Apprenticeships are an avenue of education and training that allow people to receive valuable knowledge and job skills without attaining a college degree.

In June 2017, President Donald Trump released the Presidential Executive Order Expanding Apprenticeships in America, which promotes the easing of regulatory burdens surrounding apprenticeship programs and encourages third-party development of apprenticeship programs. Allowing more businesses, nonprofits, labor-management organizations and professional associations to become certifiers of apprenticeship programs offers a new entryway to the workforce in a variety of fields. The purpose of the industry-recognized apprenticeship program, often referred to as IRAP, is to break down barriers in order to expand apprenticeship opportunities.

To qualify as a certifier of apprenticeship programs, non-government organizations will have to meet a variety of requirements including expertise in the sector, a paid work component, on-the-job training, and the ability to track progress and successes.

IRAP is unique because it allows industries to design their own guidelines and apprenticeship programs to best suit industry needs. Since IRAPs will be accredited by independent organizations, it allows the industry to gain recognition for hosting a high-quality program to attract new, skilled employees.

States have shown a strong interest in investing in apprenticeship programs. Washington reached a record of 18,947 citizens participating in apprenticeship programs in 2018. According to Matthew Erlich from the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries, the state has over 5,000 employers throughout more than 180 occupations offering apprenticeships. In 2018, Missouri invested over $3.5 million to develop and expand the state’s apprenticeship programs.

“The application process for Department of Labor’s Industry Recognized Apprenticeship Program (IRAP) accreditors, as well as for those sponsors interested participating in the IRAP program, have not yet started,” stated James Foti, a regional office of apprenticeship director for the Department of Labor. Although the program is still not underway, states are already showing an interest in being involved.

“We look forward to learning more about how the program will operate, but I can tell you that Ohio fully supports the implementation of the program,” said Bret Crow of the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. North Carolina Apprenticeship Director Kathryn Castelloes said that North Carolina also plans to participate with IRAPs.

While the implementation and execution of IRAPs are not finalized, the overall message is clear: apprenticeships are an avenue for states to upskill their workforce to meet the needs of industries experiencing employee shortages.