Kentuckians work for the government at a rate slightly higher than the national average — 16.2%. Based on application trends, however, that percentage might decrease. According to a report from the National Association of State Chief Administrators, the number of applicants for state government jobs has decreased by 24% from 2013 through 2017.[1]

In 2018, Kentucky launched an innovative apprenticeship program to engage apprentices in the public sector. Former Education and Workforce Development Secretary Derek Ramsey led the project as a part of his larger apprenticeship efforts and to recruit talented workers to ensure a high-quality state workforce. Creating a strong public sector workforce is a priority for many states.

The recent CSG Future of the Workforce Report highlights the growth of apprenticeships nationwide. Both workers and employers benefit from apprenticeships. Workers (apprentices) benefit from earning money while learning through hands-on training and technical instruction. They also receive mentorship from the employer. Following the apprenticeship, workers often receive a nationally recognized credential, a career pathway with a competitive salary and little to no education debt. Additionally, employers benefit from the ability to create customized training and develop job-specific qualifications. Employers also benefit from enhanced retention, increased productivity and lower recruitment costs.

Apprenticeships are also an opportunity to improve inclusivity. With the flexibility of creating apprenticeship programs, states can ensure that programs suit specific communities and populations in their state such as people with disabilities.

The Urban Institute published a report [3] in 2019 highlighting Kentucky’s efforts. The report examines four Kentucky public sector apprenticeship programs:

1. Direct Support Specialist program administered by the Department of Community Based Services
2. Computer Support Specialist (Help Desk Technician) program administered by the Commonwealth Office of Technology
3. Automotive Technician Specialist program administered by the Transportation Cabinet
4. Office Administrative Services program administered by Barren County Government.

Urban Institute research includes the development, design, recruitment, operation, benefits and future plans of the apprenticeship programs.

Kentucky’s efforts were a great example of strategic partnerships across government agencies. The report highlights how, in order to develop these apprenticeships, the Education and Workforce Cabinet coordinated with the Personnel Cabinet to develop the positions within the state system. Leaders across the state, from apprenticeship coordinators to local technical education teachers, advocated for numerous offices to participate. According to the report, “Officials from the Personnel, Labor, and Education and Workforce Cabinets led discussions with state and local government staff to
make the case for apprenticeship in their offices.”[2]

Secretary Ramsey stated at the launch of the DCBS Social Services apprenticeship pilot, “Simply put, apprenticeships within state government have the potential to bring important long-term cost savings to Kentucky taxpayers. Apprenticing social services positions at the DCBS is only the beginning for implementing this training model in other agencies.”[3]

The report concludes that Kentucky’s public sector apprenticeships have produced great success thus far and that other departments, such as the Department of Corrections and Veteran’s Affairs, are exploring apprenticeship opportunities. Other states will likely follow Kentucky’s lead.

