

INVESTING IN DIGITAL SKILLS BENEFITS BUSINESSES, WORKERS, AND OUR ECONOMY

The digital divide isn't just about access to broadband and hardware, it's also about access to skills. This digital skill divide impacts businesses of all sizes across every industry.

New investments made through the bipartisan infrastructure law, including the Digital Equity Act,¹ will send billions of dollars to states and localities across the U.S. over the next five years. This funding is a powerful opportunity for states to close the digital skill divide.

Business leaders can draw on new data illustrating the demand for digital skills to help policymakers understand the urgency of tackling this issue. This research, *Closing the Digital Skill Divide*, analyzed 43 million Help Wanted ads to get a real-time look at employers' needs.

KEY FINDINGS:

- **The overwhelming majority of jobs require technology skills.** Specifically, 92% require digital skills, such as Microsoft Excel, or skills that are *likely* to be digital, such as bookkeeping.
- **Younger workers need digital skills training too.** While it's often assumed that younger people are comfortable with technology, research shows that they may not be able to operate specific technologies used on the job.² These workers need opportunities to build bridges from the skills they have — such as using a social media app — to the new skills they need in the workplace, such as navigating electronic medical records or working with collaborative robots.
- **Rural workers face additional barriers in building technology skills.** As new federal funding³ helps to build out broadband infrastructure in rural communities, it will be crucial to ensure that rural workers have opportunities to build the digital skills they need. This is especially important given the fast-growing demand for digital skills in fields

such as agriculture, where equipment such as tractors and harvesters are now commonly equipped with on-board technology.

Closing the digital skill divide has major payoffs for businesses. Workers value upskilling and prefer working for businesses that offer clear pathways to advancement. Turnover has heavy costs; reducing turnover by ensuring that workers have upskilling opportunities could save businesses more than \$25,000 per position.⁴

HOW BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS CAN USE THIS DATA TO TAKE ACTION:

- Emphasize the importance of digital skills training in public and policy-related conversations about the digital divide.
- Implement and advocate for policies and practices that support digital upskilling for all workers. If you operate a small business with limited in-house training capacity, consider collaborating in a regional workforce partnership with peer companies and an education or workforce development provider.
- To create awareness and understanding, educate policymakers about the **skills mismatch** and the kinds of technology skills needed in today's economy.
- Promote public policies that support workforce partnerships between local community colleges and training providers to build industry-driven training programs.

¹ Learn more about the [Digital Equity Act](#).

² Fragmented knowledge refers to people who are comfortable with some technology skills but not comfortable with others.

³ Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) funding totaling \$42.5 billion dollars is being distributed across the U.S. as part of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA).

⁴ *Closing the Digital Skill Divide* (National Skills Coalition, 2023)