

# SKILLS FOR GOOD JOBS AGENDA 2020

## Steps Congress and the administration can take to stand behind America's greatest asset: **ITS PEOPLE**

Over half of jobs in the U.S. require training beyond high school but not a four-year degree. These skilled jobs are the backbone of America's economy, and filling them is critical to America's success in the 21st century. And every day, in communities coast to coast, working people, students, and families are looking for opportunities to get ahead. But because too many of them have limited access to training, businesses are struggling to hire skilled workers — people trained for jobs in growing industries like healthcare, medical technology, IT and software, and advanced manufacturing — as well as tradespeople like plumbers and electricians.

The impact of technology, automation, and AI on the workplace is only going to exacerbate this challenge. Over 100 million workers will need to be upskilled in the coming decades to adapt to these changes. And our nation's skill challenge is deepened by the ongoing effects of policies that have caused racial disparities in educational attainment, employment, and income. Skills policies have a crucial role in helping to remedy these effects, especially as the American workforce continues to diversify and racial workforce diversity continues to be a driver of economic growth.



**NATIONAL SKILLS COALITION**  
Every worker. Every industry. A strong economy.



# Industry-driven, worker-centered policy solutions

In recent years, Congress has taken important, bipartisan steps to reauthorize the Perkins Career and Technical Education Act and increase investments in adult education, apprenticeship, and other workforce programs. But we can't stop there. National Skills Coalition's 2020 legislative agenda identifies key steps policymakers can take to ensure that the federal government partners with businesses and organizations working in communities across the country to elevate skills to a level of national prominence and attention.

## Invest in America's greatest asset – our workers

**ACTION: Increase funding for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) workforce and adult education grants and state career and technical education grants at least to historic funding levels.**



**85% of voters and 79% of business leaders** want Congress to make new, public investments in skills training.

According to the White House Council of Economic Advisors, the U.S. underinvests in worker training compared to virtually all other developed economies, and Congress has made it worse by slashing funds for state job training grants by 40 percent since 2001. Correcting this underinvestment in skills is critical to workers, businesses, and our nation's ability to compete in a global economy.

## Modernize postsecondary education to maximize student success and meet business demand

**ACTION: Pass the JOBS Act to make Pell grants available for high-quality, short-term training programs that lead to in-demand jobs.**



**86% of voters and 64% of business leaders** want Congress to expand federal financial aid to anyone seeking skills training, not just those seeking college degrees.

Our 40-year-old federal financial aid system doesn't support workers seeking high quality, short-term credentials — credentials employers look for when they hire and that help our workforce upskill throughout their career in the face of changing technology. These programs can increase earnings by 30 percent or more compared to a high school diploma and in some fields, average earnings can exceed average earnings of those with a four-year degree. The JOBS Act would expand federal financial aid to high-quality short-term programs.

**ACTION: Pass the College Transparency Act to make data transparent for informed decision making.**



**66% of business leaders** say it will help their business to make user-friendly data publicly available.

Workers, businesses, and policymakers don't have access to the data that shows which education and training programs are preparing prospective employees to meet the needs of their industry. The College Transparency Act would ensure all of them can see which postsecondary programs are giving people the skills they need for existing jobs.

**ACTION: Pass the Community College to Career Fund Act to help businesses partner with community colleges.**



**92% voters and 77% of business leaders** support policies that create closer links between community colleges and businesses to train people for in-demand jobs.

Community and technical colleges partner with business and industry to provide high-quality training. But there is no dedicated federal support to sustain these partnerships. The Community College to Career Fund Act would provide that support.

**ACTION: Pass the Gateway to Careers Act to establish a "career pathways" fund to help workers complete their training.**



**81% of voters** support increased government funding for support services to help people finish skills training programs and **64% of business leaders** say this action will help their business.

Adults balancing full-time work and family obligations are a rapidly growing segment of today's community college enrollments. Many states have established strategies to connect students to career pathways models that combine basic and occupation skills training; career counseling and case management; and services like childcare and transportation assistance. The Gateway to Careers Act builds on these efforts.

## Expand work-based learning opportunities for all workers and all businesses

**ACTION: Pass the PARTNERS Act to support local, industry-led partnerships critical to expanding work-based learning for more businesses and workers.**



**92% of voters and 77% of business leaders support policy that would bring together industry and local practitioners to train local residents for in-demand jobs.**

Partnerships between industry, education providers, the workforce system, and community organizations help local partners efficiently leverage public funding, share information and best practices, and better serve workers and employers. But there is no sustainable federal investment in supporting these partnerships. The PARTNERS Act would provide this investment.

**ACTION: Pass the SKILL UP Act to amend the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) to empower businesses to invest in workers most in need of skills training.**



**90% of voters and 74% of businesses support targeted tax incentives for businesses that invest in skills training.**

Millions of jobs remain open because workers don't have an opportunity to develop necessary skills, but tax policy isn't currently structured to empower businesses to invest in workers who need it the most. The Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) supports hiring workers with barriers to employment, but does little to offset the costs of employer-provided training. The SKILL UP Act would address this.

## Rebuild our nation's infrastructure workforce

**ACTION: Pass the BUILDS Act to include job training and support services as part of any new federal infrastructure investment.**



**93% of voters support increased investment in job training and 81% support increased investment in support services.**

There is bipartisan support for significant new investments in our nation's roads, bridges, and other infrastructure. These efforts could create millions of new construction, manufacturing, IT, and utility sector jobs in the coming years, nearly half of which would require training beyond high school. To meet this demand, we must increase support for apprenticeships and work-based learning as well as services like childcare and transportation that ensure workers can succeed in these programs. The BUILDS Act would address this.

## Address the future of work, today

**ACTION: Ensure every worker has the reskilling to stay ahead of future workplace technologies and support a universal reemployment system that ensures all displaced workers a bridge to a new career.**



**89% of voters want our nation's skills policies to ensure that workers impacted by automation can upskill to keep their current job or retrain for new jobs.**

More than 60 percent of jobs are going to significantly change because of technological advancement in the workplace and another 10-20 percent of jobs will be eliminated. This means nearly 100 million workers will need to reskill or upskill to stay in the workforce. Congress must ensure workers and businesses are prepared by modernizing the Higher Education Act, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, Trade Adjustment Assistance for Workers, the tax code, and data policies.

## Modernize our public workforce system to prepare workers for jobs of the 21st century

**ACTION: Reauthorize the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to better serve businesses, workers, and our economy.**

In today's dynamic economy, businesses face an unrelenting demand for skilled workers, and yet workers too often are unable to access training that leads to a good job. Congress should reauthorize WIOA, with an improved focus on industry or sector partnerships, integrated education and training, career pathways, greater access to industry recognized, postsecondary credentials that are valued by employers, and alignment with work-based learning opportunities to ensure workers have access to good jobs and support business efforts to develop talent pipelines of skilled workers.

## Take a skills-based approach to poverty reduction

**ACTION: Modernize the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program by expanding training opportunities and shifting to an outcomes-based approach instead of work requirements.**



**85% of voters and 65% of business leaders support policies that make it easier for workers receiving government assistance to access training and supports necessary to get a family sustaining job.**

More than 80 percent of today's jobs require postsecondary education and training, but less than 10 percent of adult TANF recipients have education past high school. At the same time, TANF work requirements have not lifted people out of poverty because they encourage workers to take low-wage jobs rather than training for a family supporting job. And there is no evidence that work requirements help meet employers' need for skilled workers. Congress should update TANF to

expand access to high-quality training that leads to a career. Congress should also reject calls to expand work requirements in federal programs and transition TANF and other programs to an outcome-based performance measure more closely aligned with WIOA common measures. This measure would include employment in the short and longer-term, earnings level and skill gains and any transition would need sufficient time and resources occur.

## Allow all workers – including Dreamers – to contribute their skills and build long-term futures in the United States

**ACTION: Pass the Dream and Promise Act and ensure a skills training pathway pathway to citizenship.**



**76% of voters support a path to citizenship for Dreamers.**

There are roughly 2.3 million immigrant Dreamers in the United States. These workers are critical to meeting business demand for skilled workers, including for workers with some postsecondary education past high school, but not a four-year degree. Ongoing federal policy changes have created uncertainty that burdens these young workers and their employers. Congress is the only entity that can provide a path to permanent status and citizenship for Dreamers, and it is imperative that this include a pathway to citizenship for Dreamers who are working in or studying for jobs that require training past high school. The House passed HR 6, the Dream and Promise Act, in 2019. Now the Senate needs to act.

**ACTION: Encourage immigrant integration through greater access to workforce services.**

As legally authorized immigrants become more integrated in the U.S., they earn higher wages and can contribute more to our economy. The public workforce system can support greater integration, but New Americans are underrepresented among workers served by training programs. Congress should pass policy that supports best practices developed by states for improving workforce services to immigrants: partnerships with immigrant serving organizations, prior learning and credential assessments that take into account credentials earned abroad, and integrated education and training classes that teach English in an occupation context.