

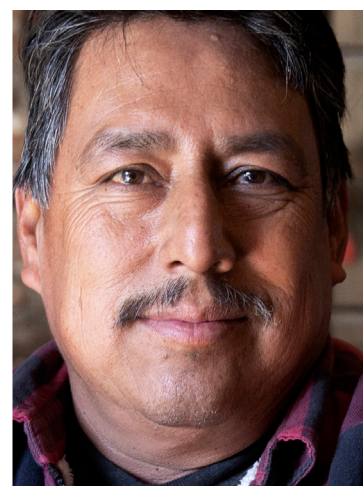



**EQUIPPING
WORKERS**



**BUILDING
FUTURES**

**FEDERAL POLICY
PRIORITIES
FOR A SKILLED
AMERICA**



An aerial photograph showing a large array of solar panels installed on a flat roof. Two workers, wearing white hard hats and orange safety vests, are walking across the roof. One worker is holding a yellow level. The solar panels are arranged in a grid pattern, and the roof surface is a mix of white and blue panels.

IN TODAY'S RAPIDLY EVOLVING ECONOMY, A SKILLED AND WELL-RESOURCED WORKFORCE SYSTEM IS MORE CRITICAL THAN EVER. AS INDUSTRIES ADAPT TO TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS AND SHIFTING LABOR DEMANDS, WORKFORCE POLICIES HAVE BECOME ESSENTIAL TO ENSURING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY FOR WORKING PEOPLE AND LOCAL BUSINESSES.

More than half of jobs in America require education and training beyond a high school degree but not a four-year degree.ⁱ And yet, **only 4 in 10 people** have had access to the skills training and supports (e.g., childcare, transportation) necessary to fill these roles.ⁱⁱ To address labor shortages, we need industry-aligned strategies and broader talent pipelines. Expanding access to quality programs can help people of color and women enter fields like construction, manufacturing, and energy.

*Please contact **Megan Evans** (megane@nationalskillscoalition.org) or **Caroline Treschitta** (carolinet@nationalskillscoalition.org) for more information on any of these recommendations.*

STRENGTHEN THE PUBLIC WORKFORCE SYSTEM

As industries and technology evolve, jobs and required skills do, too. We need a workforce system that keeps pace.

82% of voters support increasing government funding for skills training in America. Further, **91% of Democrats**, **74% of Republicans**, and **83% of Independents** want an increase in public investments in skills training.ⁱⁱⁱ

RECOMMENDATIONS

Protect Workforce Funding. The U.S. invests less in workforce policies than nearly every other industrialized country.^{iv} After two decades of funding cuts, Congress should adequately fund the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Perkins CTE, Adult Education, and Apprenticeships.

Reauthorize WIOA and prioritize equitable, high-quality skills training, sector partnerships, economic supports, pathways to quality jobs, strong data systems, and expanded outcome measures.

Build Digital Skills by passing the bipartisan Digital Skills for Today's Workforce Act to equip current and future workers with the essential skills for high-demand sectors.^v

Align Training with High-Quality Credentials. Congress should ensure that training programs provide industry-aligned, high-quality credentials that validate skills and competencies, and meet evolving job demands.

Every **\$1** invested in training can return up to **\$12** in wages.^{vi}

SUPPORT PROVEN INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS

Industry partnerships bring together groups such as local businesses, training providers, community organizations, and worker groups to develop workforce strategies, design training, and improve worker retention. They can efficiently direct resources towards high-quality programs that provide workers with the opportunity to gain skills to fill in-demand jobs.

91% of voters support partnerships between training providers and businesses to train people for jobs that businesses need to fill.^{vii}

RECOMMENDATIONS

Establish a National Network of Industry Partnerships by introducing and passing the SECTORS Act, which would provide federal grants to states to convene, expand, and sustain industry partnerships and cover participants' training costs.^{viii}

Drive Growth Through Industry Partnerships. Congress should direct agencies to use discretionary funds for grants, convening, and guidance to support small and mid-size employer collaboration.

Support Infrastructure Partnerships. Congress should pass the BUILDS Act to fund partnerships that prepare workers for (and connect them to) infrastructure jobs through robust career pathways.^{ix}

42%

of total job openings in blue-collar and skilled trade sectors between 2021 and 2031 will be available to workers with a high school diploma or less, emphasizing the need for industry partnerships to provide relevant training.^x

MAKE POSTSECONDARY TRAINING ACCESSIBLE AND AFFORDABLE

A growing share of college students are workers pursuing short-term credentials. We must ensure these credentials are high-quality, affordable, and linked to in-demand jobs.

84% of voters support federal financial aid for skills training, not just postsecondary degrees.^{xi}

RECOMMENDATIONS

Enact Short-Term Pell. Congress should pass the bipartisan JOBS Act to expand Pell Grants to short-term, high-quality training programs at community and technical colleges.^{xii} This would help businesses fill jobs and create pathways to family-sustaining careers.

Expand Student Career Access and Supports. Congress should pass the Gateways to Careers Act^{xiii} and the ACCESS to Careers Act. Together, these bills would offer grants to strength employer connections through industry-community college partnerships and work-based learning while also offering students access to supportive services including emergency grants for financial hardship and career navigation services.

Preserve the Federal Role of the Department of Education. Congress should maintain the U.S. Department of Education structure to support 15+ million postsecondary students who rely on its programs for access and affordability.

72%

of jobs in the U.S. will require postsecondary education and/or training by 2031.^{xiv}

EXPAND EARN-AND-LEARN OPPORTUNITIES

Registered apprenticeship and work-based learning let people build skills while earning wages. These programs provide immediate solutions for businesses and create sustainable career pathways for workers.

94% of voters support expanding access to apprenticeship programs.^{xv}

RECOMMENDATIONS

Modernize Apprenticeship. Congress should reauthorize the National Apprenticeship Act to modernize the apprenticeship system, build capacity for paid training, and expand access to apprenticeship and work-based learning.^{xvi}

Use Tax Credits to Support Work-Based Learning. Congress should adopt the bipartisan SKILL UP Act and expand the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, helping businesses—especially small and mid-sized ones—hire and train workers through work-based learning.^{xvii}

Boost Work-Based Learning at Small Businesses. Congress should pass the PARTNERS Act to fund grants that help small- and medium-sized businesses develop work-based learning programs, including necessary supports.^{xviii} These grants ensure that small businesses, who often lack upfront resources, can participate.

Broaden the Talent Pipeline. Congress should prioritize pre-apprenticeship programs^{xix} in non-traditional fields to address labor shortages by broadening the apprenticeship pipeline for dislocated workers, women, people of color, young adults, and people with disabilities.

\$77,000

is the average annual salary for people who complete an apprenticeship program, significantly higher than the national average salary of \$55,000.^{xx}

LEVERAGE DATA TO ENSURE FAIR OUTCOMES

Reliable and robust data holds workforce policies accountable by providing clear insights on training programs and credentials, measuring return on investment, identifying areas for improvement, and ensuring programs meet goals.

91% of voters support policies that provide access to data on which training programs and credentials lead to employment.^{xxi}

RECOMMENDATIONS

Improve Workforce Data. Congress should include funding for workforce data quality initiatives in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

Enhance Postsecondary Data. Congress should pass the College Transparency Act to provide students, families, institutions, and policymakers with comprehensive, transparent data on higher education and workforce outcomes—including information on non-degree credentials—while protecting privacy.

ZERO

U.S. states have comprehensive data on all types of non-degree credentials, indicating a nationwide gap in credential data ecosystems.^{xxii}

INVEST IN WORKER SUPPORTS

A thriving economy depends on a stable, mobile, and well-supported workforce. Lack of access to quality, affordable childcare, elder care, housing, and transportation holds back workers and local businesses.

82% of all voters—including over three-quarters of Republicans and Independents—support increased funding for services like childcare and transportation to help people finish skills training.^{xxiii}

RECOMMENDATIONS

Expand Worker Supports in Training Programs. Congress should ensure that skills training programs include funding for childcare, long-term care, transportation, and food so people have the support they need to train for good jobs.

Support Tax Credits for People with Low Incomes. Congress should expand the Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit, to reduce the tax burden and support working families.

\$23,639.16

is the average annual cost for center-based childcare for two children in the United States—a significant financial burden for families.^{xxiv}

NOTES

i Carnevale, Anthony P., Nicole Smith, Martin Van Der Werf, and Michael C. Quinn. 2024. *After Everything: Projections of Jobs, Education, and Training Requirements through 2031*. Washington, DC: The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.

ii National Skills Coalition. "The Skills Mismatch." <https://nationalskillscoalition.org/skills-mismatch/>.

iii Unruh, Rachel. 2024. *Public Perspectives: A National Skills Coalition Series on Jobs, Skills Training and the Economy*. Washington, DC: National Skills Coalition. <https://nationalskillscoalition.org/public-perspectives/>.

iv OECD. 2024. "Active Labour Market Policies: Connecting People with Jobs." <https://web.archive.oecd.org/temp/2024-06-25/71167-activation.htm>.

v Digital Skills for Today's Workforce Act, H.R.8056–118th Congress. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/8056>.

vi Author's analysis of data from the U.S. Department of Labor, PY 2023 WIOA National Performance Summary, November 2024. <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/Performance/pdfs/PY2023/PY%202023%20WIOA%20National%20Performance%20Summary.pdf>.

vii Unruh, Rachel. 2024.

viii National Skills Coalition. 2013. "Senate introduces SECTORS Act." National Skills Coalition Blog, June 28, 2013. <https://nationalskillscoalition.org/blog/industry-engagement/senate-introduces-sectors-act/>.

ix BUILDS Act, H.R.6042–118th Congress. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/6042/text>.

x Carnevale, Anthony P., Nicole Smith, Martin Van Der Werf, and Michael C. Quinn. 2023. *After Everything: Projections of Jobs, Education, and Training Requirements through 2031*. Washington, DC: The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/projections2031>.

xi Unruh, Rachel. 2024.

xii JOBS Act of 2023, S.161–118th Congress. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/161>.

xiii Gateway to Careers Act of 2023, S.2402–118th Congress. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/2402/text>.

xiv Carnevale, Anthony P., Nicole Smith, Martin Van Der Werf, and Michael C. Quinn. 2023. *After Everything: Projections of Jobs, Education, and Training Requirements through 2031*. Washington, DC: The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/projections2031>.

xv Unruh, Rachel. 2024.

xvi National Apprenticeship Act of 2023, H.R.2851–118th Congress. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/2851/text>.

xvii SKILL UP Act of 2020, H.R.5869–116th Congress. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/5869/text>.

xviii PARTNERS Act of 2023, H.R.6044–118th Congress. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/6044/text>.

xix ApprenticeshipUSA. "Explore Pre-Apprenticeship." <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/employers/explore-pre-apprenticeship>.

xx Jobs for the Future. "JFF's National Innovation Hub for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in Registered Apprenticeship: Strategies to Achieve Equitable Access and Outcomes." <https://info.jff.org/apprenticeshipdeia>.

xxi Unruh, Rachel. 2024.

xxii Van Noy, Michelle et al. 2024. *State Noncredit Data Infrastructure Cross-State Report*. Rutgers-New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers' School of Management and Labor Relations. https://sites.rutgers.edu/statenoncredit-data/wp-content/uploads/sites/794/2024/11/SNDP_Cross-StateReport_11.2024.pdf.

xxiii Unruh, Rachel. 2024. *Public Perspectives: A National Skills Coalition Series on Jobs, Skills Training and the Economy*. Washington, DC: National Skills Coalition. <https://nationalskillscoalition.org/public-perspectives/>.

xxiv The Center for American Progress. "Child Care and Early Learning in the United States." <https://www.americanprogress.org/data-view/earlylearning-in-the-united-states/>.



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[Nationalskillscoalition.org](https://nationalskillscoalition.org)

National Skills Coalition (NSC) is a national coalition that works to meet the ever-changing needs of America's workforce. We organize diverse networks that help to change the conversation about work and advocate for workforce-strengthening policies so that more working people have access to a better life, local businesses around the country see sustained growth, and more communities experience prosperity.



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[Businessleadersunited.org](https://businessleadersunited.org)

Business Leaders United for Workforce Partnerships is an initiative of National Skills Coalition (national, bipartisan 501c3). We are a free, private business network promoting inclusive, high-quality skills training policies that help build the skilled workforce that employers need to grow and thrive. Business Leaders United fully supports business leaders to advocate for industry-based strategies and policies that create effective training pipelines across the country.

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