



AMERICAN WORKFORCE POLICY ADVISORY BOARD

Investing in American Workers to Expedite Economic Recovery

A CALL-TO-ACTION BY THE
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An Urgency to Act

The COVID-19 crisis continues to impact the U.S. economy in unprecedented ways; putting millions out of work, forcing businesses large and small to make drastic cuts, and fundamentally remaking every aspect of U.S. productivity. The unparalleled nature of the pandemic has profound consequences for the American workforce. Over 30 million workers have filed for unemployment due to COVID-19, and countless millions more have seen a fundamental change to their work environment, including many who now work remotely.

But amid this seismic shift in the landscape of work, the American economy and spirit are resilient. Industries and individuals alike have shown innovation and flexibility: manufacturers reorienting product lines and processes, service-sector jobs aligning to fortify the frontlines, and educators ensuring learning continues uninterrupted by adopting new online approaches overnight.

This pandemic has highlighted the need to provide critical support to American workers. It is essential to connect displaced workers to upskilling and reskilling pathways and ensure they have access to the online tools and distance learning they will need to guide them toward good jobs in rebounding fields as the health crisis abates and the economy begins to recover.

In response, immediate and unprecedented investments in American workers and the pathways necessary for them to get back to work are needed to expedite the U.S. economic recovery.

A shared, coordinated, sustained effort by government, business, labor, education, and others is profoundly urgent. To this end, the American Workforce Policy Advisory Board calls on all these stakeholders to embrace and immediately undertake a **National Workforce Recovery Call-to-Action** to help the millions of workers who need assistance now, and build the resilient and agile workforce of the future powered by skilled American workers.

Getting America Back to Work — A National Workforce Recovery Call-to-Action

The American Workforce Policy Advisory Board, comprised of leaders from government, education, industry, and labor was convened prior to the pandemic to help reshape the nation's education and skills-based training landscape. Now, amidst and deeply affected by this crisis, the Advisory Board's charge of promoting multiple pathways to employment, increasing data transparency and relevance, modernizing recruitment practices, and encouraging employer investments has never been more important to improving the conditions of America's workers, students, and employers. While the Advisory Board will put forward formal recommendations later this summer, this call-to-action to enable Americans to re-enter the workforce cannot wait.

The Advisory Board's call-to-action is organized around three immediate and enduring workforce recovery goals:

- I.** Expedite American workers' return to employment and upward mobility by investing in career pathways and implementing skills-based hiring practices
- II.** Remove obstacles to the modernization of American education and training to accelerate reskilling and facilitate innovation in workforce development
- III.** Build the technological infrastructure necessary for the future of work

I. Expedite American workers' return to employment and upward mobility by investing in career pathways and implementing skills-based hiring practices

Connecting all American workers to good jobs, and employers to talented workers, is the most pressing objective of the Advisory Board. Immediate matching of displaced workers to open jobs is the first order of action. While many jobs will return as businesses are able to reopen, there is a critical need to prioritize education and training alignment with workforce needs.

Our nation must immediately build and expand high-quality pathways that will lead to good jobs and careers for all Americans, especially for those most impacted economically by the crisis. These pathways must be direct and enable a lifelong education-to-opportunity journey that leads to lasting economic mobility and success. The workforce development programs supporting these pathways must stand the tests of relevancy, validity, reliability, and accessibility to ensure all Americans can learn, grow, and benefit from these experiences.

Specific Actions:

- Federal, state, and local governments must prioritize resources to assist those American workers displaced by the pandemic. All Americans must have access to training and reskilling opportunities that lead to lasting economic mobility and success.

- State and local government must facilitate partnerships between employers and education providers to efficiently connect displaced workers to jobs through employer-led training models as the economy begins to recover and businesses reopen. Frictionless hiring practices that prioritize skills and competencies must be embraced, and pathways to jobs should be based on “skills first.”
- Education and training providers must facilitate pathways for immediately retraining and reskilling workers for in-demand fields highlighted by COVID-19, such as healthcare, manufacturing supply chain, maintenance and other trades, IT, and infrastructure. Going forward, these training programs should also contain information on health and safety protocols required for workers to protect themselves from COVID-19.
- Federal, state, and local government must incentivize employers to facilitate pathway developments by investing in education and training for all American workers including those from non-traditional backgrounds to widen the talent pool. This can occur through an array of existing and new public- and private-sector investments including changing the way employer-led training costs are treated from an accounting perspective to encourage further investment.
- All workforce stakeholders and policymakers must embrace a new generation of pathways to opportunity including short-duration, competency-based, earn-while-you-learn, on-the-job, and apprenticeship programs that can be expanded rapidly and stack into future opportunities. These new pathways must define outcomes based on skills and competencies developed on the job and provide credit for prior learning. They must also provide critical onramps to these pathways including career coaching and counseling, especially to individuals who are most at risk as a result of the pandemic.
- All workforce stakeholders and policymakers must prioritize support for America’s most vulnerable youth, teens, and young-adults to prepare them for their employment future. These include expanding out-of-school community programs that develop essential workplace skills, promote the exploration of multiple career pathways, and create work-based learning opportunities.
- The private sector must promote and invest in research related to advancing the use of learning technologies. Virtual and online learning must be more accessible and cost-effective for American workers and training providers to create more opportunities for upskilling and reskilling.
- The private sector must lead a national awareness campaign to connect American workers to jobs through this new generation of pathways to opportunity. Employers and jobseekers more than ever must be able to find and access multiple pathways to career success.

II. Remove obstacles to the modernization of American education and training to accelerate reskilling and facilitate innovation in workforce development

Workforce demands are changing dramatically—a reality accelerated by the pandemic. Technological advances alter the models, methods, and even the value proposition of education and training, along with the need to evolve regulatory structures to keep pace with and facilitate innovation in education and training. The pandemic has created an extreme urgency to modernize many important but dated regulations.

Now is the time to boldly embrace new modes of delivery that are online and virtual, new types of credentials that are stackable, portable, and widely available, and new methods of learning that are skills- and competency-based to better serve American workers. These should be applied across the full spectrum of lifelong, skills-based training categories, including initial skills training, job maintenance training, up-skilling, and employee development. They should fit the needs of different learners from young students to mid-career workers.

Specific Actions:

- Federal, state, and local governments must unleash innovation by eliminating unnecessary regulations that impair workforce economic and geographic mobility. Efforts to streamline occupational licensing, education requirements, reduce the cost of licensing, and increase reciprocity will enhance mobility and prosperity.
- The federal government must allow student financial aid for high-quality, short-term, market-aligned credential programs that stack into lifelong learning opportunities.
- Education and training providers must partner with government to promote high-quality educational opportunities by measuring and publishing outcome data. This includes measuring skill acquisition and making such information more readily available for learner and employer use. A focus on outcomes allows education and training providers to innovate and embrace new and more effective ways to serve the American worker.
- Education and training stakeholders must unite to assist American workers and learners in completing credentials by ending transfer credit loss. This will allow working learners with accrued credits to earn degrees and certifications more immediately. It will also create a strong foundation for lifelong learning and economic mobility for American workers.

III. Build the technological infrastructure necessary for the future of work

Our nation cannot achieve a satisfactory post-pandemic recovery unless the technological infrastructure is in place to connect and empower all Americans to participate in the workforce. Just as the development of the interstate highway system changed almost every aspect of American life, from culture to commerce, this new technology infrastructure will have a dramatic impact on the way America operates.

This pandemic is underscoring the wide-ranging impact of existing disparities in access to technology, broadband, and digital literacy from how and whether students can access remote learning options to an individual's ability to access telehealth, access new opportunities previously unavailable, and engage regularly in the digital economy. This inequity must be resolved to provide access to opportunity for all Americans.

Specific Actions:

- Initiate an unprecedented investment in digital infrastructure. The government and private sector must work collaboratively to deploy a once-in-a-generation infrastructure campaign to provide all Americans with affordable, high-speed access to online healthcare, education, and retail.
- Develop a digital open skills system for American workers and students. Such a system will align the skills and competencies needed to effectively connect education-to-work that does not exist today. It will guide learners and workers to available opportunities and provide for lifelong learning and growth. The federal government, states, education providers, labor unions, and the private sector all have significant roles in advancing this system, including providing more expansive guidance and flexibilities on data sharing.
- Develop a secure, student-owned Interoperable Learning Record (ILR) to translate a worker's full education, skills-based training, and work experience to a record of transferable skills that will open doors to opportunity. An ILR must be fast-tracked to rapidly advance the adoption of skills-based learning and hiring, and must be accompanied by a common mechanism to define skills and verify skills attainment.