



EQUIPPING WORKERS



BUILDING FUTURES

FEDERAL POLICY PRIORITIES FOR A SKILLED AMERICA



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INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly evolving economy, a skilled and well-resourced workforce 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 families.

Today, more than half of jobs in America require education and training beyond a high school degree but not a four-year degree.¹ People in these jobs work every day to build roads and bridges, care for those who are sick, keep utilities running, feed families, and so much more.

And yet, only 4 in 10 people have had access to the skills training and supportive services necessary to fill these roles.² This jobs mismatch stems from outdated federal and state workforce policies that have failed to keep pace with the evolving demands of today's economy. As a result, too many workers find themselves navigating complex systems and policies that fall short of supporting their ambitions. At the same time, local businesses feel the consequences of workforce policies that haven't kept up with the demands of today's economy. Despite the needs of both working people and local businesses, a persistent disconnect remains between workforce needs and the policies available to address them.

At National Skills Coalition (NSC), we remain steadfast in our mission to deliver prosperity to America's ever-changing workforce by advocating for federal policies that make it easier for working people and local businesses to thrive. We seek policies that provide every person in America with affordable skills training, career pathways to quality jobs, and critical services like child care, long-term care, and transportation. Without these policies, we risk undermining the economic foundation that drives our nation forward. America's greatest strength lies in its people—our workers and local business leaders—and it's time our policies reflect their true value and potential.

Guided by our mission and commitment to bipartisan solutions, NSC and our national coalition stand ready to collaborate in creating a workforce policy agenda that serves the needs of today and prepares us for tomorrow. For 25 years, NSC has worked with leaders from both sides of the aisle to inform and enact policies that expand opportunities for all workers and local businesses. As we look to the future, federal leaders in Congress and the Administration have a pivotal opportunity to champion policies that support and empower every worker—not just a select few.

Equipping Workers, Building Futures: Federal Policy Priorities for a Skilled America outlines a comprehensive set of bold, actionable recommendations to strengthen workforce policies, value every working person, and drive economic growth.

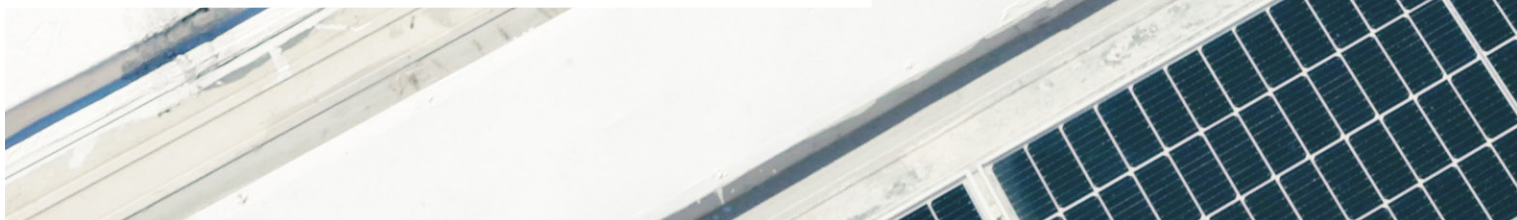
It organizes these recommendations across areas:

- **Strengthen the public workforce system**
- **Support proven industry partnerships**
- **Make postsecondary training accessible and affordable**
- **Expand earn-and-learn opportunities**
- **Leverage data to ensure fair outcomes**
- **Invest in supportive services**



A FEDERAL POLICY AGENDA FROM A COALITION OF WORKFORCE LEADERS

National Skills Coalition has built a diverse network of workforce advocates around the country made up of working people, local businesses, training providers, and workforce leaders. We channel their unique experiences to develop and advocate policies that can deliver prosperity to the millions of hardworking people who strengthen our economies and communities. The policy recommendations in this report reflect our network's perspectives on how the federal government can support the workforce today—and tomorrow.



THE IMPORTANCE OF WORKFORCE POLICIES THAT WORK FOR ALL PEOPLE

Every day, millions of workers, students, parents, family caregivers, immigrants, and local business leaders with diverse backgrounds and experiences contribute to the strength and resilience of our communities. Their contributions form the backbone of our economy.

Today's workforce is more diverse than ever and small businesses play an essential role in our nation's economy. Small businesses represent 99.9% of all U.S. businesses, employ nearly 46% of the private-sector workforce, and in 2021, generated over \$16.2 trillion in revenue.¹¹ People of color own a small share of small businesses due to historical policies that limited access to wealth, capital, and business opportunities.¹² Even so, 36 percent of Black adults (and 30% of Asian Americans, as another example) see business ownership as important to financial success.¹³

The rich diversity of our nation's people and workforce is a unique strength that promotes American innovation and prosperity. Indeed, the growing diversity of the American workforce was a major contributor to U.S. economic growth in the latter half of the 20th century.¹⁴ In a nation that values liberty and justice for all, every person deserves a fair shot at financial security, no matter their race, gender, age, or zip code. Yet half of people without a four-year college degree believe that a fair shot at economic success is out of reach.¹⁵ To have a competitive labor market that reflects and draws on the strengths of today's workforce, we need workforce policies that work for all people. The policies outlined in this report are meant to contribute to a more vibrant economy where everyone prospers.

Imagine a society where affordable skills training is accessible to everyone, career pathways to quality jobs are clear and equitable, and essential supportive services empower working people to succeed. In this vision, economic mobility and equity become a reality for all—especially for communities of color that have faced structural barriers.

U.S. WORKFORCE BY THE NUMBERS

45% of the working class is Black, Latino, and other workers of color.³

Nearly **50%** of the working class is women.⁴

Nearly **1 in 5** workers in America are immigrants.⁵

1 in 3 workers are aged 50 and older, representing a surge from 102 million in 2014 to 118 million today, with people aged 75 and older are the fastest-growing segment of the workforce.⁶

53 million people serve as family caregivers supporting older adults and people with disabilities.⁷

32 million people are working parents trying to support their families.⁸

Over **4 million** young people, aged 16-24, need opportunities to plug into school and work.⁹

1 in 20 civilian workers is a veteran.¹⁰

Local businesses benefit from a diverse and skilled workforce, fueling their sustained growth and innovation. Skills training and high-quality credentials are viewed with the same respect and value as four-year degrees, ensuring that all educational pathways are viable.

A NOTE ON IMMIGRANT WORKERS

Immigrants make up 19% of the U.S. workforce and power key industries like healthcare, construction, and agriculture. Immigrants also play a key role in U.S. entrepreneurship, owning approximately 18% of businesses.²⁰ As the economy grows and adds jobs, immigrants' contributions will become even more vital to our nation.

Smart and humane immigration reform should recognize how immigrant workers and their families are embedded across every facet of American society. Now and in the long term, National Skills Coalition supports solutions that strengthen our nation and our economy by valuing the contributions of immigrants.

We call on policymakers to:

- Provide a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants to fill millions of job openings in industries like healthcare and agriculture.
- Enact legislation to provide permanent protections and a skills-based pathway to citizenship for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients and other Dreamers, and Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders through proposals such as the American Dream and Promise Act.²¹
- Invest in workforce measures such as skills training, career pathways, English language programs, and supportive services. With such policies, we can keep families together, empower immigrants, and ensure they continue driving economic growth.

Public and political investment in inclusive workforce policies grows, reducing racial disparities and fostering economic security for millions. At the heart of this transformation is a powerful, diverse movement of advocates championing policies that open doors to prosperity for all.

Achieving this vision requires targeted investments in communities that have long faced entrenched, systemic barriers. Rural residents are less likely to have home broadband¹⁶, making it difficult to participate in digital skills training or connect with remote job opportunities. As another example, older women are among the fastest-growing segments of the workforce. Yet, they experience the highest rates of job displacement and are less likely to access skills training or employer-sponsored benefits.¹⁷ Similarly, despite making up a significant share of the workforce, immigrants frequently encounter language barriers and lack recognition of foreign-earned credentials, limiting their ability to secure good jobs.¹⁸ Likewise, while Black students account for a growing share of workers with postsecondary education, Black adults have the highest rates of student loan debt due to generational racial wealth and income gaps.¹⁹

By enacting the federal reforms shared in this report, we can build an economy that works for everyone—creating opportunity, equity, and shared prosperity across America.



STRENGTHEN THE PUBLIC WORKFORCE

A strong workforce system is key to meeting 21st-century demands. As industry practices and technology rapidly change, jobs and the required skills change, too. We need a workforce system that can keep pace with these changes. We must ensure that our workforce system is well-resourced to meet evolving skill demands, equips people with high-quality credentials, and creates direct pathways to good jobs. A strong public workforce system is also vital to address systemic barriers to economic opportunity faced by communities essential to our workforce.

82% of voters support increasing government funding for skills training in America. Additionally, 91% of Democrats, 74% of Republicans, and 83% of Independents want an increase in public investments in skills training.²⁷

\$6-\$8 in economic return is generated for every dollar invested in workforce training through increased productivity, higher wages, and reduced unemployment benefits, making it a cost-effective strategy for economic growth.²⁸

2x The likelihood that workers who participate in workforce training programs find stable, well-paying jobs compared to those who do not.²⁹



MELISSA SMITH
DIRECTOR-WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT SOLUTIONS,
GREENSBORO CHAMBER
OF COMMERCE



A strong workforce is vital to the growth of local businesses. Investments in WIOA and policies that align credentials with quality, in-demand jobs help our communities and economy thrive.”

PROTECT WORKFORCE FUNDING

Congress should adequately fund critical workforce development programs, such as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Perkins Career and Technical Education (CTE), and Apprenticeship, and oppose reductions to non-defense discretionary spending. The U.S. invests less in workforce policies than nearly every other industrialized country in the world.²² Over the past two decades, **Congress has repeatedly cut funding for key workforce programs**, even as demand has grown. Restoring and maintaining proper funding will strengthen essential services, bolster economic resilience, and expand opportunities for all working people.

REAUTHORIZE THE WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT

Congress should reauthorize the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the primary law responsible for the structure, programs, and funding of our nation’s public workforce system and our nation’s main vehicle for workforce training. Reauthorization should (1) authorize investments in programs that provide equitable, high-quality skills training, economic supports, and pathways to quality jobs; (2) require WIOA state and local plans and boards to incorporate goals to close disparities, engage workers, and improve data and expand outcome measures; and (3) strengthen the delivery of career and training services under WIOA by integrating holistic supports, improving career navigation, training frontline

staff, and piloting partnerships with organizations experienced in serving local communities.²³

BUILD DIGITAL SKILLS

Congress should pass the bipartisan Digital Skills for Today’s Workforce Act to equip current and future workers with the digital skills needed for in-demand industries, enabling them to secure good jobs and meet 21st-century workforce needs.²⁴ This legislation will provide grants to strengthen postsecondary, adult education, and workforce systems, ensuring effective delivery of digital skills training. 92% of jobs require digital skills while 1 in 3 of workers need these skills.²⁵ The advent of the AI economy will only increase the demand for digital skills.

ALIGN TRAINING WITH HIGH- QUALITY CREDENTIALS

Congress and the Trump Administration should ensure that newly passed skills training programs and those currently administered by federal agencies equip people with high-quality credentials. High-quality credentials align with industry needs and job opportunities, validate skills and competencies, result in increased earnings, and support people’s career advancement and further education.²⁶ These credentials are essential to meeting the evolving demands of the modern economy. By ensuring that training results in a high-quality credential, the federal government can improve accountability, maximize the impact of funding, and promote economic mobility.

SUPPORT PROVEN INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS

The best training programs are tailored to specific industries and shaped by workers and businesses that know their industry's needs firsthand. This insight helps identify key skills, design effective training, and improve worker retention and advancement. Industry partnerships bring together groups such as local businesses, training providers, unions and worker organizations, and community organizations to develop industry-specific workforce strategies. Partnerships can expand career opportunities for workers, and workers of color in particular, by diversifying hiring networks and changing industry practices that otherwise create barriers to hiring and promotion.³⁰ They can also benefit small and mid-sized local businesses with fewer staff and less capital to develop internal training programs.

91% of voters want the creation of closer partnerships between training providers and businesses to train people for jobs that businesses need to fill.³³

1 in 4 Americans has obtained non-degree credentials over the past 15 years, often facilitated by industry partnerships, highlighting the growing importance of alternative education pathways.³⁴

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.³⁵





MATT DICKERSON
BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
& STRATEGY OFFICER,
MID SOUTH EXTRUSION



In today's rapidly evolving job market, industry must take an active role as a producer of the future workforce, collaborating closely with K-12 education and higher education institutions. By forging strong Industry Sector Partnerships, we can ensure that training programs reflect real-world needs, enabling students to thrive and fostering a workforce that is not only skilled but also diverse and adaptable."

ESTABLISH A NATIONAL NETWORK OF INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS

Congress should introduce and pass the Strengthening Employment Clusters to Organize Regional Success (SECTORS) Act, which would provide federal grants to states to support convening, expansion, and sustainability for industry partnerships and cover training costs for program participants.³¹ This legislation would support scaling of existing partnerships, while helping to launch new partnerships where there is industry demand. Modeled on priorities from previous administrations of both parties, this legislation would strengthen workforce systems, improve economic mobility, and help businesses remain competitive in a rapidly changing economy.

CONTINUE TO DRIVE GROWTH THROUGH INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS

Congress should direct agencies to leverage discretionary funds to advance industry partnerships by continuing to provide grantmaking, convening, and guidance to support collaboration among small and mid-sized employers. Programs like the Manufacturing Extension Partnership, Trade Adjustment Assistance, and the Good Jobs Challenge have demonstrated the economic value of helping businesses adopt new technologies and enhance competitiveness.

SUPPORT INFRASTRUCTURE PARTNERSHIPS

Congress should pass the BUILDS Act to prepare and connect workers to infrastructure jobs by creating new grants for industry partnerships in the infrastructure sector that develop robust career pathways.³² This legislation also includes funding for support services like career counseling, child care, and transportation to help workers complete training programs.





A NOTE ON PROMOTING SKILLS AND GOOD JOBS

A skilled workforce is essential to a thriving economy and good, family-sustaining jobs are central to prosperous communities. The time is now for the Trump Administration to encourage skills-based hiring and promote quality jobs.

The Trump Administration has an opportunity to encourage skills-based hiring across federal agencies and contractors, prioritizing demonstrable skills over degree attainment and building on initiatives from previous presidential administrations. Well over half of voters are concerned about the impact of jobs having unnecessary degree requirements.³⁶ A skills-based hiring approach expands access to high-quality jobs for people with credentials like certifications, apprenticeships, and occupational licenses, addressing unnecessary degree barriers that limit opportunities and burden businesses. This initiative would widen the talent pool, support diverse workers, and bolster industries essential to economic growth.

The Trump Administration also has an opportunity to retain and expand policies that support quality jobs in federal programs and investments, relying on the 2022 Good Jobs Principles from the Departments of Commerce and Labor.³⁷ These principles benefit workers, employers, and the economy by supporting better employee recruitment, greater worker retention, and career advancement.

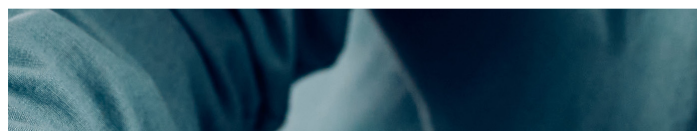
MAKE POSTSECONDARY TRAINING ACCESSIBLE AND AFFORDABLE

Working people pursuing non-degree credentials make up a big and growing share of today's college students. These credentials can help people get ahead economically when they are affordable and tied to high-quality, in-demand careers.³⁸ We must ensure that high-quality, non-degree credentials are accessible, affordable, and valuable to the growing body of students pursuing them. These policies are also vital to adults of color and women who are actively pursuing non-degree credentials to advance their careers.

84% of voters want federal financial aid available to anyone seeking skills training, not just postsecondary degrees.⁴³

72% of jobs in the U.S. will require postsecondary education and/or training by 2031.⁴⁴

Up to **30%** or more in wage increases can result from earning a certificate or credential in high-demand fields through workforce training initiatives, significantly improving earning potential and lifting many out of poverty.⁴⁵



RECOMMENDATIONS

ENACT SHORT-TERM PELL

Congress should pass the bipartisan JOBS Act to expand Pell Grant eligibility to high-quality, short-term education and training programs at community and technical colleges.³⁹ This proposal would modernize the nation's largest grant program supporting postsecondary education and training for low-income workers and students by allowing funds to be used for shorter-term programs with proven industry success. Currently, Pell Grants are restricted to programs of at least 600 clock hours and 15 weeks in length, but this legislation would lower the eligibility threshold, enabling workers to train for in-demand skills like welding, phlebotomy, and generative AI.⁴⁰

A NOTE ON HIGH-QUALITY CREDENTIALS

More adults are looking to quickly learn new skills or upgrade their existing skills to advance their careers and get ahead economically. High-quality credentials offer a way to do that, especially for those balancing upskilling with job and family responsibilities. In addition to being occupation-specific, non-degree credentials are more affordable and take less time to complete than a degree. That's why it's no surprise that nearly as many working-age adults have completed a non-degree credential program (40%) as a college degree (46%), according to a 2020 Strada-Gallup Education Survey.⁴⁶

MAKE POSTSECONDARY TRAINING ACCESSIBLE AND AFFORDABLE

By aligning training opportunities with workforce needs in critical industries, this expansion would help businesses fill job openings while providing workers pathways to family-sustaining careers.

EXPAND STUDENT CAREER ACCESS AND SUPPORTS

Congress should pass legislation to boost support for students and career readiness. The Gateways to Careers Act⁴¹ would provide holistic support to students who face barriers to postsecondary education, for example, by providing emergency grants for financial hardships and offering career navigation services. The ACCESS to Careers Act would strengthen connections to employers by increasing industry-community college partnerships and work-based learning for students. Together, these measures would ensure more equitable access to education and career opportunities for underserved students.

PRESERVE THE FEDERAL ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The Trump Administration and Congress should maintain the U.S. Department of Education structure to support the more than 15 million students enrolled in postsecondary education and training.⁴² These students count on the U.S. Department of Education to administer programs that make postsecondary education and training more accessible and affordable. The administration should delay proposals to transfer oversight and administration of education programs to other agencies.



ATHEENA "TT" MARTINEZ
MEMBER OF NSC'S STUDENT
ADVISORY COUNCIL
HAYDEN, AZ



But, like financially, it sucks financially—college. I don't know if there's a better word than 'suck,' but that's what it does. I mean it literally. It's one of the biggest burdens I think I've been through.

You know, being a mom, being a full-time student, trying to find full-time employment, finding ways to subsidize my employment by finding places to work for and get, you know, little subsidies and stuff. I've been doing it for like the last year, and it's harder than most people think.

Everyone's like, 'Oh, college is easy. College, you know. You get financial aid,' and it's like that doesn't cover everything, you know? Like, that barely just tickles my tuition."



EXPAND EARN-AND-LEARN OPPORTUNITIES

Registered apprenticeship and work-based learning give people the opportunity to build skills while earning wages. By offering training in the context of a job, these programs provide immediate solutions for businesses and create sustainable career pathways for workers. Work-based learning programs can promote career opportunities for people of color, women, and others in industries where they are underrepresented. Work-based learning programs can also improve job retention and enhance workforce productivity.

92% of apprentices who complete an apprenticeship are still employed nine months later, reinforcing the retention benefits for businesses.⁵²

\$77,000 is the average annual salary for people who complete an apprenticeship program, significantly higher than the national average salary of \$55,000.⁵³

7.6% of active apprenticeships are represented by Black or African American individuals. Similarly, 13.4 and 21.5 percent of active apprenticeships are occupied by women and Latino people, respectively—shares that are disproportionately low based on their representation in the U.S. workforce.⁵⁴

MODERNIZE APPRENTICESHIP

Congress should reauthorize the National Apprenticeship Act—a federal law enacted in 1937 to improve and regulate apprenticeship and on-the-job training programs—to modernize our national apprenticeship system, build capacity for paid training, and expand equitable access to apprenticeship and work-based learning.⁴⁷ In doing so, Congress should preserve quality standards for registered apprenticeship programs, including wage minimums, progression, classroom learning, worker protections, transparency, and industry-recognized credentials, to ensure strong outcomes for participants and businesses.

USE TAX CREDITS TO SUPPORT WORK-BASED LEARNING

Congress should adopt the bipartisan SKILL UP Act to provide businesses with the maximum Work Opportunity Tax Credit for hiring and supporting eligible workers through work-based learning programs.⁴⁸ This tax credit would incentivize businesses, particularly small and mid-sized companies, to hire and train workers who lack access to traditional training pathways. With 89% of small businesses that were hiring in December 2024 reporting difficulty finding qualified workers, this proposal addresses a critical need for workforce development.⁴⁹

BOOST WORK-BASED LEARNING AT SMALL BUSINESSES

Congress should pass the PARTNERS Act to establish a grant program to create and expand industry partnerships that help small- and medium-sized businesses develop work-based learning programs, including the necessary supports.⁵⁰ These grants will help ensure that small businesses, who often lack upfront resources to invest in work-based learning, are able to take advantage of these programs.

PRIORITIZE PROGRAMS THAT BROADEN TALENT

Congress and the Trump Administration should maintain pre-apprenticeship programs⁵¹ in non-traditional fields to broaden and diversify the apprenticeship pipeline for women, people of color, young adults, and people with disabilities. They should also support a range of work-based learning opportunities that promote career opportunities for women and people of color, particularly in industries where they are underrepresented.



ERICA MOTON
MEMBER OF NSC'S STUDENT
ADVISORY COUNCIL
LOS ANGELES, CA



Being able to train while working gave me the fresh perspective and hunger I needed to step out of my comfort zone and build a real career plan. Through the Building Skills Partnership (BSP) Peer Trainer Program, I gained leadership and technological skills while helping to train my coworkers in emergency preparedness.

That experience led me to the BSP Aviation Career Exploration Course and then to the Aviation Technology Program, where I'm now pursuing a career in Avionics—all while continuing to work at LAX. These programs didn't just teach me skills; they opened doors, created connections, and gave me the confidence to reach for more."

LEVERAGE DATA TO ENSURE FAIR OUTCOMES

With reliable and robust data, we can hold workforce policies accountable for delivering better outcomes for working people and small businesses. High-quality data empowers workers by providing clear insights into which training programs and credentials lead to success in growing industries. For policymakers and business leaders, data is a critical tool to measure the return on investment, identify areas for improvement, and ensure that workforce programs are meeting their goals. Privacy-protected data disaggregated by race, gender, income, and geography can help policymakers close labor market disparities. By leveraging data effectively, we can create a postsecondary and workforce system that supports economic growth and promotes equity across all sectors.



RECOMMENDATIONS

LEVERAGE DATA TO ENSURE FAIR OUTCOMES

IMPROVE WORKFORCE DATA

Congress should include provisions in Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act reauthorization to fund workforce data quality initiatives, support state longitudinal data systems, improve disaggregated data and its uses, and enhance labor market and workforce insights.⁵⁵ Improved data systems and use will enable better decision-making, increase policy effectiveness through detailed insights, and help close racial, gender, and geographic disparities.

ENHANCE POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION DATA

Congress should pass the College Transparency Act to provide students, families, institutions, and policymakers access to comprehensive, transparent higher education and workforce outcomes data, including information on non-degree credentials.⁵⁶ This legislation would enable the U.S. Department of Education to establish a secure, privacy-protected student-level data network.

This system would accurately track student enrollment, progress, and outcomes, giving states and institutions the tools to develop targeted strategies for student success. With bipartisan support, CTA promises to improve decision-making and ensure programs effectively prepare people for good jobs and higher incomes.



SHANA LEWIS WASHINGTON
EXECUTIVE LEAD – NATIONAL
DIRECTOR, WORKFORCE
PROGRAMS AND TALENT
SUPPLY INNOVATION,
TRINITY HEALTH

91%

of voters support policies that ensure people have access to data that tells them which training programs and credentials will help them achieve their employment goals.⁵⁷

0

U.S. states have comprehensive data on all types of non-degree credentials, indicating a nationwide gap in credential data ecosystems.⁵⁸

738,000+

credentials are saturating the U.S. marketplace, underscoring the complexity and necessity for states to develop transparent and interoperable credential data systems.⁵⁹

“

To tackle workforce challenges we need to know the entire picture. Robust workforce data systems are necessary to evaluate skills training programs, understand which communities are disconnected from skills training opportunities, and ultimately close labor shortages.”



INVEST IN SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

A thriving economy starts with supporting working people and their families. Child care, elder care, housing, and transportation aren't luxuries—they're essential for job stability and success. Financial barriers to basic needs hit workers with low wages the hardest. Additionally, the racial wealth gap—a longstanding divide caused by discrimination in housing, education, and employment—leaves Black and Latino families with fewer resources to invest in skills training while meeting basic needs. By investing in supportive services, we can create a stronger, more prosperous economy for all.

RECOMMENDATIONS

INVEST IN SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

EXPAND HOLISTIC SUPPORTS IN TRAINING PROGRAMS

Congress should ensure that skills training programs include funds for supportive services like child care, long-term care, transportation, and food so that people have the support they need to train for a new or better job. These supports are critical for students and workers to succeed in high-quality training programs and address barriers that businesses, especially small and mid-size companies, struggle to navigate because they often lack the resources, expertise, and infrastructure to provide or coordinate supportive services for their workers. Congress can do this through passing legislation like the Gateways to Careers Act referenced previously, and by embedding supportive services in major skills training legislation like WIOA. States like Virginia, Iowa, and Washington have demonstrated the importance of pairing financial resources with holistic supports to expand access to short-term credentials and empower workers and businesses.⁶⁰

PROTECT PEOPLE'S ECONOMIC SECURITY THROUGH THE SAFETY NET

Congress should protect people's access to basic needs by fully funding safety net programs like Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and by increasing funding for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) to keep pace with inflation.

The costs of basic needs like food, medical care, and housing are too high for many to afford.

Our nation's safety net programs help ensure people can cover their basic needs while training for a better job. Congress should also reject proposals to impose or expand work requirements in safety net programs and instead focus on outcomes like poverty reduction and economic mobility.



ALI O'NEILL
PROJECT EXECUTIVE,
O'NEILL CONSTRUCTION
GROUP

82%

of all voters want increased funding for support services, such as child care and transportation assistance, to help people finish skills training. Over three-quarters of Republican and Independent voters support this.

\$23,639.16

is the average annual cost for center-based child care for two children (an infant and a 4-year-old) in the United States, posing a significant financial burden on families.⁶⁴

SNAP helps

1.2 million

low-income veterans, with Florida, Texas, and California having the largest numbers of veterans participating in SNAP.⁶⁵

“

Training and upskilling workers is only part of the equation. Investments in supportive services like childcare and transportation help workers and students participate and be successful, both during and after training.”



ALISHA SMALL
MEMBER OF NSC'S STUDENT
ADVISORY COUNCIL
GERMANTOWN, MD



Simply put, individuals cannot worry about getting their higher education if their basic needs are not met. They're worrying about putting food on their table, and how they're going to pay rent, and how they're going to pay for child care and things of that nature. So, if there are resources that will consistently help them meet their needs during their time at the college, whatever time it takes for them to get their degree or certification, that would definitely help."

Forcing people into low-wage jobs as a condition of receiving food or medical care hurts people and limits their ability to access education and training.⁶¹ It also stymies businesses that need to hire trained workers.

SUPPORT TAX CREDITS FOR PEOPLE WITH LOW INCOMES

Congress should expand the Child Tax Credit and the Earned Income Tax Credit, to support working people and their families. The American Rescue Plan extended the child tax credit to benefit millions

of families with low incomes, and led to a historic reduction in child poverty, particularly in states with high levels of poverty that are disproportionately in the South.⁶² The American Rescue Plan also expanded the Earned Income Tax Credit to adults without children in their homes, boosting the incomes of more than 16 million working people in jobs with low pay.⁶³ Both of these tax credits can give people in low-wage jobs additional resources to cover their basic needs while pursuing skills training and working.

A NOTE ON THE CARE WORKFORCE

Family care is essential for workers. At the heart of the economy are care workers who make child care, long-term care, and care for people with disabilities possible. Across the country, **more than 5 million direct care workers** (i.e., home care workers and nursing assistants) and **more than 1 million child care workers** provide essential services to our communities yet often toil in jobs that are undervalued and that suffer from poor job quality.⁶⁶

As a result, turnover is unsustainably high in these sectors, which leaves many working families without critical support.⁶⁷ To meet the needs of working families, we must also ensure that child care and direct care workers have access to quality training, career pathways, fair compensation, and opportunities for career advancement. By investing in both care as a supportive service and the workforce that provides it, we can create a stronger, more prosperous economy for all.

NOTES

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ABOUT US

National Skills Coalition envisions a future where every person in America is guaranteed skills training, good jobs, and economic prosperity.

- We are a national coalition that advocates for policies that strengthen the nation's workforce and ensure local businesses can meet the demands of a rapidly shifting economy.
- We organize networks of working people, local businesses, training providers, and workforce leaders to develop long-lasting solutions to the systemic problems they face within the workforce.
- We believe that every person in America should have access to affordable skills training, career pathways to quality jobs, and services like child care, long-term care, and transportation that help them thrive in their jobs.
- We rally our networks around the growing movement for workforce policies informed by workers and employers, and together, we are helping to build a stronger economy and a more prosperous future for communities across the country.



National Skills Coalition
1250 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20036

nationalskillscoalition.org

