



Building a Fair & Safe Environment:

Avoiding Harassment, Intimidation, & Retaliation in Apprenticeship Programs



Harassment, Intimidation, & Retaliation **Free Program**

Every apprentice deserves the opportunity to learn, grow, and succeed in an environment free from harassment, intimidation, and retaliation. A safe and respectful apprenticeship program not only fulfills legal requirements but also creates stronger, more inclusive, and more resilient apprenticeship pipelines. Title 29 CFR Part 30—the federal regulation that governs Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) in apprenticeship programs—mandates that programs be structured to provide fair and equitable treatment to all applicants and apprentices. This means going beyond simple nondiscrimination statements and embedding fairness and dignity into the apprenticeship program’s daily workplace culture, practices, and policies.

Specifically, Title 29 CFR Part 30 prohibits:

- Discrimination based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex (including pregnancy, gender identity, and sexual orientation), age (40 or older), genetic information, or disability.
- Harassment that creates a hostile, intimidating, or offensive apprenticeship environment.
- Intimidation or threats designed to discourage individuals from exercising their Equal Employment Opportunity rights.
- Retaliation against individuals who file complaints, assist others, or participate in any EEO-related investigation or proceeding.



Importantly, the responsibility for fostering a harassment, intimidation, and retaliation-free environment extends beyond the sponsor itself. Sponsors must actively ensure that supervisors, staff, partner organizations, contractors, employers, and fellow apprentices understand and uphold these standards. Reasonable steps must be taken to prevent prohibited behavior, swiftly address incidents when they occur, and create a system of accountability.

Establishing this type of environment isn’t a one-time effort — it’s a commitment that must be consistently reinforced through proactive leadership, transparent processes, open communication, and ongoing education. To successfully meet these requirements and truly protect apprentices, it’s essential first to have a strong understanding of what harassment, intimidation, and retaliation look like within apprenticeship programs.

Understanding Harassment, Intimidation, & Retaliation

While terms like harassment, intimidation, and retaliation are often discussed together, each has a distinct meaning under federal regulations and presents unique risks to an apprenticeship program's safety, fairness, and legal compliance. Understanding how these behaviors manifest is critical to preventing harm, fostering inclusion, and protecting both apprentices and the program.

Harassment

Harassment is unwelcome behavior based on someone's protected characteristics—such as their race, sex, disability, or national origin—that creates a hostile, intimidating, or offensive environment in the classroom, on the job, or during training. This kind of conduct can take many forms, including verbal remarks like slurs or offensive jokes, physical actions like threats or unwanted touching, or visual displays such as inappropriate posters or messages. It doesn't have to result in job loss or formal discipline to be unlawful; simply creating a hostile environment is enough to violate federal EEO rules. Harassment can come from anyone involved in the program—supervisors, instructors, fellow apprentices, or outside partners. Even subtle or one-time behaviors should be taken seriously because when left unchecked, harassment can quickly escalate and undermine the safety and integrity of the entire apprenticeship experience.

Intimidation

Intimidation happens when someone is pressured, threatened, or manipulated into staying silent or accepting unfair treatment. It often occurs when individuals are discouraged from speaking up about discrimination, harassment, or unsafe conditions. This might include threats of retaliation, such as being told that filing a complaint could hurt their future job prospects, or subtle warnings that raising concerns could "make things worse." Sometimes, people are even discouraged from participating in investigations or training sessions by being made to feel afraid or unwelcome. Intimidation breaks trust within the program and can leave apprentices feeling isolated or powerless, precisely the opposite of the supportive learning environment they deserve.

Retaliation

Retaliation occurs when someone faces negative consequences for engaging in protected EEO activities, like reporting discrimination, participating in an investigation, or standing up for someone else's rights. Retaliation can be direct and obvious, such as being fired, demoted, or denied promotions, or it can be more subtle, like being left out of meetings, given the least desirable assignments, or socially excluded by coworkers. It's important to know that retaliation is illegal even if the original complaint is not proven true. The act of speaking up is protected by law, and sponsors must ensure that anyone who comes forward is treated with fairness and respect. Retaliation not only harms the individual involved but also sends a message to others that it's unsafe to raise concerns, putting the entire program at risk.

What Harassment, Intimidation, and Retaliation Can Look Like In Your Program

Understanding definitions is important, but recognizing real-world behaviors is critical for prevention. Harassment, intimidation, and retaliation don't always appear dramatically; they often start small and can easily go unnoticed without vigilance. Here are examples of what these prohibited behaviors might look like inside a Registered Apprenticeship Program.

01 Harassment Examples:

- A staff member repeatedly makes sexist or racist jokes in front of apprentices during training sessions.
- A supervisor comments negatively on an apprentice's disability or makes assumptions about their abilities based on stereotypes.
- Apprentices post offensive memes or photos in shared spaces, creating an uncomfortable environment for others.

02 Intimidation Examples:

- A supervisor tells an apprentice, "If you file a complaint, don't expect to get good job references."
- A lead instructor warns an apprentice that "rocking the boat" by reporting mistreatment will get them "blacklisted" in the industry.
- Apprentices who witness discrimination are pressured not to support their coworker's complaint.

03 Retaliation Examples:

- An apprentice who reports harassment is suddenly assigned the most undesirable shifts or tasks without explanation.
- After participating in an EEO investigation, an apprentice is excluded from meetings or training opportunities critical for advancement.
- A complaint filer is publicly criticized by a supervisor, causing embarrassment and discouragement.



Recognizing harassment, intimidation, and retaliation is just the beginning. Preventing these behaviors and fostering a culture where every apprentice feels protected requires more than good intentions. It demands a structured approach, strong leadership, and a commitment to accountability at every level. Apprenticeship sponsors play a critical role in shaping environments where individuals feel safe, respected, and empowered to raise concerns without fear of reprisal. To achieve this, sponsors must fully understand their legal responsibilities and implement clear, effective protocols that uphold the values of equity, trust, and opportunity throughout the program.

Creating Harassment, Intimidation, & Retaliation-Free Environments

Your Responsibilities as a Sponsor

Under Title 29 CFR Part 30, sponsors of Registered Apprenticeship Programs are legally required to operate programs free from harassment, intimidation, and retaliation. These responsibilities are not optional; they are core components of EEO compliance and must be embedded into every aspect of the apprenticeship experience.

To meet federal EEO regulations, sponsors must:

Maintain and enforce a written anti-harassment and anti-retaliation policy.

The policy must explicitly prohibit harassment, intimidation, and retaliation and apply to all individuals involved in the program, including supervisors, staff, and contractors.

Designate a responsible EEO Compliance Officer.

This individual is tasked with overseeing compliance, receiving complaints, and ensuring that all allegations are handled promptly and confidentially.

Establish procedures for reporting and investigating complaints.

Sponsors must ensure apprentices and applicants have a clear, accessible method for reporting concerns and that all complaints are investigated impartially and without delay.

Prohibit retaliation against individuals who engage in protected EEO activity.

This includes filing a complaint, supporting a fellow apprentice's claim, or participating in an investigation. Retaliation is a separate violation, even if the original complaint is unproven.

Retain documentation of complaints, investigations, and corrective actions.

Sponsors are required to keep all EEO-related records for a minimum of five years to demonstrate compliance during audits or reviews.

Provide EEO notices and policy access.

Apprentices must be informed of their rights and the sponsor's obligations in a format that is easy to understand and accessible to all.

Upholding these legal responsibilities isn't just about avoiding penalties—it's about safeguarding the integrity of your program. When sponsors commit to the core principles outlined in 29 CFR Part 30, they build trust with apprentices, ensure federal compliance, and demonstrate leadership in fostering a fair and equitable training environment. These foundational requirements are the legal minimum, but meeting them consistently is essential for sustaining a respected, legally sound apprenticeship program.

Creating a Safe and Inclusive Environment

Fulfilling the legal requirements is just the beginning. To truly protect apprentices and support a thriving learning environment, sponsors must build a culture of safety, respect, and inclusion that goes beyond basic compliance. This culture encourages open communication, celebrates inclusion, and actively prevents harm before it occurs.

Here's how sponsors can bring those responsibilities to life:



Normalize Education and Dialogue.

Make EEO training a regular part of the program, not a check-the-box activity. Discuss real-life scenarios, invite questions, and create space for reflection on workplace behavior and responsibility.



Empower Apprentices to Speak Up.

Create safe channels for feedback and anonymous reporting. Reinforcing that raising concerns is a protected and valued action, not a risk to advancement.



Conduct Regular Check-Ins.

Use short, anonymous surveys or informal group discussions to understand how apprentices are experiencing the program. Take action on trends or concerns, no matter how small they may seem.



Set the Tone From the Top.

Sponsors, supervisors, and staff must model inclusive behavior and respond to concerns with empathy and seriousness. Leadership behavior sets the tone for everyone else.



Respond With Transparency and Integrity.

When issues arise, communicate clearly about the steps being taken, even if the details must remain confidential. Following up with those affected shows accountability and care.



Build EEO Into Program Design.

From recruitment to mentorship, ensure your systems don't unintentionally reinforce exclusion: review selection criteria, outreach efforts, and promotion pathways through an inclusion lens.

Creating a truly inclusive apprenticeship environment is an ongoing journey, not a one-time fix. By actively listening, modeling respect, and embedding equity into daily practice, sponsors move from compliance to culture change. A safe and inclusive program doesn't just protect apprentices—it empowers them. When apprentices feel valued and supported, your program becomes stronger, more resilient, and better equipped to meet the evolving needs of the modern workforce.

Setting Up the Right Policies and Processes

Before a problem arises, sponsors must take proactive steps to prevent harassment, intimidation, and retaliation. This starts with clear policies, accessible training, and a culture that reinforces respect at every level. By establishing strong processes early, sponsors fulfill their legal responsibilities and build a safer, more inclusive foundation for all apprentices.



Clearly Communicate a Zero-Tolerance Policy

Sponsors must adopt and actively communicate a formal anti-harassment, anti-intimidation, and anti-retaliation policy. This policy should:

- Be written in plain, accessible language.
- Apply to all participants, including apprentices, supervisors, staff, and partners.
- Be posted publicly across worksites, onboarding materials, and apprentice handbooks.
- Include clear examples of prohibited conduct and define consequences for violations.



Ensure All Participants Understand Their Rights and Responsibilities

Having a policy isn't enough; everyone involved must know how to apply it. Sponsors should:

- Provide each apprentice with a copy of the EEO policy at onboarding.
- Review EEO expectations regularly during meetings and evaluations.
- Use visual reinforcements like posters or digital materials to maintain awareness.
- Equip supervisors and mentors with leadership toolkits reinforcing respectful behavior and conflict management strategies.



Provide Regular EEO and Anti-Harassment Training

Training should be frequent, interactive, and tailored to your needs. Best practices include:

- Offering training at least annually to apprentices, staff, and supervisors.
- Using real-world examples relevant to the apprenticeship context.
- Reinforcing how to recognize, report, and prevent inappropriate behavior.
- Tracking training completions and integrating EEO topics into program audits and performance evaluations.



Monitor Workplace Culture and Intervene Early

Prevention requires early and ongoing attention. Sponsors can strengthen culture by:

- Conducting anonymous workplace culture assessments and surveys.
- Creating regular, informal feedback loops with apprentices.
- Monitoring day-to-day interactions and addressing minor issues before they escalate.
- Use coaching opportunities to reinforce expectations when early signs appear.

Managing Complaints and Investigations Effectively

Even with the strongest culture in place, issues may still arise. Sponsors must have transparent, consistent complaint management processes to address concerns quickly, fairly, and legally. How a sponsor responds to complaints not only determines compliance but also defines the trust apprentices place in the program.



01 Establish a Clear Complaint Process

- Create multiple confidential channels for apprentices to report concerns (e.g., in person, email, anonymous form).
- Publicize the complaint process during onboarding and in training materials.
- Ensure the EEO Compliance Officer is trained and accessible.



02 Investigate Promptly and Impartially

- Assign a neutral investigator who is trained in handling EEO matters.
- Gather evidence fairly, including interviews with all parties involved.
- Maintain confidentiality to the greatest extent possible.



03 Take Appropriate Corrective Action

- Base decisions on factual findings and documented program standards.
- Apply consistent consequences for policy violations.
- Protect against retaliation during and after the resolution process.



04 Follow Up and Document Outcomes

- Communicate general outcomes to the complainant (while respecting privacy).
- Confirm that no retaliation has occurred following the resolution.
- Retain full documentation of complaints, investigations, and outcomes for at least five years.

Sample Anti-Harassment, Intimidation, and Retaliation Policy

[Program Name] is committed to providing an apprenticeship environment where all individuals are treated with dignity, fairness, and respect. We maintain a strict zero-tolerance policy against harassment, intimidation, and retaliation of any kind.

Harassment is defined as unwelcome verbal, physical, or visual conduct based on race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, sexual orientation, and gender identity), national origin, age (40 or older), disability, or any other protected characteristic that creates a hostile, intimidating, or offensive environment.

Intimidation includes any threats, coercion, or pressure intended to discourage individuals from exercising their rights under Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) protections.

Retaliation against any apprentice, applicant, or staff member who reports a concern, supports a complaint, or participates in an investigation is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal from the program.

All reports of harassment, intimidation, or retaliation will be taken seriously and investigated promptly, confidentially, and impartially.

Individuals who engage in prohibited behavior will be subject to corrective action.

No apprentice or applicant will suffer adverse consequences for raising a good-faith complaint or participating in a related process.

Reporting a Concern:

Apprentices and applicants are encouraged to report concerns immediately to the designated EEO Compliance Officer or through [confidential hotline/email/physical reporting form].

Creating and maintaining a harassment-free program is a shared responsibility. [Program Name] is proud to support a culture of opportunity, respect, and accountability for all.

Sample EEO/Anti-Harassment Statement for Statement for Flyers, Applications, Brochures, or Applicant Paperwork

[Program Name] is committed to providing equal opportunity in apprenticeship. We maintain a strict zero-tolerance policy against harassment, intimidation, and retaliation. All applicants and apprentices will be treated with fairness, dignity, and respect.

Discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, gender identity, and sexual orientation), national origin, age (40 or older), disability, or any other protected status is strictly prohibited.

We encourage individuals from all backgrounds to apply and will provide reasonable accommodations upon request.

Contact our EEO Compliance Officer at [contact information] to learn more about your rights and how to report a concern.

Medium Version For Social Posts, Posters, or Short Announcement

[Program Name] is proud to be an Equal Opportunity Apprenticeship Program.

We welcome all qualified applicants and enforce a strict zero-tolerance policy for harassment, intimidation, and retaliation. Everyone deserves to learn and work in a safe, inclusive environment.

Short Version For Footers - Tagline Style

[Program Name] is an Equal Opportunity Apprenticeship Program. Harassment, intimidation, and retaliation are not tolerated.

Or:

We are committed to a respectful, harassment-free apprenticeship environment. All individuals are welcome and protected.

Additional Resources

For more information and practical tools to support your program's compliance with harassment, intimidation, and retaliation and EEO requirements, we recommend exploring the following resources:



Jobs For The Future

5 Equal Employment Opportunity Steps to Take When Setting Up a Registered Apprenticeship Program:

This tool documents the steps RA sponsors need to take under the Apprenticeship Equal Employment Opportunity regulations, 29 CFR Part 30.

5 Initial Steps to Equal Employment Opportunity for Registered Youth and Adult Apprenticeships:

This self-paced, online training course walks you through the first five actions RA programs must complete to meet EEO obligations.

Responses to Potential Sponsors' Concerns About Equal Employment Opportunity in Apprenticeship:

Organizations considering registering an RA program often have concerns about what EEO regulations mean for them. These talking points address many of their frequently asked questions.

Other Resources

- **US Department of Labor Anti-Harassment FAQs:** A helpful compilation of FAQs addressing workplace harassment, employee rights, and the responsibilities of sponsors under federal law.
- **US Department of Labor Anti-Harassment Poster:** A sample workplace poster that outlines employee protections from harassment, designed to promote awareness and compliance.
- **US Department of Labor Anti-Harassment Training Presentation:** Sample presentation that provides an overview of harassment prevention and employer obligations.
- **US Department of Labor Anti-Harassment Training Video:** Educational video developed to complement DOL's harassment prevention training.
- **US Department of Labor Anti-Harassment Knowledge Check Questions:** A set of questions designed for internal training assessments to assess understanding of anti-harassment concepts.
- **US Department of Labor Anti-Harassment Knowledge Check Questions Answer Key:** The corresponding answer key to the knowledge check questions.

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