

March 23, 2021

President Joe Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden,

Our country is currently facing the most devastating economic crisis since the Great Depression. As your administration works to address the needs of working people and local businesses, the undersigned organizations urge you to call for critical, generational defining investments in programs that help people develop skills necessary to access and succeed in good jobs that businesses need filled.

The current crisis has had an inequitable economic impact on workers, especially those without education past high-school, workers of color and women.

A staggering number of workers – particularly historically underserved workers of color, women, and immigrants – have lost their jobs. Entire industries have been made – at least temporarily – obsolete by COVID-19.

- There are 15 million workers unemployed today.
- More than 1/3rd of the jobs lost over the pandemic will be permanent.
- More than 40% of those unemployed have no education past high school.
- Workers with a high school degree or less have been displaced at nearly three times the rate as those with a bachelor's degree, across the past 12 months.
- In January, almost half (49.7%) of jobseekers ages 55+ were long-term unemployed, up from 45.5% in December.
- Between February and June 2020, the number of young people neither working nor going to school more than doubled, to over 10 million.
- And across the labor market, workers of color and immigrants, particularly women and young people, have shouldered the greatest job loss impacts and are overrepresented in jobs hit hardest by the economic downturn.

When the pandemic subsides, workers who lost their jobs won't necessarily be able to return to the same companies, occupations, or industries. Many of these workers need access to job training to reenter the workforce, and many who are currently employed will need additional training to keep their job. In our last recession, 98% of new jobs created required some postsecondary education.

Investing in workers' access to skills that meet industry demand must be a component of the federal response to the current crisis. And workers themselves agree - according to polling commissioned by National Skills Coalition in the summer of 2020, 84% of unemployed workers want Congress to immediately increase investments in training to support their journey back into the workforce.

The nation's workforce system - convened through workforce development boards, career and technical education, adult basic education systems, and the nation's community colleges - stand poised to address this need, but desperately need federal investments to meet this demand.

Except for an initial investment of \$345 million, Congress has not funded workforce development in any of its COVID response packages to date.

We urge you to call for investments of no less than \$100 billion for workforce development in the next recovery package to ensure that all workers have the skills and reemployment assistance necessary, and all businesses can contribute to, a truly inclusive economic recovery. These investments should include:

- \$35 billion, or not less than 1% of any investment as a part of job creation efforts in infrastructure, manufacturing and clean energy industries, to ensure all workers have access to and can succeed in those newly created jobs. Federal investments in physical, digital, and clean energy infrastructure, as well as in manufacturing, could create millions of good jobs. According to the Georgetown Center on Education and Workforce, every \$1 trillion investment in infrastructure will create up to 11 million new jobs. These and any other job creation efforts should include dedicated, comprehensive training and support service investments with a focus on inclusion of local workers most impacted by the pandemic, including people of color, immigrants, youth, older workers and women. Too often, past infrastructure investments in bricks and mortar have not been paired with support for training and services that would help individuals take advantage of these new employment opportunities.
- \$15 billion, consistent with the Relaunching America's Workforce Act, to support immediate capacity for our public workforce system, workforce development boards, community college/career and technical and adult education systems to respond to historic worker and business needs. Even before our current crisis, investments in skills training were far below what was necessary. Funding for workforce development has been cut by nearly 40% over the last two decades. Prior to the pandemic, investments in unemployment and reemployment programs only enabled about 5% of all workers who lose their jobs to access comprehensive reemployment services. The United States invests less in active labor market policy than any other industrialized country, except for Mexico, and would need to invest \$80 billion more, annually, just to reach the median of other international peers. Our public workforce, career and technical, and adult education systems were at a disadvantage prior to the crisis and desperately need investments today to respond to demands of both workers and businesses. This investment should support the capacity of businesses to partner with education providers, to provide robust career navigation services to workers, and to expand access to childcare, digital access and skills, transportation assistance and other support services.

- \$50 billion for training for workers who are unemployed, underemployed or most at risk for losing their jobs to reskill and upskill for new careers of the 21st century. This level of investment is consistent with the funding levels called for by the Biden campaign and then-Senator Kamala Harris’ 21st Century Skills Act. This investment should empower workforce development systems, workforce boards, community colleges, CTE, technical, and adult education providers to respond to historic unemployment and the evolving skill needs of America’s economy through needed skills training for workers in transition to new careers.

To provide skills training to just three quarters of the workers who are still without jobs as of December or expand opportunities for reskilling to underemployed workers who are struggling in today’s economy, we would need at least \$50 billion per year, based on Pell grant investments for traditional college students and adult worker “reconnect” initiatives being carried out by several states. This funding would support training provided by both significant expansion of community college and apprenticeship programs, and through other high-quality providers across many industries for as many as 8 to 10 million additional workers.

At the same time, public investments should support greater access to training for workers most at risk of losing their jobs and leverage private investment in upskilling workers, including access to digital skills. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, it was apparent that American jobs are undergoing massive technological transformation. In-demand careers increasingly require digital literacy skills, and for many industries digital skills are entry-level competencies for new hires and incumbent workers. Since the pandemic, digital demands in the U.S. workplace have only accelerated, with workers from frontline jobs to white-collar roles being asked to quickly adapt to new tools and technologies.

This scale of investment is critical to meeting U.S. workers’ and businesses’ need in the current crisis. We thank you for your attention to these important issues.

Advance CTE	BDP & Associates
Amerigroup	Business Leaders United
Arizona Workforce Association	Career Development Counseling & Consulting
Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Program	Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions	Center for LGBTQ Economic Advancement & Research (CLEAR)
Association for Career and Technical Education	Coalition on Adult Basic Education Coalition
Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs	Coalition on Human Needs
Augustus F. Hawkins Foundation	Corporation for Skilled Workforce
	Creative Career Chic

Easterseals
Florida Workforce Development Association
Goodwill Industries International, Inc.
HIRE360
Illinois Workforce Partnership
Impact Equitable Justice Inc
Indiana Workforce Board Association
Jobs for the Future
Labor Education Training Center
Maryland Career Development Association
Maryland Counseling Association
Maryland Workforce Association
Massachusetts Workforce Association
Michigan Works! Association
Minnesota Association of Workforce Boards
Missouri Career Development Association
National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity (NAPE)
National Association of Counties
National Association of Regional Councils
National Association of Workforce Boards
National Association of Workforce Development Professionals
National Career Development Association
National Coalition for Literacy
National Council of State Directors of Adult Education
National Education Association
National Employment Counseling Association (NECA)
National Employment Law Project
National Fund for Workforce Solutions
National Job Corps Association
National League of Cities
National Skills Coalition
National Urban League
National Youth Employment Coalition
NC Association of Workforce Development Boards
New America, Center on Education and Labor
New York Association for Training and Employment Professionals
North Carolina Association of Workforce Development Boards
Open Hearth Inc
PA Workforce Development Association
Pathways Consultants
Per Scholas
PowerNotes LLC
ProLiteracy
Puerto Rican Police Association
Rocky Mountain Workforce Development Association
Safer Foundation
Shriver Center on Poverty Law
SkillSource

Texas Association of Workforce Boards

The Center for Work Ethic Development

The Corps Network

The Network of Jewish Human Service
Agencies

United States Workforce Associations