

# SKILLS FOR GOOD JOBS

# AGENDA

# 2018

Steps Congress and the Administration  
Can Take to Stand Behind America's  
Greatest Asset: **ITS PEOPLE**



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

**A**s the U.S. economy continues to grow, investments in education and training have never been more important — helping workers obtain the skills and credentials they need to take advantage of emerging job openings, while helping U.S. businesses maintain their competitive edge. But we're in danger of falling behind, particularly with respect to middle-skill jobs that require more than a high school diploma but not a four-year degree. While 53 percent of all jobs in today's labor market are middle skill, only 43 percent of U.S. workers are trained at this level, meaning that key industries are losing out on economic opportunities — and U.S. workers are being held back from career pathways that lead to good wages.

Congress and the Trump Administration must work together in 2018 to develop and implement bipartisan solutions to build our economy and support broadly shared prosperity. National Skills Coalition's 2018 *Skills for Good Jobs Agenda* identifies key steps federal policymakers can take this year to ensure that all workers and all industries have the skills to compete and prosper.

## **Don't just talk about workers as America's greatest asset, invest in them.**

**ACTION:** *Increase funding for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) workforce and adult education grants to at least FY2019 authorized levels, and restore career and technical education (CTE) state grant funding to \$1.3 billion.*

Despite messages of strong bipartisan support for skills policy, over the past fifteen years, Congress has slashed funding for state job training grants by 40 percent, CTE grants by 30 percent, and adult education grants by 20 percent.

## **Transform our nation's postsecondary education system into an engine for economic opportunity and growth.**

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### **Eliminate the bias against working people who want in-demand credentials.**

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**ACTION:** *Pass the bipartisan JOBS Act (S.206) so that America's workers can use federal Pell grants to earn short-term credentials sought by local employers.*

Nearly one million Americans seeking better jobs pursue short-term credentials, offered through community colleges and other institutions. These programs can increase earnings by 30 percent or more than a high school diploma. In some fields, the average earnings of those with in-demand credentials can exceed average earnings those with a four-year degree.

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### **Measure postsecondary outcomes to ensure program quality.**

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**ACTION:** *Pass the bipartisan College Transparency Act (S.1121, H.R. 2434) so that students, parents, employers and Congress know the return on investments in postsecondary education.*

Most students enroll in postsecondary education to improve their job prospects. But those who invest in postsecondary education — whether they're workers, parents, employers, or policymakers — often don't know what they can expect from specific programs in terms of employment and earnings because current law restricts the ability to capture this information.



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## Support the success of today's college students: Working Americans

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**ACTION:** *Establish a “career pathways” fund to supports the success of today’s college student.*

Adults balancing full-time work and family obligations are a rapidly growing segment of today’s community college enrollments. Some states have established strategies that ensure these students succeed, including career pathways models that combine basic and occupational skills training; career counseling and case management; and support services like child care and transportation assistance. Federal policy should build on these innovative efforts.

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## Strengthen connections between business and postsecondary education

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**ACTION:** *Create a new permanent program to support industry-community college partnerships.*

Community colleges across the nation partner with local and regional industries every day to develop skills pipelines that support economic growth. Both Republican and Democratic administrations have supported these efforts through dedicated grant funding. But those funds have run out, cutting off real opportunities for job creation and expansion.

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## Modernize and strengthen career and technical education (CTE)

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**ACTION:** *Reauthorize the Perkins Act to meet the needs of local workers and businesses.*

The Perkins Act provides critical funding to secondary and postsecondary CTE programs, but hasn’t been updated in over a decade. Congress should reauthorize the program, and ensure that federally-funded CTE programs are better aligned with state and local workforce development strategies.

## Take a skills-based approach to poverty reduction

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### Increase SNAP Employment & Training (E&T) investments in Farm Bill reauthorization.

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**ACTION:** *Build on bipartisan achievements of the last Farm Bill and increase funding to help more SNAP participants gain access to high-quality education and training.*

Skills-based SNAP E&T programs provide job training and work experience for low-income individuals seeking family-supporting jobs and careers. Congress has recognized the value of these investments, reauthorizing the program in 2014 and funding pilot grants to expand programs. Congress should reject outdated, ineffective work requirements and build on innovative skills-based programs.

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### Remove outdated TANF restrictions on education and training

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**ACTION:** *Modernize the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program to support training opportunities.*

More than 80 percent of today’s jobs require postsecondary education and training, but less than 10 percent of adult TANF recipients have education beyond high school. Congress should update TANF to expand access to high-quality training and education that leads to in-demand credentials.



## Ensure all of America's workers — including DREAMers — can help drive economic growth

**ACTION:** *Extend authorization for DREAMers, and ensure that middle-skill credentials, not just college degrees, are among the educational paths to citizenship.*

Approximately 1.7 million young people came to the U.S. as children and do not have authorized immigration status. Proposals for work authorization and eventual citizenship based on educational attainment, such as the DREAM Act, should include middle-skill credentials as a valid pathway.

## Partner up: Let's get to 5 million apprentices

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**Rebuild our nation's infrastructure workforce through work-based learning.**

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**ACTION:** *Ensure that any infrastructure bill includes new dollars for training partnerships, consistent with the bipartisan BUILDS Act (S.1599).*

President Trump has proposed significant new investments in our nation's roads, bridges, and other infrastructure. These efforts could create millions of new jobs in the coming years, but nearly half would require some education and training beyond high school. We will need to ramp up our support for apprenticeships and other skills strategies to keep up with demand.

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**Invest in local capacity to develop effective work-based learning programs.**

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**ACTION:** *Pass the bipartisan PARTNERS Act (H.R. 4115) to support industry partnerships.*

Many firms—especially small- and medium-sized businesses—lack resources to develop work-based learning programs on their own. Industry or sector partnerships reduce the burdens on businesses by convening local stakeholders to develop programs as well as the supports workers need to succeed.

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**Maximize employer investments in training and work-based learning.**

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**ACTION:** *Amend the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) to support targeted investments by employers in work-based learning and training.*

WOTC helps businesses hire workers with barriers to employment, including veterans, disadvantaged youth, and low-income workers, but does little to offset the costs of employer-provided training. As a result, many employers that offer well-paying, but higher skill jobs are unable to take full advantage of the program.

