



Business Leaders United
for Workforce Partnerships

AN INDUSTRY-DRIVEN SKILLS AGENDA



FOR THE 116TH CONGRESS

Across the country, businesses are struggling to hire skilled workers — people trained for jobs in industries like healthcare, medical technology, IT and software, and advanced manufacturing — as well as for jobs in the trades like plumbers and electricians. Nearly two-thirds (62%) of business leaders say it is difficult to find skilled workers they need to fill open jobs today.

The impact of technology, automation, and artificial intelligence on the workplace is only going to exacerbate this challenge. Reports suggest nearly 60 percent of jobs will be significantly impacted by the future of work and a smaller, but still significant, number will be displaced. Combined, this means more than 90 million workers will need training to stay in their industry or find a new job. Yet, our federal policies don't adequately support businesses as they work to fill middle-skill job openings or empower workers who are ready to take their career to the next level.

These jobs are the backbone of America's economy, and filling them is critical to America's success in the 21st century economy. Leaders of small and mid-size businesses — the engines of local economies — support policy solutions that would expand investments in higher education, work-based learning, and in students and workers who need supports as they earn critical skills.

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. We can't stop there.

As business leaders, we are making investments in our workforce every day. But we can't do it alone. The Business Leaders United Skills Agenda for the 116th Congress identifies tangible steps policymakers can take to help advance national skills policies that work for our country's businesses, workers, and economy.

Invest in skills to prepare our country to compete in a global, 21st century economy

ACTION: *Increase funding for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) workforce and adult education grants and state career and technical education grants to at least FY2020 authorized levels.*

Current funding levels fall below those authorized in legislation, represent significant cuts from past levels, and pale in comparison to the investment other industrialized countries are making in their own workforces. **Seventy-nine percent of business leaders** support new, public investments in skills. Increasing investment in skills training will lay the groundwork to get more workers into good-paying jobs and will ensure businesses have the workforce we need to survive and grow.



Support local, industry-driven workforce programs that help businesses fill open positions today

ACTION: *Reauthorize the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and support training, retention, and advancement of workers at all skill levels*

In today's dynamic economy, companies face an unrelenting demand for skilled workers, especially for middle-skill jobs—those which require education or training beyond high school, but not a four-year degree. Reauthorizing WIOA, with a focus on industry or sector partnerships, greater access to industry recognized, postsecondary credentials that are valued by employers, and alignment with work-based learning opportunities will support business efforts to develop talent pipelines of skilled workers to meet future demand and promote industry growth and competitiveness.

Make the higher education system work for students and employers

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

Our forty-year-old federal financial aid system doesn't support workers seeking high quality, short-term credentials – credentials employers look for when they hire. **Sixty-four percent of business leaders** say expanding federal financial aid to anyone seeking skills training, not just those seeking college degrees, would help their business.

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

Business leaders 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. **Sixty-six percent of business leaders** say it will help their business to make user-friendly data available so that everyone can see which postsecondary programs are giving people the skills they need for existing jobs.

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

Businesses partner with community colleges to provide high-quality training. But there is no dedicated federal support to sustain these partnerships. **Seventy-seven percent of business leaders** say investments in partnerships like these would help to create closer links between community colleges and businesses to better train people for the jobs for which businesses are hiring.

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

Many workers struggle to complete training without supports like career counseling, childcare, or transportation, yet providing these services is outside of business' expertise or capacity. **Sixty-four percent of business leaders** say increased government funding for support services to help people persist and succeed in their skills training programs would help their business.



Expand work-based learning opportunities to train the workforce of tomorrow, today

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

Many businesses lack the resources to develop work-based learning programs on their own or to support the success of workers in these programs. Industry or sector partnerships reduce burdens on businesses by supporting stakeholder collaboration and increasing access to programs for the broadest pipeline of workers. **Seventy-seven percent of businesses** say it would help their business to create closer links between education providers and businesses to train people for the jobs needed by regional industry.

ACTION: *Pass the SKILL UP Act to empower businesses to invest in workers most in need of 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 stimulate businesses to invest in workers who need it the most — including veterans, out-of-school youth, and the long-term unemployed. **Seventy-four percent of business leaders** say their businesses would benefit from targeted tax incentives for investments in skills training for these workers.

Strengthen our nation's infrastructure workforce by helping workers succeed in demand-driven skills training

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

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 these jobs would require some education and training beyond high school. To meet this demand we will need to ramp up our support for apprenticeships and other demand strategies as well as services like childcare and transportation that ensure workers can succeed in these programs.

Business Leaders United for Workforce Partnerships (BLU) is comprised of employers from a range of industries across the nation who are concerned about our nation's skills gap, who are working with local partners to train and hire community residents for skilled jobs, and who want our country's policymakers to follow suit and invest — aggressively and effectively — in the skills of America's workers. Business Leaders United is a project of National Skills Coalition and the National Fund for Workforce Solutions.

Please contact KatieS@nationalskillscoalition.org with any questions.



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