-106 (2020).
 - Talent, Education, and Industry Alignment -- Definitions, Utah Code Ann. § 53B-34-101 (2022).
 - Talent, Education, and Industry Alignment Board -- Creation -- Membership -- Expenses -- Duties, Utah Code Ann. § 53B-34-102 (2022).
 - Talent Ready Utah Program, Utah Code Ann. § 53B-34-103 (2023).
 - Talent Program Report to Board, Utah Code Ann. § 53B-34-104 (2022).
 - Apprenticeships and Work-based Learning, Utah Code Ann. § 53B-34-106 (2022).
 - Youth Apprenticeship Governance Study, Utah Code Ann. § 53B-34-111 (2024).
- USBE statute and administrative rules
 - Powers of the State Board, Utah Code Ann. § 53E-3-507 (2021).
 - Weighted Pupil Units for Career and Technical Education Programs -- Funding of Approved Programs -- Performance Measures -- Qualifying Criteria, Utah Code Ann. § 53F-2-311 (2019).
 - Internship Programs -- Criminal Background Checks, Utah Code Ann. § 53G-7-904 (2020).
 - Work-based Learning Programs, USBE Administrative Rules § R277-915 (2022).
- Related House and Senate Bills
 - H.B. 22, Concurrent Enrollment Revisions, 2024 General Session (2024).
 - H.B. 68, Apprenticeship and Work-Based Learning Amendments, 2020 General Session (2020).
 - H.B. 280, Apprenticeship Opportunity Awareness, 2019 General Session (2019).
 - H.B. 348, Economic Development Amendments, 2021 General Session (2021).
 - H.B. 391, Apprenticeship Nomenclature Act, 2021 General Session (2021).
 - H.B. 555, Talent Ready Utah Program Modifications, 2023 General Session (2023).
 - S.B. 122, Youth Apprenticeship Governance Structure Amendments, 2024 General Session (2024).
 - S.B. 131, Talent Ready Utah Amendments, 2018 General Session (2018).
 - S.B. 138, Utah Apprenticeship Act, 2019 General Session (2019).

Appendix B. Selected Examples of Interagency Alignment from Other States

- **Wisconsin's Youth Apprenticeship Program:** The Department of Workforce Development (DWD) provides structured oversight while establishing program standards in collaboration with industry stakeholders. DWD partners with the Department of Education and technical college system, while implementation occurs through 33 regional consortia that receive state funding of up to \$1,100 per apprentice. This approach balances statewide consistency with local flexibility (Baddour, 2024; Lerman & Tyson, 2023; Parton, 2017).
- **Maryland's Apprenticeship Maryland Program:** Established through legislative action (House Bill 1207 in 2014), the program features dual agency oversight with the Maryland State Department of Education and Department of Labor jointly administering the initiative. Policy guidance comes from the Career and Technical Education Committee within the Governor's Workforce Board, while county school systems implement programs after MSDE approval. DOL-employed navigators recruit employers and help them become program sponsors (Baddour, 2024; Lawal et al., 2023; Maryland DOL, 2022).
- **South Carolina's Apprenticeship Carolina:** Operating as a statewide intermediary within the Technical College System, this model connects high schools, technical colleges, and employers to create integrated pathways. The program employs consultants who work with stakeholders to build programs, coordinates with U.S. DOL for registration and approval, and advocates for dedicated state funding while leveraging federal grants (Baddour, 2024; Copson et al., 2021; Kuehn et al., 2023).
- **Colorado's CareerWise Model:** Operating as an independent public-private partnership launched in 2016, CareerWise Colorado serves as a statewide intermediary organization that coordinates all stakeholders in the youth apprenticeship ecosystem. This Swiss-inspired model provides robust support services, including recruitment and mentor training, while school districts adjust schedules to accommodate apprenticeships, employers provide structured on-the-job training, and community colleges deliver related technical instruction (Katz & Elliott, 2020; Kuehn et al., 2023; Parton, 2017).

Appendix C. Supplementary Narrative Descriptions of Dimensions of Interagency Alignment



Areas of Strong Interagency Alignment

Shared Purpose and Aims for Youth Apprenticeships. UEPC analysis of participants' discussion of the vision and purpose for YA in Utah reveals there is a consistent articulation of youth apprenticeship's purpose of benefiting both students and industry for the common economic good of the state of Utah. While each agency tends to emphasize different aspects of this shared purpose, reflecting their primary stakeholders and organizational areas of focus, their fundamental aims show strong alignment around creating pathways that connect education to workforce needs in Utah. Selected evidence for alignment of shared aims and purposes for YA included:

- All agencies describe serving both students and industry as central to how they see the purpose of YA.
- TRU tends to focus on industry need with their aim to *"represent the voice of industry as we identify gaps, workforce gaps, in the state, and then we create long-term and short-term workforce solutions"* while also ensuring quality outcomes for students.
- DWS similarly emphasizes this dual focus: *"We all want to help the students and we all want to help the employers, those are our real customers on everybody's front,"* with a particular focus on workforce development given the broader agency role.
- USBE's approach centers on quality learning experiences that connect to career pathways: *"We're really working hard to grow those [WBL programs] and most importantly, to ensure they are experiences of high quality."*
- GO articulates how these purposes connect and tethers it more strongly to statewide economic goals: *"For the prosperity of Utahns... our economy strength is based on these type of efforts. And so for employers, they need a highly educated workforce."*

This dimension demonstrates **strong alignment** in fundamental purpose across agencies, providing a solid foundation for collaboration despite differences in approaches and emphases.

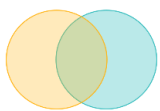
Policy Development and Advocacy. Agency representatives describe positive experiences with collaboration and collectively derived benefit in developing and advocating for YA-related policies. House Bill 555 stands out as an example of successful cross-agency policy work that supported the work of state agencies to expand YA opportunities by mitigating stakeholder concerns about liability that was mentioned spontaneously across agency interviews.

- House Bill 555 represents a significant collaborative policy achievement: *"... there was a bill that went through called Talent Ready Utah Amendments. In that amendment, we passed a law... House Bill 555, and what that allows employers to do is get youth apprentices into their facility, but the state covers liability and workers' comp medical."*
- Multiple agencies contributed to and supported this legislation: *"They've [TRU] done really great at helping push along legislative policies and law, and they're really great with that. And some of*

those things that they have already helped create, have helped move this work along, I'm sure you've heard of H.B.555."

- The Governor's Office also plays a key coordinating role in policy development to support the landscape for YA more broadly: *"So in this role, and particularly as it pertains to youth apprenticeships, this role works with our legislature on various initiatives. And there's a few of this session that are addressing this very subject. I've been very involved with those and shaping that for what that looks like in our state."*
- Representatives across agencies mentioned how it has supported their work to develop relationships with employers to offer YA, for example: *"Our legislature too, also last year passed House Bill 555, which covers workman's compensation for youth. And so, that's been a nice tool that we can use with employers to say, 'They're covered, you don't have to worry about this.' And so, that's been really helpful when we're collaborating with other agencies."*

This dimension demonstrates **strong alignment**. The agencies have demonstrated effective collaboration in developing and advocating for YA policy, particularly exemplified by House Bill 555 and ongoing legislative initiatives to develop a supportive policy landscape for YA and that has been mutually beneficial for involved agencies.



Areas of Partial Interagency Alignment

Communication and Collaboration Mechanisms. The agencies have established both formal and informal mechanisms for communication and collaboration, with varying degrees of institutionalization. These mechanisms range from regularly scheduled meetings to informal, ad hoc communication, largely driven by strong personal relationships between agency representatives, and include particularly positive experiences reported around structured collaborative opportunities.

- Regular interagency meetings occur: *"We also in the state have a monthly meeting on expansion of apprenticeship programs throughout, and it includes people from all different kinds of agencies. It can be Talent Ready Utah, Department of Workforce Services... We have people from the Utah State Board of Education that comes online on that meeting."*
- Some structured collaboration exists between specific agencies: *"In fact, [TRU representative] and I have just set up kind of an every other Friday rotation meeting for us to stay on top of some things and ensure that we're aligning efforts."*
- Participation in structured collaborative opportunities such as the NGA Policy Academy has strengthened connections: *"I think the NGA Policy Academy definitely gave us that space to really sit down and figure it out... and just seeing, okay, we all want to do what's best for our students and for our employers, so let's figure out how we can make that work."* These external facilitated experiences have helped overcome siloed behavior and build mutual understanding.
- Many collaborations depend on personal relationships: *"I'll call [DWS representative], and I'll be like, 'Hey, so-and-so wants to do XYZ,' or he'll call me like, 'Hey, we want to do this and that.'" This relationship-dependency creates vulnerability: "Because once one of us leaves a position, we all have a great relationship going,...but what happens when one of those people are turned over and something moves, then that could really have everything come crashing down."*

- Agency representatives recognize the need for more structured communication: *"We're just so busy that, not intentionally not communicating, we will go two months, and I'm like, 'Crap. I haven't talked to [DWS representative] in two months.' And there's no ill intention there. We're just busy."*

This dimension demonstrates **partial alignment**. While valuable communication mechanisms exist, they are often reliant on personal relationships rather than formalized routines or structures, creating vulnerability to inevitable personnel changes.

Stakeholder Engagement Processes. Agency representatives describe a mix of coordinated and occasionally competitive approaches when engaging with stakeholders, particularly employers and education partners. While some informal division of responsibility has emerged, stakeholders sometimes receive mixed messages or experience confusion about which agency to work with given their goals for YA.

- Some informal division of stakeholder engagement has developed but has yet to be formalized: *"if this is an individual company thing, DWS, you take it. If this is more of a group-style apprenticeship, that's something that we will take on."*
- Joint stakeholder engagement occurs to support stakeholders, particularly in the K12 education system through coordination by USBE: *"we've done a lot of presentations this last year and a half to our CTE folks at varying levels of CTE to just try to get the word out about what a youth apprenticeship entails and what the expectations are and the requirements."*
- However, stakeholders sometimes experience confusion: *"... if we're talking to them [employer] about a group apprenticeship program, and then one of the apprenticeship coordinators is talking to one of their reports about a DOL program... that confuses industry. Well, who in the world should I be working with?"*
- Competition for stakeholder relationships sometimes occurs following initially unintentional overlapping efforts with an employer: *"And so I was helping the employer with their goal ... while other entities were trying to incorporate it in the youth aspect and with youth apprenticeship in the schools so that the students can participate. And then the conversation kind of excluded me, and then it stopped."*

This dimension demonstrates **partial alignment** with the opportunity for improvement. While each agency invests in engaging stakeholders through their own programs and some coordination of stakeholder engagement across agencies exists, the lack of clearly defined processes creates occasional confusion and competition that detracts from shared goals to expand YA offerings and participation in Utah.

Governance and Leadership Structures. Representatives across agencies describe a variety of governance mechanisms within and across agencies (e.g., board/committee participation) but highlight the absence of a central coordinating entity or champion with oversight across the entire YA system. While some cross-agency representation exists through board participation and committees, no

overarching governance structure specifically focused on aligning youth apprenticeship efforts was identified.

- Cross-agency representation on boards creates some opportunity for shared leadership and governance: *"So my leadership at our agency, both a board member and our state superintendent sit on the Talent Ready Utah board. I attend those meetings kind of on the side and listen in and provide input to our leadership."*
- Specific statutory leadership roles exist within individual agencies: *"So I'm the Commissioner of Apprenticeship for the State of Utah. That position is a little interesting because it resides inside of the Department of Workforce Services, but it's actually written into state code so I also produce an annual report that goes straight to the state legislature."*
- The Apprenticeship Committee provides a forum for some coordination, but primarily within DWS, while the Talent Board similarly provides a forum for coordination but primarily from the perspective of TRU.
- Several respondents noted the absence of a central champion to lead, coordinate, and advocate across agencies: *"I don't feel like we have a champion that encompasses apprenticeship holistically. I feel like definitely individual champions for individual projects and that sort of thing exist, but I would like to see a little bit more holistic attention paid to apprenticeship in general."*
- Agency representatives identified the need for more centralized coordination to be able to achieve shared goals for YA in Utah: *"What we've seen from this collaboration with the National Governor's Association is that a lot of states will have just a designated Office of Apprenticeship that combines the efforts of both of our groups into one spot... There's been a lot of effort here to try to make that happen, but for various reasons it just has never coalesced."*

This dimension demonstrates **partial alignment** with significant opportunity for improvement. While governance structures exist within each agency and some cross-agency representation occurs, the system lacks a central coordinating entity or champion with authority to align efforts across the full YA ecosystem.

Shared Youth Apprenticeship Standards. Agency representatives describe varying levels of progress toward establishing shared standards for YA across the system and different approaches to YA programs. While the recent development of a YA course code with supporting strands and standards through USBE represents a significant step, the interviews suggest ongoing work to ensure these standards are consistently applied and recognized across participating LEAs and to incorporate them into program implementation and measurement.

- USBE has taken a lead role in developing standards: *"We just got final board approval last month... we just actually finished developing strands and standards for that course, and it falls under career and technical education... Yes, so it's a course now under CTE."*
- DWS representatives express enthusiasm about these standards and their potential to connect state standards to meeting U.S. DOL quality standards for program quality: *"I'm super excited about the strands and standards that the State Board of Education has put together."*
- TRU recognizes the importance of these standards for program integrity, particularly for their legislative work: *"When we wrote House Bill 555, the one thing I put in there was they could be*

covered so long as they were an enrolled student into that USBE coursework. And the reason we wrote the bill that way is because USBE has framework."

- The process of developing these standards was highly collaborative: *"Talent Ready Utah, USBE and DWS was meeting every other week to try to get this curriculum developed and advertised, to be utilized this upcoming year."*

This dimension demonstrates **partial alignment**. While significant progress has been made through the development of USBE's standards with cross-agency input, work remains to ensure these standards are fully operationalized and consistently applied across Utah's approaches to YA programming and measurement of program success.

Shared Definitions of Youth Apprenticeships. Representatives across the agencies discussed notably different definitions of what constitutes a youth apprenticeship, creating potential confusion for stakeholders and challenges for system-wide coordination. These differences appear not only in how agency representatives conceptualize youth apprenticeships in practice but also reflect differences in different statutory definitions across agencies and then how those formal definitions are interpreted operationally, for example: *"Well, I think there's a definition of a youth apprenticeship, and then I think there's the youth apprenticeship program that we administer."*

- TRU defines youth apprenticeship broadly as *"any registered or unregistered program that takes a high school student and blends education with real-world experience to get them credentialed."* Their statutory definition similarly emphasizes combining *"paid on-the-job learning with formal classroom instruction to prepare students for careers"* (Utah Code § 53B-34-S101).
- In contrast, DWS defines youth apprenticeship primarily by age: *"we usually consider youth apprenticeship as ones that target anyone from the ages of 16 to 24 years old. They don't necessarily have to be inside of the high school curriculum."* The DWS statutory definition includes youth apprenticeship as a subset of apprenticeship, with a focus on workforce development, but like the TRU statutory definition also emphasizing paid experience and training to earn credentials (Utah Code § 35A-6-S102).
- USBE has formalized their definition through course standards, despite technically adopting the DWS definition in administrative rule (USBE Admin Rule WBL_R277-915). In practice, they focus on quality of educational experiences for students: *"for youth apprenticeships, as with our other courses and programs, we have a set of standards... so that we know that students who enroll in a youth apprenticeship program will get this minimum set of high-quality standards."*
- The definitional differences are explicitly acknowledged as problematic by agency representatives: *"There's different definitions floating around, not everybody really knows what it means... It's hard for us to really hammer it down."*

This dimension demonstrates **partial alignment**. Though there are elements of how YA is defined that are consistent across agencies, the details of what constitutes a youth apprenticeship varies across agencies both in statute and in practice, creating confusion for stakeholders and complicating efforts to coordinate services and track outcomes.



Areas of Opportunity for Improved Alignment

Role Clarity and Formal Agreements. Agency representatives describe an evolving understanding of their roles and responsibilities in the YA system, with some informal division of labor but limited formal agreements or clearly delineated responsibilities. While this arrangement creates flexibility, it also can create occasional confusion for stakeholders and representatives across agencies.

- Some statutory roles are defined, such as TRU's intermediary function: *"So my statutory role, my role was started within House Bill 555 about two years ago... to really help employers join youth apprenticeship programs and act as a liaison within, for education and employers."* Although the TRU intermediary role differs from DWS's conceptualization of an intermediary based on the U.S. DOL guidance they follow.
- Informal division of responsibilities has emerged in the absence of more formal guidance: *"DWS and us have decided that registration is really where, and group programs versus individual programs is where we lie. DWS can really cover an individualized program... and if we hear about that, we'll toss them over to them... And then from our perspective, we're really focused on group youth apprenticeship programs."*
- However, confusion and overlap still occur: *"I think behind the scenes we're all each other's biggest cheerleaders. I think that when it comes down to who's taking what, that's where there's just a little bit of confusion. And it's confusing to the industry partner, which is the worst thing."*
- Agency representatives acknowledge the need for more formalization and raise concerns that forthcoming legislation, while ultimately helpful for YA, may add to existing confusion amid existing lack of clarity of roles across agencies: *"And I can see that getting exacerbated with First Credential⁷ because this is going to be a huge initiative for the state, and a lot of it's going to be based on, well, what is the credential? If a credential has something to do with apprenticeships, who takes it then? Who's ultimately responsible?"*

This dimension demonstrates **partial alignment with opportunity for improvement**. While an informal understanding of roles has developed, the lack of formalized agreements creates precarity in the context of staff turnover and potential confusion for agency representatives and stakeholders.

Funding Coordination. Agency representatives describe limited coordination around funding and resources to support YA, with separate funding streams and sometimes competitive approaches to securing program resources. This creates challenges for sustaining or scaling YA programs and efficient resource allocation across the system.

⁷ The First Credential Program, or [H.B. 260](#), was signed by Governor Cox on March 26, 2025. The bill was passed outside of the study data collection period but was referenced by multiple stakeholders as being potentially influential for YA in Utah. It replaces the PRIME program and aims to facilitate student workforce readiness with establishing industry-recognized credentials earned by secondary students.

- Funding streams remain largely separate across agencies, with USBE funding for YA in LEAs relying on CTE and WBL funding through legislative appropriations while TRU and DWS have independent funding streams on a more intermittent basis (e.g., grant funding, limited legislative allocations of funding).
- Competition rather than coordination sometimes characterizes funding relationships: *"I think that there's a little bit of territorialism built into the way we operate... we have our own types of reporting that we're required to do for either our federal dollars or for entire Utah's cases, the state dollars... So being able to take credit for the expansion of a program can ruffle feathers on both sides of the aisle there."* In other cases, agencies are apprehensive about taking offers of shared resources due to perceived competition.
- Restrictions on funding create barriers to program implementation in some cases: *"The CTE internship class currently has that funding... We have not been able to attach it just yet to our youth apprenticeship course code, because usually those add-on dollars, their state dollars, are supposed to be spent within the regular school day. And the youth apprenticeships, many of them are happening outside of those hours."*
- There are concerns about sustainable funding: *"So when we set up these new programs, they need to be sustained at some point and make sure that recruitment remains... finding other sources of funds that might be able to be utilized there that are sustainable, ongoing, not just like one time..."*

This dimension represents an area with **opportunity for improved alignment**. The current approach to funding appears more competitive than collaborative, with limited mechanisms for coordinating funding and other resources across agencies.

Shared Data Systems and Metrics. Agency representatives consistently identify challenges in collecting and sharing data on YA across agencies to facilitate collaboration. This contributes to challenges for establishing baseline measures of program status, tracking outcomes, and measuring the impact of programs in a way that can be compared across YA programs.

- Lack of baseline data is a significant issue: *"One big piece is identifying metrics to assess the success. I feel like that is a lowest hanging fruit for sure... We don't even know our baseline at the moment. So when we say we want to expand youth apprenticeships, I have my TRAC numbers and [DWS representative] has [their] numbers, but on the USBE side, we don't really know exactly what [each] LEA is doing."* (TRU representative)
- Lack of a cleared shared definition of YA and differences in metrics required by different YA program approaches can complicate tracking: *"And that's where I think it starts getting really messy is which ones really are considered youth apprenticeships or which ones are considered apprenticeships, which ones are our registered right now, and that's where we do get messy."*
- Data sharing across agencies is limited: *"I think there's nothing that really exists where we can share data right now. It'd be really nice if we had some kind of internal between the entities, an internal page that we can communicate, connect and know what's going on and how we can help."*
- Data quality in education systems is challenging: *"Our data is often flawed because we can't limit the use of codes for tracking purposes... Because of the way our system works with course codes... people will often just grab something and go, oh, this looks fine. I'll just throw this kid in that course when it may not be an actual youth apprenticeship."*

This dimension is an area with **opportunity for improved alignment**. The absence of shared data systems and metrics limits the ability to track outcomes, demonstrate program impact, and engage in continuous improvement for YA in Utah.