How to Prepare US Workers for the Post-Pandemic Economy: Report Lays out Plan for Business Leaders, Educators, & Policymakers

Washington, DC, April 22, 2021...Despite the recent boom in US hiring, millions of American workers, especially minority workers, women, youth, and workers with lower educational attainment remain left behind. Many jobs in hard-hit sectors will not come back and are likely to be replaced by emerging jobs demanding new and advanced skills in other industries.

As detailed in a new report by the Committee for Economic Development of The Conference Board (CED), COVID-19’s labor market disruption means that many workers will not only need new jobs, but they will also need the training and opportunities to switch careers. The rapidly changing demands of the post-pandemic economy require the full participation and collaboration of the nation’s employers, trainers, educators, and public policy officials to prepare new workforce entrants with in-demand skills and upskill both displaced and incumbent workers. The CED Solutions Brief, A US Workforce Training Plan for the Post-Pandemic Economy: Driving recovery with a highly skilled workforce, was developed with assistance from The Conference Board Human Capital Center.

As the analysis notes, the pandemic accelerated trends already underway toward remote work, digital transformation, and automation, catapulting the need to revise and reorganize the plethora of today’s uncoordinated training programs to the top of the nation’s agenda. Collaboration, coordination on innovative reforms among leaders in the private, public, and education sectors and a focus on future, marketable skills will be critical to American leadership, prosperity, and competitiveness in a more digital post-pandemic economy.

“The pace of change, including the accelerated technological transformation during the pandemic, demands a workforce of life-long learners continuously upgrading their technical skills, as well as those abilities valued by employers that cannot be automated: critical thinking, communications, and the ability to think ‘outside the box,’” said Lori Esposito Murray, President of CED. “Looking forward, the US must incentivize public-private partnerships that aim to bridge the skills gap to sustainable, well-paying careers and also incentivize unemployed and employed workers to prepare for the post-pandemic economy.”

The report offers business and public policy leaders, along with leaders in education and training, collaborative solutions to narrowing the post-pandemic skills gap. They include:

Business leaders:

• Must carry out strategic assessments of emerging technologies (i.e., cutting-edge tools, platforms, and applications) and map the skills and jobs needed to integrate them into business processes. As a steppingstone, companies must commit to improving employees’ overall technical literacy, which enables employees to more easily upgrade their skills and adapt to ever-evolving roles.

• Must redesign human capital processes to delineate clear career pathways, along with the skills they require and ways to attain those skills. This would empower employees to control their own careers.
Business leaders, training providers, and educators:

- Need to collaborate to establish new skill-development and career pathways by, for example, designing curricula for the skill sets employers need and determining credentials based on skills instead of degree attainment.

- Must engage with public workforce boards, employer consortiums, and sector-based initiatives. Employer partnerships that coordinate with education and training providers to offer industry-based apprenticeships and other hands-on learning experiences are particularly effective.

Public policy leaders:

- Should incentivize high schools, community colleges, and other training providers to seek out public-private partnerships. For example, they could establish a national goal that every student has access to employer-connected education or training experiences prior to, or immediately following, high school graduation.

- Must provide incentives for individuals, especially unemployed workers, to upgrade their skills. For instance, they could provide the jobless with tax relief for eligible training expenses or support for maintaining broadband access so they could tap into online training options. The establishment of Lifetime Learning Accounts to pay for education-related expenses would help all workers navigate disruption and better plan training expenses across their careers.

- Must also redirect existing federal training funds to more efficient uses by, for example, making short-term training programs eligible for federal tuition subsidies (Pell Grants) and consolidating existing funding streams so they are better targeted and easier to use.

“A focus on skills—not jobs—will require changes in the talent and human capital strategies used by many organizations today,” said Amy Liu Abel, Vice President, Human Capital at The Conference Board. “The ability to hire, promote, and move talent within the organization based on skills will require business leaders to recalibrate those processes. Everything from recruiting to learning and development, to performance management and assessment, to promotions and talent mobility, must change. Business leaders will be critical to reforming career development.”

_A US Workforce Training Plan for the Post-Pandemic Economy_ can be accessed [here](#).

About CED

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