New Pathways at Intuit

Introduction

Diversity within a workforce is vital to a company's competitiveness. Studies show definitively that diversity boosts corporate bottom lines:

– A 2018 Boston Consulting Group study showed that innovation revenue was 19 percentage points higher in companies with diverse leadership teams.

– A 2018 Harvard Business Review study that measured the impact of diversity on venture capital investment performance showed that on all measures, the more homogeneous the investment partnerships, the worse they performed.

– Ongoing McKinsey research shows that the impact of diverse workforces on company financial performance has increased over time.

Beyond business performance, diverse workforces and inclusive corporate cultures are aligned with increased creativity, better problem-solving capacity, and worker satisfaction.

Despite this evidence, tech jobs are unevenly distributed. They are filled predominantly by men, with women representing only 26% of tech employees. Black and Latino workers are significantly underrepresented as well, with Black workers holding 8% of tech jobs compared to 12% in the overall economy, and Latino workers holding just 8% of roles compared to 17% in the overall economy. Women of color in particular are even less represented, with just 3% and 2% of tech roles filled by Black and Hispanic women, respectively.

Intuit, the financial technology platform behind TurboTax, Credit Karma, QuickBooks, and Mailchimp, adopted "True North" goals that guide the company's internal and external strategies. In 2019, Intuit announced two True North goals:

– Increase representation of women in technology roles at Intuit to 37% globally by fiscal year 2024.

– Increase representation of people who identify as Black, Latino, Native American, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native to 18% of the US workforce by fiscal year 2024.

The company has made solid strides toward both goals, increasing female representation in tech roles by 6 percentage points to 33% in 2022, and Black, Latino, Native American, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native representation by 6 percentage points to 13%. In addition to being committed to improving representation, Tracy Stone, director of diversity, equity, and inclusion at Intuit, commented, "This is who we are as a company – DEI is built into our DNA. We fundamentally believe in diversity of thought, perspectives, experiences, and we know that improves our ability to innovate and deliver for customers."

A portion of these positive outcomes can be attributed to an innovative new program that Intuit launched in partnership with AnitaB.org, a nonprofit organization devoted to advancing women and nonbinary people in tech through professional development, training, mentorship, and community, and through generating culture and practice change in the tech industry. This case study shares the story of the Intuit Career Pathways Program.

Building from Strength

Intuit and AnitaB.org are long-time partners. Intuit has supported AnitaB.org's efforts through membership and sponsorship of the organization's conferences and projects. Further, Intuit and AnitaB.org shared a vision for creating better opportunities, environments, and outcomes for women in tech. A fateful meeting between Intuit executives and AnitaB.org's president and CEO, Brenda Darden Wilkerson, laid the foundation for future collaboration, including the idea for a tech apprenticeship program built to expand diversity in Intuit's recruiting pipeline.

Intuit had a history of investing in programs and practice changes to encourage more women and diverse technologists to join the company. In 2015, Intuit launched "Intuit Again," a returnship program that encouraged professionals to return to the workforce after taking time away. While open to anyone, the program is especially attractive for women who take time off for motherhood and caregiving. The 16-week program blends mentoring, career development, and customized technical training, offered in a highly supportive cohort-based model, that enables returning professionals to get back up to speed and reenter the workforce without a stigma from a career break. The program has been remarkably successful, with 70% of returnship participants converting into full-time roles.

Based on the success of that program, Stone found an openness for thinking differently about talent acquisition. "There was a talented workforce being overlooked because of the gap in their experience. We were saying we wanted to

reach more female technologists, so we created this program as a means of bridging this gap. So, when we were considering an apprenticeship program, we thought about it in the same way. Maybe there is an opportunity to look at people who want to be in the tech field but don't have the background. We can bridge that gap for them, too," she commented.

The partnership with AnitaB.org was a great fit. "It was fortuitous timing. They had a community, so they could reach out and see where there is interest. They had a tech training partner. They could add programmatic elements. And we had the pieces for an apprenticeship – we could provide on the job training, leadership support, team placement opportunities, and a vision for the longer term. We could work on these things together and create some great synergies," Stone commented. "We were so aligned on the goal and the mission of this. We both fundamentally believed in this. If we look at increasing the aperture for talent, increasing the diversity of talent we're able to attract and bring into Intuit, maybe there's an alternative pathway."

Creating a New Pathway

For Darden Wilkerson, creating new pathways into tech roles isn't just a career, but a calling. Referring to her own career as a computer scientist as "accidental," she is committed to breaking the barriers that keep people out of tech careers, especially women of color. After working as an engineer and pivoting into education after she started a family, Darden Wilkerson "found a lot of people who could have been me," she said. "They were talked out of tech, or they didn't know what they needed to know. Now they're back in school trying to learn how to be technologists at night. That's where my fire got lit. I want to be that bridge for them – tech needs them and they should have that opportunity."

The barriers keeping women of color out of tech roles are systemic and pervasive and start early. Darden Wilkerson refers to "preparatory privilege," where boys may get robots and computers to play with when they are young, while girls get dolls. School counselors may coach girls away from math and computer science courses. But Darden Wilkerson reserves specific criticism for tech leaders who close their minds to change. "When you have success, you get power, and power can beget arrogance. If you're only listening to people who look and sound like you, these patterns get ingrained. It's the only thing you know," she said.

Open minds, especially when considering who should work in tech, are precisely the point. "I think we could fix all our problems in tech if people had an open mind to great ideas. That is how tech gets created. The people we're getting into these roles are going to create different solutions than folks who are traditionally trained. They've had different experiences and will see the world differently, and innovation will increase because they're going to solve problems for the groups we were never trained to think about," she said.

Creating new pathways, and new ways for people with different backgrounds and experiences to compete for tech roles, is also a community imperative. Tech jobs pay more than twice the median national wage. Enabling people from different backgrounds to compete for those jobs creates mobility for families and the places they live. "Tech has so much power to either give life or take it away. We need to change these attitudes. It is so important that our apprentices get into the ecosystem," commented Darden Wilkerson.

"As a child of immigrants, you often hear that the goal in life is stability. The choices I made led me to a profession that was familiar to myself and my family and one that provided stability, but then the pandemic hit, and it forced both the world and myself to slow down. It gave me time to think and dared me to dream. I made the choice to push the boundaries of my critical thinking and problem-solving skills and embark on a career switch."

Kristen Silva was a high school math teacher before she set out to pursue a software engineering career through the Intuit Career Pathways Program. Since 2021, she has worked as a software developer for Intuit's Small Business Self-Employed Group in the QuickBooks Money engineering organization.

Piloting for Success

That passion for a new pathway grew into Intuit's Career Pathways Program, which launched as a pilot in spring 2021. The program is not a registered apprenticeship, but it retains the characteristics of registered models, which include paid work, on-the-job learning, classroom-based learning, mentorship, and credentials of value. Early on, Intuit and AnitaB.org hammered out responsibilities and roles. Intuit placed a great deal of confidence and trust in AnitaB.org staff, who would be responsible for recruiting, training, and supporting apprentices during the first phase of the program. Intuit would then take over, supporting on-the-job learning and career mentorship.

Initial conversations about the program began in early 2020. Intuit and AnitaB.org envisioned a fully in-person program — those plans were, of course, thwarted by the

pandemic. Rather than scrap the model, the team pivoted toward a fully remote opportunity for apprentices.

In the pilot, the team was strongly committed to creating open-access opportunities. No tech experience was required to apply. Intuit and AnitaB.org worked closely to provide the best experience possible for apprentices. Each organization meaningfully contributed their skills and resources in support of the program. Four hundred and seventy-five people applied for the first cohort, which had 11 apprentice positions available. Nine apprentices in the first cohort were hired by Intuit for full-time employment.

The program operated in three phases. The first, led by AnitaB.org, focuses on learning. Apprentices earn a Full Stack JavaScript Techdegree through Treehouse. The credential takes about three months. During the learning phase, apprentices studied full time and were paid for their work. Apprentices earn competitive wages and work 40 hours per week during the learning and apprenticeship phases. AnitaB.org provided wraparound support, including counseling, career guidance, and professional development, with a focus on building confidence and resilience among the apprentices. Amanda Hill-Atkisson, vice president for programs at AnitaB.org, commented, "When we talk about building resilience, we're really talking about building self-confidence, helping apprentices know that they are supposed to be here. We are always fighting imposter syndrome, teaching them to own their space. We also work on making sure apprentices understand professional expectations."

Once the candidates completed training, they moved into the apprenticeship phase, where they were placed on teams inside Intuit. In the pilot, apprentices were concentrated in one business area. The apprenticeship phase takes place over four months.

The third phase, which overlapped with apprentices' experiences on the job at Intuit, focused on career support. Managers hosted apprentices on teams, integrating them into projects, assigning tasks, and helping apprentices build bodies of work that allow apprentices to demonstrate their skills and improve their opportunity to gain full-time employment with Intuit.

Intuit thoughtfully created new roles, scaffolding the apprenticeship with mentors:

– **Tech mentors** are colleagues on apprentices' teams who work closely with apprentices on a day-to-day basis. They are designated mentors who can support apprentices when they need help, provide guidance on tasks, and give technical support when needed.

- **Career mentors** are Intuit employees who volunteer to mentor apprentices. They are often connected to Intuit's robust Employee Resource Group community and are positioned to help apprentices in their first roles in the tech industry, or in a corporate setting, providing navigation and connections within the company and industry.

Adapting for Scale

Through the pilot, and through the two additional cohorts that have participated in Intuit's Career Pathways Program since it launched, AnitaB.org and Intuit learned both that their ideas were sound and that improvements could be made to improve the apprentices' experience and to create a more robust talent pipeline for Intuit's varied departments.

The program remains focused on creating a diverse pipeline to recruit traditionally underrepresented populations. Candidates can come from any learning or work background, as well. One change the team implemented was the introduction of a starter track, which includes an assessment for general technical aptitude. Hill-Atkisson commented, "What we realized was, especially if candidates had not been in any kind of tech environment at all, that learning the systems was very difficult. It's not that they wouldn't ultimately be able to learn the systems, but in the accelerated learning phase, which is 16 weeks, it was very stressful for them and very hard for them to get acclimated to that environment. We learned that successful apprentices had to have some basic fluency."

> *"When I first learned about Intuit Career Pathways, I was so excited to apply for a number of reasons. The first reason is that it was beginner-focused, which was something I hadn't found in many of the other apprenticeship programs I had researched on my own."*
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> **Tamika Hayes** studied classical civilization in college and was looking for a way to enter the software industry. Since 2021, she has been a software engineer working on QuickBooks features.

Most apprentices have some academic background, with the majority holding a four-year degree in a liberal arts or science field. All have work experience, representing a variety of roles in retail, hospitality, healthcare, sales and marketing, and research, among others.

AnitaB.org also refined their rubric for assessing potential candidates. Based on analysis of successful apprentices in the first cohort, AnitaB.org prioritized some new

skills. Problem-solving became very important – apprentices would have support but would need to be able to overcome challenges. Adaptability and resilience became very important in candidate assessments, as well, recognizing that apprentices need to constantly learn and adapt to work requirements, and build confidence that they belong. AnitaB.org also increased focus on team building, helping apprentices recognize how they can contribute to teams.

Successful candidates are also able to give and receive feedback. Hill-Atkisson commented, "We have a whole component about giving and receiving feedback. We work with them to understand what the environment will look like, and explore what will be their biggest challenge? What happens when they hit a wall? What are they excited about, or scared about? You can read whether they are able to be forthright in the challenges they own. That is really important – it's hard, but you have to ask for help, you have to reach out, and you have to hear what people tell you."

Once at Intuit, the partners learned that apprentices need and valued ongoing support. AnitaB.org provides long-term support, mentorship, and community for apprentices through its network. In addition to tech and career mentors, Intuit implemented regular check-ins, both in-person and chat communities, and ongoing education and guidance.

One area of ongoing adaptation sits at the bridge between the learning and apprenticeship phases. Initially, once apprentices shifted into work, the intensive support from AnitaB.org diminished. The partners discovered that apprentices were struggling. "They weren't raising their hands. They thought they were going to get in trouble and weren't quite comfortable yet saying they had a problem and needed support," Hill-Atkisson commented.

"I wanted skills that I could own and carry with me. I feel like there's always a way for you to make an income if you know how to program and build things."

Ebony Hargro came to the Career Pathways Program with a bachelor's degree in international studies and was interested in the possibilities of a tech career. In 2021, she joined Intuit's Small Business Self-Employed Group as a software engineer, building guided Q&A for QuickBooks.

During the second cohort, the partners moved AnitaB.org into a more intensive support role. That also wasn't ideal. "You have to let the baby birds fly," Hill-Atkisson said. For the third cohort, the partners adapted a hybrid approach with monthly meetings of the full cohort and support available as needed.

Ultimately, Intuit's decision about whether to hire an apprentice for full-time employment is based on that individual's skills and qualifications for the job. While Intuit is driving toward goals of increasing diversity, Intuit does not have specific quotas or hire for specific roles based on identity or protected characteristic. At the end of the day, apprentices are evaluated for employment individually, so it is important for the Career Pathways Program to provide training and support to enable the apprentices to secure full-time employment on the merits of their qualifications and demonstrated skills.

What We Learned

Intuit and AnitaB.org are demonstrating an effective, scalable opportunity for increasing representation in tech roles.

Intentional Piloting

According to Stone, piloting is "typical Intuit." The company is accustomed to testing and iterating, working at a smaller scale before expanding initiatives. One smart decision the company made was identifying one department for piloting the Career Pathways Program, rather than working across the entire organization. Stone commented, "That was an intentional decision, starting in one group. We had multiple leaders in the organization say they wanted to host apprentices, but we decided to have it only in one group, with only three managers engaged. We needed it to be concentrated so we could pilot."

For one team to support nine apprentices in the pilot was no small lift, and Stone gives all the credit to those managers. "Tech teams are measured based on what they can deliver quickly and their productivity. This type of thing really stretches them. They were able to do this as an 'and' to their regular work, and they really delivered."

Leadership Matters

Beyond team leadership, Intuit's Career Pathways Program enjoys support all the way to the top of the business. Stone attributes this to both the True North goals, which set Intuit's path. "There's an opportunity to create a whole new pathway. It takes a lot of effort to get that investment, buy-in, and support throughout the entire chain of command, and it has to be a commitment from the whole organization for it to be successful. We had a True North goal, and the leadership team was really invested in this as a solution."

AnitaB.org noted the importance of Intuit's leadership, as well. Hill-Atkisson commented, "Intuit has been fantastic. They are committed to the work. They listen and solve problems. Anything that comes up, they are just on it immediately. And there is commitment all the way up. We really feel that. They have really hopped in with us."

Intuit's leaders are also willing to invest in long-term solutions. Apprenticeships take time and require significant investment of company resources. "It was a leap of faith for them. An apprenticeship investment has multiple layers — the apprentices themselves as they're in the learn-and-earn model, an investment in their teams, and the number of people who are supporting them, including managers, tech mentors, and career managers."

"Coming from an education background, helping children grow, develop, and reach their goals, I was worried about how to translate that desire into a business environment so the work would be rewarding. At Intuit, we can see the value of our work for small business owners. We speak to them to understand their needs, and what works for them and what doesn't. Having those conversations makes me excited to do the work to make their lives easier."

Cindee Crosby worked as an elementary school teacher for seven years before joining the Career Pathways Program. She was compelled by the opportunity to join a welcoming community on the same learning journey, while receiving a competitive salary. She joined Intuit's Small Business Self-Employed Group in 2022, serving as a front-end software developer for QuickBooks Checking.

Empathy Matters

Intuit's culture centers around empathy. This is not paternalistic or top-down empathy, but rather a drive for all stakeholders to consider others' needs and objectives. This drove a more holistic approach in supporting apprentices than might have occurred otherwise.

AnitaB.org helped raise issues that the company needed to address, as well. Hill-Atkisson commented, "Most companies are used to employees who are able to show up to work without support to get to the job. They often make the assumption that folks were coming into the program with internet access and with existing infrastructure."

Intuit was more than open to recommendations, recognizing just how vulnerable apprentices can be in their roles. They also thought about tech leaders and how managing apprentices would stretch them. "Empathy goes all ways. Tech leaders want to have a positive impact and contribute. This is about their team's experience — if the team isn't having a good experience, the apprentice won't either."

Opening Minds

The Career Pathways Program's success has revised some managers' approaches, especially when it comes to hiring. Stone commented, "I think the challenge of engineers in particular is that they gravitate toward formulas. This has opened up all of our worlds. Within the tech teams, they see that apprentices have been able to come in through different pathways and succeed. This helps all of us open up our perspectives, and to look more at a person's capabilities rather than their experiences and education."

Darden Wilkerson has also seen shifts. "Many people will look at what we're doing as charity, but it absolutely is not charity. What I hear now is, wow, the apprentices have changed the environment. They're different, they're more joyful, they're happy to be there. These are things you don't plan for, but a better work atmosphere works for everybody."

Apprenticeship Works

While apprentices have traditionally been focused in the trades, more employers are learning about the benefits of blending learning and work to prepare people for all types of careers.

Not only does apprenticeship remove the very real barrier of cost for people to gain the education and training they need, but paid learning experiences enable apprentices to focus fully on their studies. Apprentices also gain real-life insights into company culture, professional expectations, and work environments, reducing the risk of "poor fit" hires when apprentices transition into full-time roles. Apprentices also learn the particulars of company products and processes, as well as the unique skills and competencies employers want, but often have difficulty embedding in external education programs.

Since 2021, Intuit has hosted 54 apprentices, 38 (75%) of whom have become full-time employees. Former apprentices now work in software engineering roles, along with one business data analyst and one technical program manager. Retention of former apprentices at Intuit is 100% since program inception.

Apprentices themselves valued the program. Upon completion of the apprenticeship phase, 90% of apprentices reported that they were confident they could build a successful tech career. And the program is creating real economic mobility, with apprentices earning 138% more than their pre-apprenticeship wage upon program completion.

Conclusion

Intuit's True North goals inspired its efforts to create new pathways into technologist roles within the company. AnitaB.org has a long history in building opportunities for marginalized people to enter into and thrive in tech careers. Working together, the Career Pathways Program is changing individual lives, driving change within a major corporation, and chipping away at the entrenched biases in the tech industry.

AnitaB.org is working to expand its footprint, building from its successful partnership with Intuit. With conversations underway with other tech companies and the public sector, the organization is poised to share its insights on a broader scale.

Upskilling efforts, including apprenticeships, are not short-term fixes, but with care and attention, they can yield solid returns. Darden Wilkerson commented, "When a tech company starts a new project, they're building toward something. We need to look at people the same way."

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