

Medical Assistant Talent Pipeline Replication Guide

DEVELOPED BY: ASCEND INDIANA

SUPPORT FROM: EMPLOYINDY & THE CITY OF INDIANAPOLIS

DATE: 2025



Table of Contents

- 01** Introduction
 - Background and Purpose
 - Program Development Model

- 02** Medical Assistant Training Program
 - Program Overview
 - Program Learning Journey

- 04** Replication Guide
 - Phase 1
 - Phase 2
 - Phase 3

- 09** Conclusion

- 10** Appendix

Introduction

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The **Medical Assistant Talent Pipeline Replication Guide** is a strategic resource developed to help hospital systems address critical workforce shortages by building a reliable pipeline of qualified, work-ready Medical Assistants (MAs). As demand for MAs continues to grow, healthcare systems are seeking sustainable solutions that not only meet hiring needs but also support career pathways for individuals entering the healthcare field.

The Medical Assistant occupation is an excellent entry point into the healthcare field due to its lower barriers to entry—it requires only a high school diploma, Basic Life Support (BLS) certificate, and an MA credential. However, most leading certification programs do not require hands-on learning, leaving many candidates unprepared for the clinical demands of the role. This gap in training contributes to high turnover and workplace challenges, particularly in fast-paced hospital environments.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT MODEL

To address this issue, Ascend Indiana (Ascend) developed a comprehensive training model designed to be implemented within hospital systems. The model integrates best practices from high-performing MA programs across the country and incorporates input from Indiana-based healthcare partners to ensure relevance to real-world operational and staffing needs. It emphasizes hands-on training, on-the-job learning, and aligned support systems to prepare MAs who are ready to contribute on day one.



The foundation of this model is the Ascension St. Vincent MA Career Pathway Program—a successful initiative that combines classroom instruction, skill-building, and real clinical experience. Building on this foundation, in early 2025, Ascend convened a cross-sector working group—including leaders from Ascension, Franciscan Health, Community Health Network, and EmployIndy—to refine the model. Their collective insights shaped the final design and ensured it reflects current workforce demands.

This guide presents the final version of that program, built for replication and adaptable to different hospital settings. It includes the program structure, implementation strategies, and tools needed to support a successful launch and long-term sustainability. A **Replication Toolkit**, a companion document, provides planning templates and key considerations to streamline decision-making and remove ambiguity from program development.

Whether your hospital is launching a new MA pipeline or enhancing an existing program, this guide offers a clear, tested framework to build internal talent, support operational goals, and improve retention.

Medical Assistant Training Program

The **Medical Assistant (MA) Training Program** offers a scalable, workforce-aligned solution to address the ongoing shortage of skilled MAs. This program is specifically designed for implementation within hospital systems and provides a comprehensive, hybrid learning experience that combines classroom instruction, clinical practice, and paid employment. By preparing participants for certification and integration into healthcare teams, this program ensures that graduates are immediately able to contribute to patient care.

Each component of the program is intentionally structured to provide the essential knowledge, hands-on training, and support participants need to succeed as MAs. As you review this model, consider how each element can be adapted to your organization's specific operational context and staffing needs.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The MA Training Program is a 16-week training model that combines in-class, clinical, and hands-on patient care experiences to prepare participants for certification and success in the medical assistant role. Designed with the adult learner in mind, the program integrates income-earning opportunities, foundational instruction, and strong wraparound support to reduce barriers and ensure participants are practice-ready upon completion.

Note: This program is designed to meet immediate hiring needs while investing in long-term talent development. When selecting participants, hospital systems can align enrollment with high-need departments or units, ensuring a direct pipeline from training to employment.

The program includes the following key components:

- **Five working and learning shifts per week, totaling 36 hours per week.**
 - **Two in-person didactic sessions per week (160 hours total)**
 - > Classroom learning is structured into 6-hour sessions, combining simulation-based skills training with foundational instruction to prepare participants for clinical settings and the CCMA exam.
 - **One paid 8-hour clinical shift per week (120 hours total)**
 - > Clinicals are supervised by dedicated preceptors and take place at host sites that provide or coordinate role-specific training. Floating preceptors may be used across locations to provide consistent support.
 - **Two 8-hour Patient Care Technician (PCT) shifts per week**
 - > Participants earn income and gain direct patient experience by working in high-need roles while concurrently training, supporting both learning outcomes and healthcare staffing gaps.
- **Final Exam and Certification Support**
 - Participants are expected to sit for their certification exam shortly after course completion. The program includes preparation resources, practice exams, and covers the cost of the first attempt. Remediation support is available for those needing to retest.

- **Eight-day orientation at the clinic office**

- o This intensive onboarding experience focuses on readiness, role expectations, and soft skills development. It includes one day of new employee orientation (NEO), one day of clinic-specific orientation, and six days of hands-on skill training.

Recognizing the unique challenges adult learners face, including the need to maintain income, secure transportation, and care for dependents, the program offers:

- Embedded paid work experiences to ensure income continuity during training
- Strategic scheduling and job shadow opportunities to confirm career fit early in the process
- Exploration of dedicated childcare solutions, including partnerships with local providers
- An attendance policy that promotes accountability and offers structure
- Dedicated support for exam preparation and access to transportation resources where possible

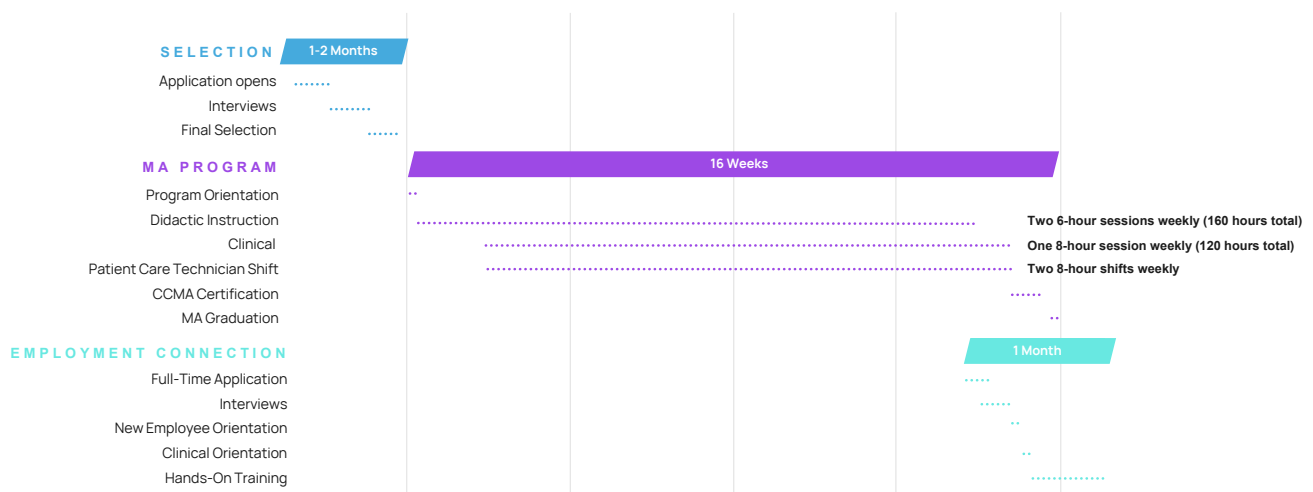
Eligible individuals:

- Hold a high school diploma or equivalent
- Are interested in launching a career in healthcare
- Can commit to the full duration of the program
- Are eligible for employment within the host hospital system

Participants can enter the program directly or begin by working in an entry-level position (e.g., Environmental Services, PCT, Administrative Secretary) for several months before transitioning into training. This approach builds organizational familiarity, ensures a pipeline of committed learners, and allows employees to balance paid work and education over time.

PROGRAM LEARNING JOURNEY

Outlined below is the MA learning journey, which details the participant experience throughout the program as well as post-program. It specifies the learning and training approach, wraparound supports, and credentials to be earned.

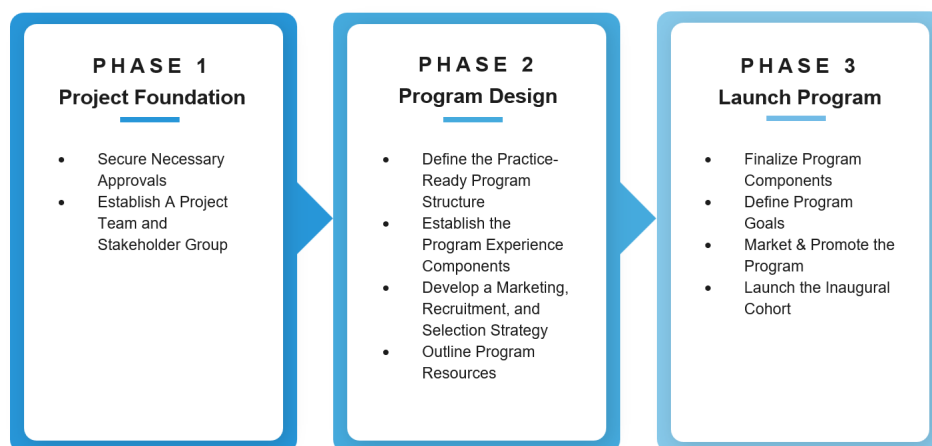


Replication Guide

The MA training program is a culmination of best practices and ideal scenarios, designed for organizations that value long-term investment in developing talent internally. Ascend recognizes that implementing the entirety of the proposed program may require considerable effort, resources, or adjustments to existing systems. However, fostering talent internally offers significant advantages—it allows for alignment with the specific needs of the role, improves employee retention, and supports the professional growth of individuals within the organization.

This guide, along with the accompanying **Implementation Plan** ([see Replication Toolkit](#)), provides a step-by-step process for adapting the proposed MA training program to meet the unique needs and circumstances of your organization.

Outlined below are the three phases for a successful replication:



PHASE 1: PROJECT FOUNDATION

This foundational phase ensures alignment with internal stakeholders and secures the necessary approvals for the program. Establishing a dedicated team and stakeholder group at this stage sets the stage for effective program design and implementation.

There are two key objectives in this phase:

- Secure Necessary Approvals
- Establish A Project Team and Stakeholder Group

1. Secure Necessary Approvals

Before committing time, people, and resources, leadership buy-in is essential. Their support will help clear roadblocks, allocate resources, and show others that this is a priority. Developing and launching a training program is a major investment, and internal champions will play a critical role in its success. Gaining approval early helps ensure the program receives the visibility and support it needs to move forward effectively.

Guiding Questions:

- Who are the key stakeholders or decision-makers who must approve or champion this program?
- What will leadership need to see to be confident in this investment?
- Do we have the resources (people, space, budget) to support the program?

2. Establish a Project Team & Stakeholder Groups

This program will require collaboration across departments at several points throughout the replication process. Assembling a cross-functional project team early on supports more efficient planning, coordination, and decision-making. Use the [Stakeholder Matrix](#) included in the toolkit to identify who needs to be involved, when to engage them, and what roles they'll play.

Guiding Questions:

- Who needs to be at the table to design and launch this program?
- Who will lead the project day-to-day?
- How will we keep the team aligned and moving forward?
- What benchmarks do we need to establish to keep program design on schedule? How will we ensure relevant departments are meeting these benchmarks?

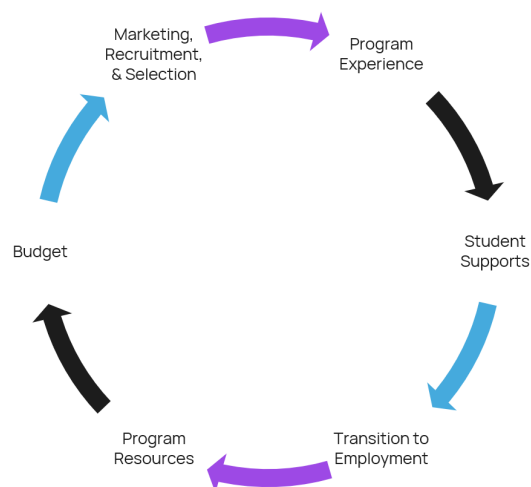
PHASE 2: PROGRAM DESIGN

The structure of your program is critical to ensuring that it aligns with industry standards and provides students with the essential skills they need to succeed. With leadership buy-in and the right team in place, this phase focuses on designing the core elements of the program—defining how it will operate, aligning it with organizational goals, and meeting learner needs.

To further support your organization in designing and implementing the MA training program, **Appendix A** highlights essential program design components—including program experience, student supports, transition to practice, program resources, marketing, recruitment and selection, and budget—to ensure all critical elements are thoughtfully planned and seamlessly integrated.

There are four key objectives in this phase:

- Define the Practice-Ready Program Structure
- Establish the Program Experience Components
- Develop a Marketing, Recruitment, and Selection Strategy
- Outline Program Resources



1. Define Practice-Ready Program Structure

With the established Project Team, start by aligning on the core knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that Medical Assistants need to be successful. KSAs represent the necessary qualifications and competencies required for the role and will shape the development of the curriculum, learning objectives, and assessments. Use the [KSA Matrix](#) (see Replication Toolkit) toolkit and **KSA Guiding Principles** (see Appendix B) to tailor these to your specific setting. Grounded in the National Healthcareer Association (NHA) Certified Clinical Medical Assistant (CCMA) exam, these resources provide a strong foundation for building a program that meets industry standards and prepares participants for real-world success.

Guiding Questions:

- What specific knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) are most critical for MAs in our organization and region?
- How will we ensure that the program's structure is aligned with current industry standards (e.g., NHA, certification requirements)?
- How will we adapt the program's structure to changing industry standards?
- How will we measure whether learners meet the necessary qualifications for practice readiness?

2. Establish the Program Experience Components

Designing the learner's experience includes defining what they'll learn, how they'll learn it, and the support systems that will be in place. The goal is to create an engaging and impactful experience that prepares students for real-world application. Consider including orientation, didactic and clinical learning plans, and certification requirements. Refer to the sample learning journey in the toolkit for ideas and guidance.

Guiding Questions:

- What key learning activities and experiences will help students build the required skills?
- How will we integrate clinical learning with classroom instruction, and how will we balance those learning modalities?
- When and how will students complete their certification requirements, and what kind of support will they need to succeed?

3. Develop a Marketing, Recruitment, and Selection Strategy

Attract strong candidates by first establishing a clear and compelling program identity. Define the program's value proposition and craft messaging that resonates with your target audience. Finalize the program name, develop marketing materials, and implement a strategy to increase visibility through information sessions, career fairs, and networking events.

Build recruitment and selection processes that are accessible, equitable, and aligned with your program goals. Establish clear evaluation criteria, a defined selection timeline, and an easy-to-navigate application platform. These efforts ensure you are reaching individuals who are not only qualified but motivated to succeed in the role.

Guiding Questions:

- What is our program's value proposition, and how do we communicate that to our target audience?
- How will we recruit a diverse and qualified pool of candidates for the program?
- What criteria will we use to evaluate applicants, and how will we ensure a fair and transparent selection process?

4. Outline Program Resources

Outline the required resources crucial for ensuring that the program has the necessary tools, staff, and infrastructure for a successful launch. Identifying existing equipment, staffing needs, and clinical locations allows for effective planning and budgeting, while addressing any gaps in resources ensures the program operates smoothly. A key decision will be to develop a structure that allows preceptors to float to several clinics to support clinical learning and to prevent delays or shortages, ensuring the program can provide a high-quality learning experience from the outset. Use the [Budget Planning Tool](#) included in the toolkit to identify the resources required to support a successful program launch.

Guiding Questions:

- What resources (staff, equipment, clinical locations) do we already have in place, and where do we have gaps?
- How will we ensure we have the necessary clinical sites and preceptors to provide high-quality clinical experiences for students?
- What ongoing support will students need during the program to ensure they can succeed in both the classroom and clinical settings?

PHASE 3: LAUNCH PROGRAM

With the program design complete, it's time to prepare for launch. This final phase focuses on finalizing outstanding decisions, confirming timelines, and ensuring all components are ready for implementation. Use the [Implementation Plan](#) in the Replication Toolkit as your central hub—mission control—for tracking progress, monitoring key steps, and aligning your team around critical launch activities.

Clear communication with stakeholders and attention to detail will set the stage for a smooth rollout and successful first cohort.



There are four key objectives in this phase:

- Finalize Program Components
- Define Program Goals
- Market & Promote the Program
- Launch the Inaugural Cohort

1. Finalize Program Components

At this point, all the details of the program must be finalized—from course materials to student onboarding resources. This includes ensuring the curriculum is ready, any certifications are in place, and students have the information they need to succeed.

Guiding Questions:

- Are all course materials, resources, and curriculum ready to be implemented?
- Do we have the onboarding materials and support systems in place for new students?
- Have we created clear, detailed program syllabi and student handbooks?

2. Define Program Goals

Establish clear and measurable goals for the program that align with your organization's mission and the needs of the healthcare sector. These goals will guide the program's performance and allow you to measure its success over time. Use the [Program Goals](#) template in the toolkit to define objectives that will guide program performance, focus your efforts, and provide a framework for measuring success over time.

Guiding Questions:

- What are the primary outcomes we want to achieve through this program (e.g., number of graduates, certification pass rates, job placement)?
- How will we measure the success of the program, and how will these metrics be tracked over time?
- What will success look like for both the program and the students it serves?

3. Market & Promote the Program

To ensure the program attracts a strong, diverse group of candidates, a well-defined marketing and promotional strategy is essential. It should communicate the benefits of the program, the application process, and the value it brings to both students and the organization.

Guiding Questions:

- How will we effectively communicate the program's value to potential applicants and other stakeholders?
- What promotional materials (brochures, social media, websites) do we need to develop?
- How will we engage potential applicants throughout the recruitment and application process?

4. Launch the Inaugural Cohort

With everything in place, it's time to launch your program's first cohort. This is the critical step where the rubber meets the road, and the success of the program will begin to be measured. Pay close attention to feedback and make adjustments as needed to ensure smooth implementation.

Guiding Questions:

- How will we welcome and orient the first cohort of students to the program?
- What processes will we put in place to track student progress and address any issues that arise?
- How will we ensure the program is well-supported throughout its initial run and that lessons learned are applied to future cohorts?

As you and your team finalize and launch this program, unforeseen challenges may arise that may not have been planned for. Continue to adapt and update the program based on the roadblocks and lessons learned.

Conclusion

As you progress through the phases outlined in this guide, remember that successful replication of the training program is a collaborative effort requiring careful planning, effective communication, and ongoing evaluation. By following the steps and using the provided resources, your organization can design, implement, and launch an MA training program aligned with your unique needs and goals.

Here's what to do next:

- 1. Use the Replication Toolkit:** Start by utilizing the toolkit to help establish the program foundation in your organization. This includes the templates, Stakeholder Matrix, KSA Matrix, and Implementation Plan, which will be key in defining roles, responsibilities, and resources for each phase.
- 2. Leverage the Implementation Plan:** The Implementation Plan is your roadmap throughout the entire replication process. Refer to it regularly to track progress, ensure alignment with objectives, and manage key milestones.
- 3. Monitor and Adapt:** As you move from Phase 1 to Phase 3, keep an eye on timelines, make necessary adjustments, and ensure that you're addressing any emerging needs. The program's design and execution will likely evolve, so continuous feedback and adaptation are critical to long-term success.
- 4. Set Up for Launch:** In Phase 3, finalize all program components and ensure that all necessary materials, from coursework to clinical placements, are ready. Focus on your program goals and measurable outcomes to ensure the program's effectiveness once it's launched.

By the end of this process, your organization will be well-equipped to run a successful, sustainable training program that not only meets current workforce needs but also creates a foundation for long-term talent development and retention.

If you have questions or need additional support, **contact Ascend Indiana** at info@ascendindiana.com or visit our website at www.ascendindiana.com. We're here to support your success at every step.

Appendix A

PROGRAM DESIGN COMPONENTS

Outlined below are the key program design elements to consider and ensure all elements are considered to support the learning experience.

Program Design Components		
Category	Definition	Examples
Program Experience	Refers to the full learning journey, including curriculum, clinical training, and skill development required for Medical Assistants to be practice-ready.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Orientation and onboarding• Didactic classroom learning• Program length and structure• Clinical learning objectives and schedule
Transition to Practice	Covers the expectations and supports that help participants move from training into full-time employment, including certification and hiring processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interview and hiring process• MA exam and certification requirements• Post-program employment expectations
Student Supports	Wraparound services designed to reduce barriers and promote participant success throughout the program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transportation or childcare assistance• Academic or exam preparation support• Career coaching and mentorship
Program Resources	Includes the staffing, facilities, and operational components required to deliver the program effectively.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Faculty and staff roles and responsibilities• Classroom and clinical site capacity• Instructional materials and equipment
Marketing, Recruitment, & Selection	Encompasses outreach strategies, recruitment efforts, and the processes used to select participants for the program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Outreach messaging and promotional materials• Recruitment events and timelines• Application and selection criteria
Budget	Captures financial planning to support program implementation, including costs across staffing, supports, certification, and operations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Program budget and funding sources• Certification and exam fees• Student wraparound support costs

Appendix B

KSA GUIDING PRINCIPLES

KSAs detail what an individual needs to know, understand, demonstrate, and be able to do. These KSAs will be utilized to design the didactic and clinical experience for an individual in this program. Please review the draft KSAs. The key questions below are provided to support you in your review.

For current MAs that excel:

- What KSAs do they have?
- What is their experience and/or educational background?
- What technical skills do they have?
- What interpersonal skills do they show?

For future MAs:

- What could they be better prepared for?
- What would they need to be knowledgeable about for that to happen?
- What is the skill or ability?

Over the next 5, 10, or 15 years, how do you anticipate the Medical Assistant role changing?

- Are there emerging healthcare trends that will impact their role and responsibilities?
- Will potential technological advancements impact the role and their responsibilities?