



A Road Map to Reemployment in the COVID-19 Economy

EMPOWERING WORKERS, EMPLOYERS,
AND STATES

Brent Orrell, Mason M. Bishop, and John Hawkins

JULY 2020

A M E R I C A N E N T E R P R I S E I N S T I T U T E

Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent economic and employment crises that have ensued have put unprecedented pressure on the US workforce system. Tens of millions of Americans, particularly lower-income and service workers, have lost their jobs, many of which may not return anytime soon, if ever. As a result, millions of these workers will need to make difficult career transitions as our economies reopen and will be attempting to do so in diverse local economies that are facing a myriad of challenges. The workforce system has struggled previously in a strong economy to support workers looking for stable employment, so meeting this surge in demand will require a fundamental rethink of how the system operates.

First, we must shift away from national policies and initiatives that set policy at a distance from actual needs and conditions. Instead, our approach focuses on creating the flexibility for state, regional, and local leaders in allocating crucial resources and supporting workers in making decisions about skill development and employment that are tailored to their skills, interests, and abilities.

These two pillars, strategic state-led investment and worker flexibility, are the core of the road map to workforce recovery. Under our policy construct, governors have control of special COVID-19 relief workforce system moneys, directing funds in partnership with local government and business leaders where need and opportunity are greatest among a state's regional economies.

Second, states must work with local leaders to reinforce their regional and sector-based approach to workforce development, aligning strategies and

investments in businesses and job seekers to the needs of the local economy. Lastly, a shift toward the use of real-time, easy-to-access labor market information can empower policymakers, workers, and businesses in developing the talent they need now and will need in the future.

To support worker flexibility, job seekers are provided the financial resources they need to acquire training through Personal Reemployment Accounts, which help maximize worker choice in identifying and pursuing training that fits their individual needs and interests. These resources will be highly flexible and can be used for a broad range of training opportunities and supportive services, such as transportation and childcare, that can facilitate a return to work. Lastly, for harder-to-serve workers with multiple barriers, limited work histories, or other challenges, the road map proposes investments in reimaged American Job Centers (AJC) that reduce bureaucratic obstacles and expand access to tailored reemployment services. We believe this combination of worker flexibility and strengthened AJCs will allow millions of workers to return to jobs quickly while reserving more intensive services for those in greatest need.

As the pandemic continues, and state and regional economies reopen on different schedules, the workforce system requires a flexible and adaptable approach that can address the widely varying needs that states, regions, and localities face. The road map to workforce recovery will help create a more agile system and move resources closer to the people and organizations that need them most.

A Road Map to Reemployment in the COVID-19 Economy

EMPOWERING WORKERS, EMPLOYERS, AND STATES

Brent Orrell, Mason M. Bishop, and John Hawkins

Rebuilding the economy is going to require a thorough rethinking of how the nation supports workers facing challenging employment transitions. Recent work by the US Government Accountability Office¹ and the American Enterprise Institute (AEI)² describes a workforce system mired in burdensome regulations, difficult for both businesses and job seekers to navigate, and arguably ineffective in its primary mission of helping American workers find, retain, and advance in employment. All this was true before the COVID-19 crisis struck and will be even more evident as displaced workers attempt to reattach to jobs during an uncertain economy. Serious reform of the public workforce system is now needed to complement and reinforce other federal economic recovery investments in the business and finance sectors. The US government must ensure that as many workers as possible have the resources and support they need to get back to work.

Two key points frame our thinking in this regard. First, we need to shift our focus away from national initiatives and toward states and regions, as each will face different obstacles and opportunities in the coming months. A focus on flexibility—for workers, primarily, but also for businesses, governors, local officials, and public workforce system leaders—will be essential.

Second, we will need a spectrum of services and resources to provide for the wide range of challenges newly unemployed workers face. Tens of millions of workers have filed for unemployment in the past two

months, peaking at about 40 million before beginning a recent decline. Official unemployment is 11.1 percent, while broader measures that consider underemployment (those working less than full time) are 18 percent. A recent McKinsey Global Institute report estimates that up to 86 percent of the jobs vulnerable to the early displacement or layoffs from COVID-19 pay less than \$40,000 per year and over 98 percent pay less than \$69,000.³ Unemployment is affecting every sector of the economy and every type of worker—from service employees to manufacturing workers. Even fields such as health care have seen layoffs despite the most urgent health crisis in a century.

As we have seen, the nation's programs for supporting unemployed workers are struggling. One study found that nearly half of the 40 million workers who have filed for unemployment in recent months either have been denied or have yet to receive both state and federal benefits at a time when people need this relief the most.⁴ These numbers suggest that the public workforce system, which oversees the programs designed to help workers access training, job-search, and supportive services, is also likely to become overwhelmed by job-hungry workers as state and regional economies reopen.

We need a strategy flexible enough to support workers regardless of previous levels of education and employment and that is easily adaptable to local economic conditions. The good news is that millions have been able to remain on company payrolls

and can return to the jobs they had thanks to the federal Paycheck Protection Program.⁵ But millions of others—especially in the services sector, which accounts for 80 percent of all American jobs—will be looking for new work in a chaotic and competitive job market.⁶ These workers will need the best information possible to help align their skills to emerging and market demands and flexible resources to pay for training that can help them qualify for new types of work. For the remaining workers, who were likely already struggling with a wide range of barriers to maintaining stable employment before the epidemic, longer-term, intensive assistance will be required to help them regain a foothold in the economy.

Empowering States and Workers

To address these diverse worker needs and economic conditions, this report focuses on two key pillars of change—state flexibility and worker support—each driven by three core strategic policy objectives that are necessary to ease the return to work during the restart.

For state flexibility, strategic policy objectives include (1) greater flexibility for governors to support regional restarts, (2) regional and sector-based workforce development strategies, and (3) a skill-based model to improve labor market alignment.

For worker support, strategic policy objectives include (1) empowering rapid return to work through Personal Reemployment Accounts (PRA), (2) diversifying and expanding training options, and (3) providing intensive workforce services for workers with multiple barriers.

This report's scope has been limited by necessity. We do not attempt to address the myriad challenges facing high school and college graduates. Our focus here is on the millions of recently unemployed adult workers who are anxiously considering their next steps as the economy begins to open up. For their sake, we offer a way forward.

State Flexibility: Strategic, Targeted, and Data-Informed Workforce Development

As AEI documented in a recent landscape report on the public workforce system,⁷ current workforce development programs are often dispersed among a complex web of disparate state and local agencies that have overlapping, competing, or otherwise complex and burdensome requirements. Moreover, the current patchwork of employment and workforce development programs cannot, and was never designed to be able to, address the coming surge in demand. Left unaddressed, these problems of complexity and inadequacy of resources will become their own stumbling blocks to recovery. Governors need the flexibility to manage and disperse funds across their respective states, work collaboratively with regional workforce development authorities and employers, and promote a more data-driven approach to skill and job matching.

Greater Flexibility for Governors to Support Regional Restarts

Over the past several months, Congress and the Trump administration have rapidly expanded federal spending for a wide range of federal programs, relying on existing program infrastructures to deliver services and benefits. As discussed above, this approach will likely prove inadequate for supporting the millions of individuals who will be seeking work under adverse circumstances.

Rather than simply filling the public workforce system “pipeline” with new resources, we believe the bulk of any future recovery-focused federal investments should be directed to, and controlled by, state governors in partnership with local leaders, business leaders, and worker advocates. This approach would simplify and encourage cooperation across state lines in the restart of the multistate regional economies that are omnipresent in the US. Additionally, burdensome federal program requirements that stifle quick responses to restarting the economy should be waived to avoid unnecessary delays in assisting workers and

Federal Program Challenges

The following are federal program requirements that inhibit the workforce system from adapting to rapidly changing needs during marked economic downturns.

Funding Limitations. Funding limitations include:

- Funding restricted to certain allowable activities and programs,
- Funding amounts determined by distribution formulas that do not reflect the on-the-ground reality, and
- Federal cost principles that hamper the ability to disperse funds quickly.

Worker-Related Restrictions. Worker-related restrictions include:

- Limitations on eligibility and definitions of types of workers who can be served,
- Mandatory program priority of services to certain narrowly defined customers, and
- A complex web of programs dispersed across several independent agencies created to serve workers with unique needs.

Administrative Requirements. Administrative requirements include:

- Funds restricted to limited, federally mandated–approved lists of training programs (i.e., eligible training provider lists),
- Wide-ranging program definitions that can conflict with one another, and
- Burdensome reporting requirements.

businesses with upskilling and employing workers in available jobs.

Several federal workforce programs scattered among a number of federal agencies discussed in AEI's recent landscape report are likely to be called on to assist workers with employment and job-training services. Some of these programs are available to all workers, while others are targeted to workers in specific socioeconomic categories, such as dislocated workers affected by trade and those with criminal records.

Part of the complexity in managing the federally funded employment and training programs highlighted in the landscape report is the number of public and private organizations delivering services. Navigating this web of programs creates excessive barriers for states in strategically reopening regional economies. Additionally, while most federal workforce training programs are managed at the state

level, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act's (WIOA) Title I programs target funding to local workforce development areas. Here, local officials are responsible for oversight and establishing the one-stop service delivery system mandated by WIOA.

In the context of recovery from COVID-19, these program issues pose great risks for workers and the economy. If Congress were to simply add appropriations to the existing program structure through established funding formulas, the resources would simply be divided among the nation's 600 local workforce

In January 2020, an AEI team published an extensive evaluation of workforce system structures in each state. These state infographics outline how much federal funding each state receives and how each state delivers this funding. Additional information is available on the AEI website.⁸

development areas, reinforcing system fragmentation without respect to any overarching recovery strategy.

Rather than simply infusing resources into a broken and ineffective system, new appropriations should be designated as “state reserve” funds to be managed by governors and state workforce agencies. This would help ensure funds are strategically targeted for regional economic restarts and can be more effectively managed during unforeseen “start and stops” that may be experienced. Managing funds at the state level would empower governors to be strategic about when, and how, they restart regional and local economies by enabling them to perform the following actions.

Coordinate Public Health and Economic Restart Priorities and Activities. To date, national policy has featured governors as the responsible and accountable parties for implementing phased economic restarts using crucial safety measures, such as social distancing and occupancy limits for business establishments and public gatherings. Since governors and their public health authorities have the best understanding of the risks and challenges associated with particular work settings, and responsibility for establishing rules of operation, they will also be best able to decide when and how to prioritize worker training and supportive services funded through the public workforce system. Opening the economy and COVID-19 safety mitigation must be viewed as complementary rather than competing priorities if we want to limit disease-driven starts and stops in economic activity. Governors are in the best position to oversee the coordination of these crucial decisions.

Align the Release of Employment and Training Funds to the Timing and Phasing of Reopenings. Under WIOA Title I, 85 percent of Adult and Youth program funds and 60 percent of Dislocated Worker funds are distributed to local workforce development areas to provide career and training services, typically administered by county and city employees. As mentioned earlier, other employment and training funds are managed at the state level with services provided by state employees. Once funds are distributed

locally, state processes to recapture and redistribute those funds are so burdensome they rarely occur. As a result, certain parts of a state may run out of WIOA Title I moneys, while other areas have idle balances.

With the challenges of widespread suffering inflicted by mandatory shutdowns and the uneven starts and stops likely to come, this disconnect between state and local management will significantly impede responsive and effective service delivery, flooding closed areas with resources while insufficiently funding regions that are largely open. By enhancing state workforce reserves, governors will be better positioned to ensure that resources are delivered to the areas that can best use them to support the overall recovery and ensure recovery moneys are coordinated with employer needs, economic development plans, regional differentiation, and current conditions and integrated with other funding sources.

Consolidate WIOA Title I Funds with Other Employment and Training Funds. An effective response to the looming reemployment challenge will require using all employment and training funding resources available for states. It will not be enough to continue the traditional program-by-program approach and hope various staff and program managers can work out arrangements community by community. Solutions will need to occur regionally but must be managed with the full array of employment and training program funding across WIOA, Employment Service, Unemployment Insurance, Adult Education, Vocational Rehabilitation, and low-income programs, such as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training.

To distribute funds and ensure a true “one-stop” response to reemploying COVID-19-impacted workers and building back COVID-19-impacted small businesses, governors should develop “quick response” guidelines whereby regional and local officials develop coordinated responses using an array of available funding. Implementation of these guidelines should occur with public health guidelines, and state and local leaders must provide clear structure and direction for businesses seeking to open.

Make Funds Available to Regional Collaboratives. An advisory board made up of representatives from local workforce and economic development leaders that coordinate among local workforce and economic development agencies, public health departments, and postsecondary education institutions should be organized to provide oversight and leadership on behalf of regional efforts.

Specific details include distribution of funds based on strategic plans and targeted, local, and regional needs. Funds appropriated for WIOA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs would be held as state reserve funds. These funds would be distributed upon approval of a regional plan that details how funds will be distributed to workers, in this case through PRAs, and how PRA resources would be aligned to the rest of the employment and training infrastructure to ensure coordination of services and supports to workers in need of quick-response reemployment assistance.

Funds would be available in two accounts at the state level: (1) for use for worker-directed training and supportive services through PRAs and (2) for one-stop innovation. Regional collaboratives would apply for funds by submitting strategic plans that outline services and customer-centric processes to help workers gain skills and employment. They would then describe how one-stop service delivery will be transformed to involve more integration of resources and infrastructure to adapt to a post-COVID-19 economic environment.

For moneys directed to issue PRAs, 75 percent of funds would be available for the PRAs for training and supportive services for workers and 25 percent for local costs of delivering services and administration. (See below for additional details on PRAs.)

For one-stop innovation funds, all local workforce development areas would receive funds based on a prorated share of their WIOA Title I formulas. Before receiving funds, as part of the regional collaborative planning process, strategic plans submitted to the governor would detail how funds will be used to support (1) better virtual one-stop service delivery options; (2) program partner coordination, consolidation, or integration; and (3) innovative technology

solutions, such as better labor market information or case management. Local areas would be allowed to pool funds regionally to address larger service delivery issues and create economies of scale for purchasing and implementing services.

State workforce agencies would track and monitor use of accounts and report to the US Department of Labor on how people used the accounts and what types of employment people were able to obtain or keep (if funds used by worker for layoff aversion).

Regional and Sector-Based Workforce Development

From the outset, WIOA was meant to be a demand-driven system that relied on local workforce staff to proactively lead in aligning workforce services in a region.⁹ Its emphasis on sector strategies, local control, and local decision-making was meant to provide for the significant variation in labor market conditions around the country. Regardless of the challenges that have plagued workforce development programs to date, local workforce leaders, working with regional collaborative partners, are still best positioned to assist the state in shaping regional strategies as conditions change daily. The role of workforce leaders in directing the planning and response is paramount to these efforts' success. Here are some crucial steps for them to take.

Build on Initiatives Tied to Sector Strategies.

As a large body of research has demonstrated, the most effective employment and training initiatives go through the hard work of engaging employers and developing sector strategies that lead to training and employment pipelines in a given region. In a recent case study, we highlighted the remarkable efforts of a workforce board in Austin, Texas, that spearheaded the Austin Metro Area Master Community Workforce Plan, a comprehensive regional upskilling initiative.¹⁰ The plan seeks to move 10,000 people out of poverty and into a job earning 200-plus percent of the poverty wage by 2021. Austin stakeholders built partnerships among city leaders, employers, the Austin Chamber

of Commerce, Austin Community College, and community-based organizations (CBO). Together, they set measurable goals and engaged in rigorous sector analysis to identify three key growth sectors in their region with a wide availability of middle-skill jobs. Crucially, the initiative also included a partnership with researchers at the University of Texas, who agreed to provide independent data collection and evaluation of the plan's implementation.

Austin's efforts were producing results before the pandemic and may be even more important now. The one-year findings showed the city was on track to reach its goals, seeing increases in placements, training completions, and wages over the baseline year. While COVID-19 undoubtedly changed the city's outlook moving forward, Austin's experience in developing and implementing the plan provides a proactive model for other cities to follow.

Other regions have engaged in similar efforts. In Houston, UpSkill Houston has leveraged the US Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Talent Pipeline Management process to build out sector strategies for in-demand sectors including petrochemical and construction. Early data show a 32 percent increase in enrollment in petrochemical courses at the area's community college and a 42 percent increase in completion rates for degrees and technical training programs.¹¹ In Philadelphia, local leaders in West Philadelphia started the highly regarded West Philadelphia Skills Initiative, a unique partnership between employers and the coalition to successfully place more than 530 formerly unemployed workers in local jobs, achieving high rates of job placement and significant wage increases.¹²

Each local leader has something in common: a commitment to active engagement of employers who drive training methods and outcomes and rigorous measurement of those outcomes. Crucially, upskilling efforts are only as effective as the partnerships' workforce leaders have made and maintained on the ground. In this post-COVID-19 moment, it is more important than ever that the workforce be incentivized and encouraged to fulfill its regional convening role by engaging with employers, local CBOs, and economic development to build out sector strategies.

Promote Specialization Among Local Partners.

No single regional entity can provide all the services needed for effective upskilling. Early analysis of Austin's Master Community Workforce Plan showed that community college programs effectively placed their graduates into jobs paying 200 percent of the poverty line but struggled with retention and completion. Conversely, CBOs in the plan effectively shepherded people toward completion, but graduates often ended up in jobs that did not provide a living wage.

Some of the most effective programs around the nation—such as Austin's Capital IDEA, Per Scholas, and Project QUEST—rely on outside training providers, such as community college programs, but provide the wraparound supports (intensive case management, childcare, and tuition assistance) through CBOs to help people address barriers and complete the program.¹³ This emphasis toward viewing local entities as a “step in the pipeline” rather than trying to rely on a single provider for all services can maximize relative strengths of the various types of partners and free up leaders to repurpose the resources at their disposal. Doing so will help minimize duplication and administrative confusion while helping ensure efficient use of resources.

A Skill-Based Model to Improve Labor Market Alignment

Before COVID-19, technology and innovation were accelerating the pace of change in the labor market. As jobs were changing, new roles were being created, and new skills were emerging. Our education and workforce systems were not designed to keep up with the rate of change that was occurring. As a result, workers struggled to find jobs that matched their skill sets, and employers struggled to fill open positions. In the midst of a pandemic-induced economic crisis, labor market changes are occurring even faster, leaving millions of workers in uncharted waters and putting the careers of many into question.

To help end this current workforce crisis, and to minimize the risk of future ones, leaders from education and training institutions, businesses, workforce

and economic development agencies, CBOs, and government need to come together to reshape how we think about education and work and the systems we use to support them. This alignment will fundamentally change the entire workforce development ecosystem but will be required for us to support millions of new unemployed workers in the COVID-19 economy.

Limitations of Traditional Labor Market Information. For decades, traditional labor market information (LMI) has been the primary resource for workforce development professionals available for analyzing the workforce and understanding emerging and growth occupations. Traditional LMI is collected by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics and other government agencies and made available to the public. These data are information and publications about unemployment, job growth, and wages. While traditional LMI is extremely helpful and an essential component of labor market analytics, it is also limited in the amount of detail it captures, especially at the local level.

While state and federal agencies collect massive amounts of LMI, most data are only reported at the state, Metropolitan Statistical Area, or county level, and any data that could be linked to an individual person or a particular employer are suppressed before a dataset is made available. Local LMI, when available, is typically sparse, and the development, delivery, and processing of surveys that capture the data are time-consuming and expensive.

Additionally, labor market data collection is an ongoing process, as these data quickly become stale, an issue that has been exacerbated during the COVID-19 crisis. This is largely because traditional LMI is structured and hierarchical, with each metric tied to an occupational, industrial, or educational subcategory that rolls up into a larger category. For example, under the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system, web developers are one of 13 occupational categories that roll up to the broader category, computer occupations.¹⁴ At the end of 2019, over 4.6 million US jobs fell into this category, with web developers accounting for about only 169,000 of

those jobs.¹⁵ This mass aggregation of job roles results in a generalized dataset that lacks specificity.

Consider, for example, a welding job in the Seattle area, a region heavily influenced by the aircraft manufacturing industry, and a welding job in the Houston area, a region heavily influenced by the oil and gas industry. Both jobs are likely much different, but under the SOC system, welding jobs fall into the broader occupational category of welders, cutters, solderers, and brazers and do not capture specific skill differences between them.

The most significant weakness of the SOC system is the time lag. Revisions occur about once every 10 years (currently using the 2010 SOC—so the occupational categories being used right now were defined in 2010). Yet, a web developer job at Amazon today is likely a lot different than it was last year or it will be a year from now. “Newer” jobs such as cyber security analyst and data scientist have been widely held for a little less than a decade, so they have not yet been defined by the SOC system.

A Skill-Based Approach to Worker Classification and Labor Market Alignment. Further compounding the issues with traditional LMI is that government taxonomies, like the SOC system, are typically only used for government reporting purposes. Most people are not familiar with them. There are no standards for the job titles and job descriptions employers use. The same is true for job postings; some are quite vague while others are narrowly defined—and many are guilty of using random, almost cryptic job titles (e.g., planner I, account executive, and sales ninja).

This means workers, educators, and employers often do not speak the same language. Most people find resume writing a difficult task, not knowing how best to showcase what they know; educators have a hard time connecting what they offer to employment opportunities; and employers often struggle describing what they want in job postings. For decades, this failed communication loop among key players in this workforce ecosystem has served as a major barrier to progress and has resulted in marked labor market inefficiencies.

Best Practice Examples of Using Data-Informed Practices in Local Workforce Development

Regions should be proactive in collecting and disseminating up-to-date regional data. This is often a challenge for local communities, as federal and state data quickly become stale, a phenomenon exacerbated in the rapidly changing COVID-19 crisis. Workforce leaders should be equipped with flexible resources to use data-aggregating tools to get a more accurate picture of the job opportunities and in-demand sectors in their area. A local board in Texas has been given additional access to state unemployment insurance filing records to better identify people in need and have begun outreach and case management efforts.¹⁸ Other regions could follow this model.

While outside data sources are helpful, regional proactive data collection efforts will be an essential part of understanding and responding to true needs. In Austin, the local workforce board has

partnered with the Austin Chamber of Commerce to administer employer surveys to better understand employer needs. In the pandemic, they administered a new survey to workers affected by the shutdown and are using these data to drive training resources. In Orlando, the Orlando Economic Partnership has provided a wide range of highly accessible labor market data to employers and workers, including fact sheets by opportunity sector,¹⁹ interactive maps displaying occupation and demographic characteristics by county,²⁰ and links to job- and skill-matching resources.²¹ Proactive steps like these, and facilitating data-sharing agreements with local entities and partnerships with research institutions, will equip local leaders with a better picture of the needs in their area and provide employers and workers with crucial job-search information.

The SOC system is useful for understanding the types of jobs that exist in a given labor market, but it does not provide granular details to help stakeholders see what skills individual workers have that would enable them to succeed in a job with a different title or classification. However, classification of skills can also be challenging. While concepts such as transferable skills, skills-based hiring, hard and soft skills, and the elusive skills gap are not new, figuring out how to apply them in practice has been difficult. A recent report by a labor market analytics firm Emsi and the Strada Institute for the Future of Work introduced a new skills-based model that can support labor market alignment efforts. The report seeks to provide a new framework for reclassifying workers, not by their job titles or categories they fall under, but by the skills they bring to the table.¹⁶

Skills are the smallest unit of measure in the labor market; they are the fundamental unit of work used to define components of jobs. Job titles, degrees, and information on a resume are intended to showcase

what we know and what we can do—based on the underlying assumptions and inferences attached to such resume elements. The problem is that not everyone makes the same assumptions and inferences.

However, skills are what people “get” from training and experiences. As skills are obtained, workers then apply those skills to jobs through demonstrating competency and performance. Hence, skills and the resulting competencies individually attained are the building blocks that combine to form job roles and job duty areas. Skills are like labor market DNA; they are the building blocks for how people, occupations, employers, industries, and regions function and grow. The goal, then, is helping every worker identify his or her own “skill DNA”—or “skill shape”—that forms the basis of his or her worker profile.¹⁷

Skills clustering is a technique that helps define roles and job titles based on the network of related skills as they emerge, shift, and combine in the market.²² By applying advanced methods of statistical factor analysis and overlaying the prevalence in the

marketplace by how often they appear in job postings and resumes or professional profiles, it is possible to show how a skill's cluster "definition" or "shape" can affect roles and job titles. This type of factor analysis on skills data finds maximally informative latent topics in the data based on the relationships between skills. In other words, we find the most distinct roles as described by employers and employees in job postings, resumes, and profile data. Recent technological and analytical techniques and tools permit this analysis to be done at the national, regional, and metropolitan statistical area levels.

Enabling States with Next-Generation Labor Market Analysis and Tools. The existing LMI system is not designed to provide accurate and timely data to workforce development agencies and workers in the rapidly evolving COVID-19 labor market. Continuing to use this system in the current environment leaves state and local leaders virtually blind to what is occurring in their local economies. States need access to more granular, localized data about the skill supply and demand to bridge these information gaps and help them more effectively manage federal resources tailored at regenerating local and regional economies. Likewise, workers need access to better data about the local job market to help them identify career opportunities and make informed decisions about jobs, careers, and training opportunities as they emerge. A portion of the resources available to governors and state workforce agencies can be allocated to fund innovative LMI tools to help support rapid reemployment.

Worker Support: Flexible and Expansive Skills Training and Workforce Services

Under WIOA, workers have been limited in their ability to choose the training and skill development opportunities that best fit their needs, abilities, and opportunities. These programs are also often aligned specifically to a limited government preapproved list of training programs that limit worker choice. As demand for training services grows from

COVID-19-impacted workers, job seekers need greater flexibility on where and how to spend their training dollars, and they need access to more training providers to meet demand. For workers with significant barriers to employment (e.g., workers with language barriers, unstable living situations, and lack of stable employment), funds—either regular WIOA appropriations or special allocations from governors—should also be available for intensive case management and employment counseling services to complement training assistance.

Supporting Workers with PRAs

To respond to COVID-19-induced conditions of mass unemployment, we believe the principles of devolution and flexibility granted to governors as a public health response should be extended to workers themselves as an economic response through creating new PRAs that maximize worker choices in finding "on-ramps" to the economic recovery.

History of Worker Choice Under Workforce Investment Act and WIOA. Since the passage of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998, the federal government has funded state and local workforce authorities to provide training through Individual Training Accounts (ITA). Before the introduction of ITAs, local workforce entities funded training mainly by issuing contracts to training providers to fund slots for eligible workers seeking to improve their skills. ITAs took the opposite approach. Rather than local workforce entities deciding which training would be offered through their preferred networks, ITAs are used by workers to pay for training from a list of approved training organizations and entities including community colleges, technical schools, and private, for-profit training organizations. ITAs empower workers to determine the training options that work best for them, rather than have a local workforce staff person decide for them.

To determine the efficacy of the more flexible, worker-empowered approach, the US Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration

Table 1. The Three Service Delivery Models Tested in the ITA Experiment

	Model 1: Structured Choice	Model 2: Guided Choice	Model 3: Maximum Choice
ITA Award Structure	Customized	Fixed	Fixed
Required Counseling	Mandatory, Most Intensive	Mandatory, Moderate Intensity	Voluntary
Counselor Discretion to Reject Customer's Program Choice	Yes	No	No

Source: Irma Perez-Johnson, Quinn Moore, and Robert Santillano, *Improving the Effectiveness of Individual Training Accounts: Long-Term Findings from an Experimental Evaluation of Three Service Delivery Models*, Mathematica Policy Research, October 2011, https://wdr.doleta.gov/research/FullText_Documents/ETAOP_2012_06.pdf.

undertook an ITA research experiment with Mathematica Policy Research starting in 2005. The demonstration provided a comparison of three distinct approaches to providing worker training services. Table 1 summarizes the three approaches that were then evaluated for outcomes and evidence.

The three options deployed by local workforce entities that took part in this evaluation moved on a continuum from low to high worker autonomy in using the ITA resources. Under Model 1, ITA amounts were flexible based on individual need, with a more generous upper limit, and counseling by workforce system staff was both mandatory and intensive. Counselors had the authority to veto a worker's choice of training. ITAs under Models 2 and 3 were fixed at a less generous amount. Counseling was still required under Model 2 but was less intensive; under Model 3, counseling was voluntary. Workforce system counselors had less stringent training approval guidelines under Model 2 and could not reject a participant's training choice under Model 3.

An evaluation of program results showed that Model 1 (structured choice) participants had earned about \$500 more per quarter than Model 2 (guided choice) participants had and slightly higher earnings than Model 3 (maximum choice) participants had. These results were attributed to the higher dollar value of the ITAs that helped participants finance

more expensive trainings that were tailored to jobs with higher skill demand and pay.

Model 2 (guided choice) programs produced somewhat lower returns on investment, although it was not a statistically significant difference compared to Model 3 (maximum choice) returns. The counseling aspect of Models 1 and 2 was found to have been unevenly implemented, with system counselors often taking a more passive role and deferring training choices to the participants.

Model 3 (maximum choice) workers participated in and completed training at higher levels and were least likely to participate in employment counseling than Model 1 or 2 workers were. Overall, Model 1 (structured choice) and Model 3 (maximum choice) produced the best returns on the government's investment, having demonstrated increasing employment, wages, and tax receipts. All types of ITA recipients had relatively robust levels of long-term employment.

Overall, the ITA program has effectively helped workers identify and gain access to training opportunities that have helped them achieve success in the workforce. In the context of the COVID-19 recovery, the needs of workers will vary based on a range of socioeconomic characteristics. Many have the resources and know-how to find work, and empowering them with the resources to choose the training opportunities that best fit their skill sets and abilities

will allow them the freedom to pursue them without having to climb over unnecessary barriers. In turn, workers will reattach to the labor market faster on their own, while states focus additional resources on those who need more intensive assistance.

Applying the ITA Experience to PRAs. Conditions surrounding ITA implementation are profoundly different than those we face today. In the early 2000s, the US had just passed through a robust, internet-driven expansion and was recovering from the post-9/11 slump. At the time the Mathematica Policy Research evaluation was wrapping up, the 2008–09 financial market crisis and subsequent recession was upon the nation, leading to a significant spike in unemployment that was slow to resolve.

As the COVID-19 reopening gains momentum, and unemployment benefits begin to taper, pressure is growing for a return to work. Federal stimulus and stability programs have helped protect businesses and will allow many to return to their pre-COVID-19 jobs. However, many of the jobs that have been lost to the pandemic may never return. In the face of this, millions of others will find themselves competing with one another to find jobs in new sectors that require new skills.

In the face of this fast-approaching reality, we have little time to restructure the public workforce system and create the processes, efficiencies, and connections to training services to a level that is sufficient to meet demand. We must put money into the hands of the workers who need it most, without overburdening the public workforce system or creating administrative barriers or constraints. What is needed is a hybrid, return-to-work system that puts individual workers in control of their own training resources and provides them with the best possible LMI to help identify and secure the training and supportive services they need. This is where PRAs fit.

PRAs provide a flexible supplement to the current workforce system by offering highly flexible, worker-directed federal resources to meet the goal of enhancing access to job-training opportunities as part of a comprehensive recovery strategy. Rather than restricting workers to a predetermined list of eligible training providers, PRAs would be

paired with open-ended training options to choose the type of skills development they believe best fits their needs and available work opportunities. Such resources could be used to pay for traditional classroom-style training at a community college, vocational training at a private or for-profit institution, or on-the-job training as a stand-alone opportunity or as part of an apprenticeship program. They could also be used to help offset the cost of other kinds of education and training.

Using PRAs for on-the-job training also benefits small businesses that could integrate workers back into the workforce while gaining federal assistance for wage costs associated with training tailored precisely to their business needs. PRAs could also be used to fund “back-to-work” services such as transportation, relocation, or childcare that facilitate a labor market connection, especially for low-wage workers and families. Finally, PRAs would create a basis for addressing the long-term re-skilling and lifelong learning needs of an American workforce faced with rapid, ongoing technological change even after the COVID-19 pandemic passes.

To finance PRAs, the federal government could begin by reallocating a portion of the federal Pandemic Unemployment Assistance benefit, which currently amounts to \$600 per week, to the PRA. This converts some or all of this benefit from an “unemployment” benefit to a worker transition benefit. Appropriated stimulus funds to governors would also support PRAs for workers in key regions or sectors where a large number has been dislocated by the shutdown. After the immediacy of the need for PRAs to help workers with reentry into the workforce, Congress should continue to authorize WIOA funds for these accounts to support the lifelong learning and upward mobility of workers through future education and skills development. If they were structured as tax-exempt accounts similar to individual retirement accounts, employers and workers could also make regular contributions to help build the PRAs over time as a way of cushioning against future layoffs while supporting retraining and reemployment needs.

Perhaps the most important benefit of PRAs is the relative ease with which they can be adapted to

individual circumstances and help triage other more limited workforce resources toward those in greatest need. For those with significant work history and good skills, PRAs would accelerate reemployment by addressing immediate, short-term obstacles to work such as transportation, relocation, or childcare. For workers who need additional skills training, PRAs, when combined with advanced LMI, would be especially useful to identify in-demand occupations and the training required to qualify for such jobs. For those who are at the entry level or have significant barriers to employment, PRAs could be combined with traditional WIOA career services to address non-training needs and provide case management support to those struggling to make their way in the post-COVID-19 economy.

While we promote maximum worker flexibility in choosing the appropriate training needed for employment, we also recognize many workers may want assistance and longer-term career planning. In those instances, PRAs could be used to purchase employment and training counseling from community colleges, local workforce development programs and staff, or CBOs.

Expansion of Training Options

As we have documented in the past, training options for workers can be quickly created or modified if not mired in bureaucratic red tape and traditional college-based accreditation requirements.²³ Given the current, unprecedented need to provide workers with quick-response training options, a maximum number of quality training options should be made available to connect workers to real-time LMI and employers who are hiring.

To advance and promote the expansion of training options in communities at varying stages of reopening and job availability, federal and state governments can implement a series of crucial actions.

Waiving Federal Training Provider Eligibility Requirements. WIOA requires that institutions and individual training programs be part of a state eligible training provider list (ETPL). Under the regulations,

the US Department of Labor defines the ETPL as “a compilation of the programs of training services for which ITAs can be used.”²⁴ Therefore, WIOA training funds can only be used on training programs that are on the ETPL and have gone through the state application process.

In light of the impending surge in demand, this requirement will limit important and rapid training options to promote a quick return to work. Funds provided to workers for PRAs should not be subject to ETPL requirements. Rather, states should develop broad parameters to promote acceptable training programs that offer recognized academic or industry credentials but, more importantly, provide workers with quick skills upgrades provided by training institutions, community organizations, and employers themselves. States should also provide guidance to help workers make informed decisions about the training programs they choose to participate in but should not limit them to a narrow list of training options available. Additionally, local workforce system professionals should not be dissuaded from directing PRA holders to high-quality, affordable-cost options at community colleges. The maximum choice ideal for PRAs does not mean transparent information should be withheld from PRA holders.

Promoting Training Programs with Industry-Recognized Credentials or On-the-Job Training.

Our research has demonstrated the efficacy of non-credit training programs tied to industry-recognized credentials. These programs often have a higher return on investment for trainees and can be accomplished in much shorter periods than traditional academic-based training programs can be.

More recognition is being given to credentials, including industry-recognized credentials that are tied directly to standards defined by employers and industry associations. Initiatives, such as Credential Engine, are working to foster transparency in credentialing, especially through technology, and promote a more robust credential marketplace.²⁵ Exposing workers in transition to credential options and language during COVID-19 reopening is an important short- and long-term solution to giving people

“currency” that speaks to employers and can be used to build skills and gain other competencies through lifelong learning.

Intensive Workforce Services for Workers with Multiple Barriers

While many workers will be able to use the resources above to develop their own return-to-work plan, some in the hardest-to-serve socioeconomic groups will need much more support. These workers already struggled to find and maintain family-sustaining employment in a booming 3 percent unemployment economy. Many of these workers also were often employed in low-wage, service-sector jobs that will likely take a long time to recover and will be in search of alternative options. If not addressed, their unique needs may be overlooked underneath a growing pile of case files and service demand.

WIOA and WIA were primarily established to serve unemployed and underemployed workers. WIOA Titles I–IV provide funds for job-training services to adult, youth, and dislocated workers and employment services, adult education and literacy, and vocational rehabilitation for individuals with disabilities.²⁶ These dollars will be stretched thin, and traditional training options will be backlogged by new workers turning to the workforce system for help, potentially excluding the most vulnerable from services.

Regional leaders should begin thinking now about how to enhance training pipelines for workers with less work history, significant barriers to employment, and individuals with disabilities. One use for our innovation funds concept is to develop the integrated services necessary to serve these vulnerable populations. New partnerships between local workforce development professionals and one-stop system partners and CBOs will be essential to providing the tailored training, case management, and wraparound supports often needed for successful job placement for these populations. To ensure strategic consideration, state workforce agencies could require each workforce board to submit a COVID-19 service strategy for vulnerable populations.

Tailoring Solutions to Vulnerable Populations.

As research has shown, there are few shortcuts to building the employability skills that are crucial to a successful career. In addition to little work history, many disadvantaged workers suffer from a lack of self-efficacy, adequate information, and networks to navigate the world of work.²⁷ Recent research has shown a growing body of successful programs—such as EMPATH Mobility Mentoring,²⁸ Project QUEST,²⁹ and WorkAdvance³⁰—that combine long-term case management with “soft” and technical skill training. Many of these organizations encourage acquisition of community college credentials that take longer to earn but tend to provide better career footing.

If viewed thoughtfully, this crisis could present a unique moment to build new pathways for particularly vulnerable individuals, providing them with priority access to, and encouraging enrollment in, longer-term programs that can lead to middle-skill, middle-wage jobs, rather than funneling them toward quick upskilling options likely to be clogged with more experienced workers. Moneys from the PRA and one-stop innovation fund could be allocated to training tuition and wraparound services such as childcare and transportation for additional support.

Expanding Access and Outreach.

As more resources go digital, local providers will need to find innovative ways to provide broadband access to low-income and vulnerable workers and expand training for digital literacy. Recent Pew research found nearly 73 percent of American adults have broadband access at home. The “last mile” of the broadband gap disproportionately affects low-income and rural households and people of color.³¹ State governments should prioritize efforts to establish clear broadband oversight structures, provide additional funding, and reduce barriers to service providers in the broadband market.³² Locally, school districts have been paving the way in increasing access, deploying buses with mobile Wi-Fi to underserved areas, creating local hot spots, and partnering with cable and telephone services to provide affordable (or free) data plans.³³ Local workforce leaders should borrow from this playbook, partnering with school districts, nonprofits, public

library systems, and employers to expand access to more homes.

Finally, in a time of significant digital “noise,” workforce leaders should consider new strategies to provide vulnerable workers with accurate information on where to go to receive services. Low-income Americans use social media at a similar rate as their well-off counterparts do, and over 70 percent of adults earning under \$30,000 have a smartphone.³⁴ In addition to traditional mediums of communication, targeted social media campaigns, advertisements, and online resources tailored to mobile phone users should be used to provide workers with training information.³⁵

Conclusion: Getting America Back to Work

The pace of change and uncertainty of the COVID-19 economy emphasizes the need for state and job seeker flexibility. Those closest to the problems are those best equipped with the knowledge and skills to address them, and these principles must be applied in future legislation designed to get Americans back to work.

Governors should have the ability to shift resources to economic regions that have the greatest need and require adaptation as local conditions change. By extension, workers know their path back to work best and should be empowered to align their interests and opportunities. A national response should be regional in nature and provide the data, tools, and resources necessary to bolster our country’s overall economic health.

About the Authors

Brent Orrell is a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, where he works on job training, workforce development, and criminal justice reform. He was nominated by President George W. Bush to become assistant secretary of the Employment and Training Administration of the US Department of Labor (DOL) and served as the director for the Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives at DOL.

Mason M. Bishop is an adjunct fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and the owner of WorkED Consulting. He was previously appointed as deputy assistant secretary in the US Department of Labor’s Employment and Training Administration during the George W. Bush administration. His current work focuses on employment and postsecondary education policy.

John Hawkins is the director of Workforce Development and a senior consultant at Emsi. His work focuses on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of workforce development practices through strategic labor market data and real-time data analytics.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank Matthew Leger, research analyst at the American Enterprise Institute, for his support in research and editing for this report.

© 2020 by the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research. All rights reserved.

The American Enterprise Institute (AEI) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, 501(c)(3) educational organization and does not take institutional positions on any issues. The views expressed here are those of the author(s).

Notes

1. Gene L. Dodaro, “Government Efficiency and Effectiveness: Opportunities to Reduce Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication and Achieve Billions in Financial Benefits,” testimony before the Subcommittee on Federal Spending Oversight and Emergency Management, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, US Senate, May 21, 2019, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/699214.pdf>.
2. Mason M. Bishop, “Landscape Study of Federal Employment and Training Programs,” American Enterprise Institute, January 28, 2020, <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/landscape-study-of-federal-employment-and-training-programs/>.
3. Susan Lund et al., “Lives and Livelihoods: Assessing the Near-Term Impact of COVID-19 on US Workers,” McKinsey & Company, April 2, 2020, <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-sector/our-insights/lives-and-livelihoods-assessing-the-near-term-impact-of-covid-19-on-us-workers>.
4. Abigail Hess, “Study Finds 44% of U.S. Unemployment Applicants Have Been Denied or Are Still Waiting,” CNBC, May 15, 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/05/15/44percent-of-us-unemployment-applicants-have-been-denied-or-are-waiting.html>.
5. Brent Orrell, “Don’t Attack Pandemic Unemployment. It Did What It Was Meant to Do.,” RealClearPolicy, June 3, 2020, https://www.realclearpolicy.com/articles/2020/06/03/dont_attack_pandemic_unemployment_compensation_it_did_what_it_was_meant_to_do_495076.html.
6. H. Plecher, “Distribution of the Workforce Across Economic Sectors in the United States from 2009 to 2019,” Statista, July 15, 2020, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/270072/distribution-of-the-workforce-across-economic-sectors-in-the-united-states/#:~:text=The%20statistic%20shows%20the%20distribution,and%2079.41%20percent%20in%20services>.
7. Bishop, “Landscape Study of Federal Employment and Training Programs.”
8. American Enterprise Institute, “Employment and Job-Training Reform: A Framework for Policy and Practice,” <https://www.aei.org/employment-and-job-training-reform/>.
9. David H. Bradley, “The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and the One-Stop Delivery Service,” Congressional Research Service, October 27, 2015, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R44252.pdf>.
10. Mason M. Bishop and Caleb Seibert, “Sector Strategies in Austin: A Case Study in Workforce Planning,” American Enterprise Institute, April 6, 2020, <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/sector-strategies-in-austin-a-case-study-in-workforce-planning/>.
11. Talent Forward, “Strengthening the Talent Pipeline,” <https://www.forwardontalent.org/stories/greaterhoustonpartnership/>.
12. Bruce Katz and Megan Humes, “West Philadelphia Skills Initiative: A Model for Urban Workforce Development,” Drexel University, Nowak Metro Finance Lab, <https://drexel.edu/nowak-lab/publications/case-studies/WPSI-city-case/>.
13. Kelsey Schaberg, “Can Sector Strategies Promote Longer-Term Effects? Three-Year Impacts from the WorkAdvance Demonstration,” MDRC, September 2017, https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/WorkAdvance_3-Year_Brief.pdf.
14. For example, the Standard Occupational Classification System groups all US workers into one of about 900 occupational categories based on the primary duties of the individuals working those jobs. Each category can then be further grouped into broader, more generalized categories.
15. Emsi, website, www.economicmodeling.com.
16. Clare Coffey, “A New Geography of Skills,” Emsi, December 10, 2019, <https://www.economicmodeling.com/2019/12/10/162749/>.
17. Coffey, “A New Geography of Skills.”
18. Tamara Atkinson (CEO, Workforce Solutions Capital Area), in discussion with the author.
19. Orlando Economic Partnership, “Data and Downloads,” <https://business.orlando.org/l/data-downloads/>.
20. Orlando Economic Partnership, “Properties,” <https://properties.orlando.org/?sorting=featured%20desc,%20name%20asc&showpropertyonmap=true>.
21. Orlando Economic Partnership, “COVID-19 Assistance Center,” <https://business.orlando.org/l/coronavirus-business-assistance-center/>.

22. Joshua Wright, “Skill Clusters: A Better Way to Market and Match Your Region’s Talent to Companies,” Emsi, September 12, 2019, <https://www.economicmodeling.com/2019/09/12/skill-clusters-a-better-way-to-market-and-match-your-regions-talent-to-companies/>.
23. Mason M. Bishop, “Addressing the Employment Challenge: The Use of Postsecondary Noncredit Training in Skills Development,” American Enterprise Institute, March 7, 2019, <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/addressing-the-employment-challenge-the-use-of-postsecondary-noncredit-training-in-skills-development/>.
24. US Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, “Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act; Final Rule,” *Federal Register* 81, no. 161 (August 19, 2016): 56125, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2016-08-19/html/2016-15975.htm>.
25. Credential Engine, “About Us,” <https://credentialengine.org/about/>.
26. Bradley, “The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and the One-Stop Delivery Service.”
27. Marcela Escobari, Ian Seyal, and Michael Meaney, “Realism About Reskilling: Upgrading the Career Prospects of America’s Low-Wage Workers,” Brookings Institution, December 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Realism-About-Reskilling-Final-Report.pdf>.
28. Elisabeth Babcock, “Using Brain Science to Transform Human Services and Increase Personal Mobility from Poverty,” US Partnership on Mobility from Poverty, March 2018, <https://www.mobilitypartnership.org/using-brain-science-transform-human-services-and-increase-personal-mobility-poverty>.
29. Anne Roder and Mark Elliott, “Nine Year Gains: Project QUEST’s Continuing Impact,” Economic Mobility Corporation, April 2019, <https://economicmobilitycorp.org/nine-year-gains-project-quests-continuing-impact/>.
30. MDRC, “WorkAdvance,” <https://www.mdrc.org/project/workadvance#overview>.
31. Office of Science and Technology Policy and the National Economic Council, “Four Years of Broadband Growth,” White House, June 2013, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/broadband_report_final.pdf; Anne Stauffer and Kathryn de Wit, “How States Are Expanding Broadband Access,” Pew Charitable Trusts, February 27, 2020, <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/2020/02/how-states-are-expanding-broadband-access>; and Monica Anderson, “Mobile Technology and Home Broadband 2019,” Pew Research Center, June 13, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2019/06/13/mobile-technology-and-home-broadband-2019/>.
32. Kathryn de Wit, Anna Read, and Dan Kitson, “Progress Made by States in 2019 Is Key to Increasing Broadband,” Pew Charitable Trust, April 23, 2020, <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2020/04/23/progress-made-by-states-in-2019-is-key-to-increasing-broadband>.
33. Kaicey Baylor, “IALR Partners with Danville Public Schools Helps to Provide WiFi to Students,” WSET, May 12, 2020, <https://wset.com/news/coronavirus/ialr-partners-with-danville-public-schools-helps-to-provide-wifi-to-students>; Click2Houston.com, “Texas School District Deployed over 100 School Buses Equipped with WiFi for Students Without Internet Access,” April 15, 2020, <https://www.click2houston.com/news/local/2020/04/15/texas-school-district-deployed-over-100-school-buses-equipped-with-wifi-for-students-without-internet-access/>; Journal Staff, “Updated: Free WiFi for Online Learning During COVID-19,” *Journal*, June 20, 2020, <https://thejournal.com/articles/2020/04/30/free-wifi-for-online-learning-during-covid19.aspx>; and Zach Jablonski, “Schools, Community Organizations Provide Internet Access,” *Peninsula Daily News*, May 10, 2020, <https://www.peninsuladailynews.com/news/schools-community-organizations-provide-internet-access/>.
34. Andrew Perrin and Monica Anderson, “Share of U.S. Adults Using Social Media, Including Facebook, Is Mostly Unchanged Since 2018,” Pew Research Center, April 10, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/10/share-of-u-s-adults-using-social-media-including-facebook-is-mostly-unchanged-since-2018/>.
35. Amanda Bergson-Shilcock, “COVID-19 Shines a Spotlight on Digital Skills: Updates and Key Questions for Advocates and Policymakers,” National Skills Coalition, April 21, 2020, <https://nationalskillscoalition.org/news/blog/covid-19-shines-a-spotlight-on-digital-skills-updates-and-key-questions-for-advocates-and-policymakers>.