



Business Leaders United
for Workforce Partnerships

Legislative BLUprint for Economic Recovery



A FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Across the country, businesses are struggling to adapt to the most devastating economic crisis since the Great Depression. Small businesses with fewer than 100 employees — which serve as the engines of local economies — have been particularly vulnerable to the effects of the crisis.

The effects have been uneven across industries. For some, the pandemic has created unprecedented demand, such as manufacturers' response to the national need for personal protective equipment. For others, modernization has been fast-tracked as healthcare rushes to answer new challenges and transportation, distribution, and logistics firms work to safely keep our country running. Meanwhile for those in hospitality and retail, this crisis has necessitated a complete overhaul of service delivery models and in some cases impeded the ability to operate at all.

Regardless of industry, BLU members continue to face an unmitigated need for workers with industry-responsive skills. Businesses have met this demand by upskilling existing workers and training new workers to join industries with ever-growing demand. These challenges are not new, however, and COVID-19 has only exacerbated the challenges industry faced given a widespread digital divide, missed connections between the business and education communities, and a national workforce system hampered by decades of underinvestment.

These jobs are the backbone of America's economy — from healthcare and IT, to construction and manufacturing, to retail and logistics — and filling them is critical to America's success in the decades ahead. BLU business leaders support expanded investments in higher education, work-based learning, and in our workforce's ability to succeed in these programs as they earn the critical skills our industries demand.

As business leaders, we are making investments in our workforce every day. But we can't do it alone. Our *Legislative BLUprint for Economic Recovery* identifies tangible steps policymakers can take to help advance national skills policies that work for our country's businesses, workers, and economy.

Businesses need Congress to support industry-led partnerships that drive industry-specific training and hiring

AMERICA AGREES: 88% of voters want public investment in partnerships between skills training programs and local businesses to help train people for the jobs for which businesses are hiring.

As the economy recovers, demand for trained workers will increase. That demand, however, will be uneven and will vary sector by sector and in different communities across the country. We need to invest in industry-based training models to develop locally specific, industry-targeted strategies that will help businesses, workers, and communities adapt to a changing economy, and broaden worker pipelines into growing industries by ensuring training models are accessible to workers who have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, including workers of color, immigrants, and women.

ACTION: *Ensure community and technical college programs aligned with local industry demand by passing the ACCESS Act as part of Higher Education Act reauthorization.*

ACTION: *Make it easier for businesses to offer work-based learning opportunities by passing the bipartisan PARTNERS Act.*

ACTION: *Better connect workforce and economic development programs by expanding the Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) model to additional industries via newly created "21st Century Expansion Partnerships".*



Businesses need Congress to invest aggressively and effectively in the skills that industries demand and workers need

AMERICA AGREES: 82% of voters support immediate increased public investment in skills training to help people laid off in industries hit hard by the coronavirus and 81% support continuing to increase investment in skills training long-term.

Most jobs today require education past high school, but less than a four-year degree. Current funding levels for workforce, career and technical, and adult education programs that help people access these skills fall below those authorized in legislation, represent significant cuts from past levels, and pale in comparison to the investments other industrialized countries are making in their own workforces. Increasing investments in skills training, and ensuring those investments are sustainable, 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.

ACTION: Create a Workforce Trust Fund that would provide a sustainable funding source on which states could draw down to support costs associated with training new and exiting workers with skills necessary to meet industry demand.

ACTION: Increase appropriated funding in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), career and technical education (CTE), and adult education state grants — returning to at least Fiscal Year 2001 levels.

Businesses need Congress to modernize education and training policies to better align with industry demand and worker need

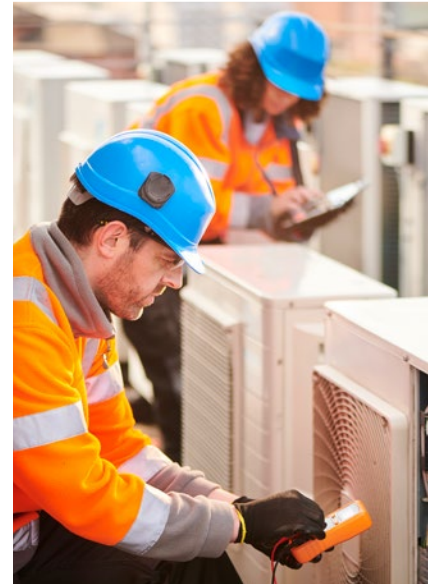
AMERICA AGREES: 75% of voters want to see more nimble, short-term higher education and workforce options so that people can quickly retrain, and 71% of voters support collecting and publicly reporting data on which groups of people are and are not benefiting from stimulus and recovery efforts, including investments in skills training.

As with past major economic disruptions, the demand for training will significantly increase as workers try to return to the workforce. Modernizing options today will ensure those displaced by the pandemic access programs that could quickly move them into new skilled jobs for which businesses are hiring, as well as help businesses avoid laying off workers who need to upskill to succeed in their current jobs. This means Congress needs to expand financial aid to anyone seeking skills training, not just those seeking traditional college degrees, including support for training, digital skills, and worker retention for workers at all skill levels. It also requires ensuring businesses, policymakers, and workers can readily know which programs prepare workers to meet the needs of industry.

ACTION: Make Pell grants available for high-quality, short-term training programs that lead to in-demand jobs by passing the bipartisan JOBS Act through the Higher Education Act reauthorization.

ACTION: Make program-level data on postsecondary education programs transparent for informed decision making by passing the College Transparency Act as part of the Higher Education Act reauthorization.

ACTION: Ensure workers who lose their job have access to training for jobs for which businesses are hiring by passing the Skills for 21st Century Act as part of WIOA reauthorization.



Businesses need Congress to build upon existing private sector efforts to avert layoffs and encourage upskilling

AMERICA AGREES: 82% of voters believe the government should offer incentives for businesses to use down time for training instead of laying off workers and 84% of voters want to see public investments in expanding access to digital learning and increasing digital literacy.

COVID-19 has affected key industries in very different ways but has disproportionately impacted small and mid-sized businesses across industries. To reduce ongoing economic hardship for businesses and workers and to work toward recovery, we must support small and mid-sized businesses — which represent the majority of firms — in averting layoffs, keeping their employees paid, and supporting employee re-training during down-time.

ACTION: Empower businesses to upskill and reskill existing workers by creating a new title under WIOA establishing a federal incumbent worker training fund.

ACTION: Ensure businesses can provide workers with digital skills necessary to train for and succeed in jobs of the 21st century by creating a new grant program within WIOA to support occupational digital literacy.

ACTION: Provide businesses with an up to \$9,600 credit to empower private investment in workers with the greatest skill needs by amending the Work Opportunity Tax Credit and passing the SKILL UP Act.

Businesses need Congress to broaden the talent pipeline by supporting workers' success and completion of demand-driven training opportunities

AMERICA AGREES: 76% of voters want the US to expand support for unemployed workers to include health care coverage, training, and re-employment services.

Many workers struggle to complete training without supports like career counseling, childcare, or transportation and the current crisis is only exacerbating this challenge. This leads to a narrowing of the pool of workers to fill open positions and furthers existing inequities in our country. And while businesses have a role in helping meet these needs for their workers, they cannot be expected to tackle them alone. Public investments in supportive services help broaden the talent pool, ensure more equitable access to skills education and training, and provide businesses with a more robust pipeline of skilled workers in their local communities.

ACTION: Help working learners persist in postsecondary education by passing the Gateways to Careers Act as part of the Higher Education Act reauthorization.

ACTION: Broaden the pipeline of workers who can succeed in training for infrastructure jobs by passing the bipartisan BUILDS Act as part of an infrastructure package.

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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