

Skills State Policy Advocacy Network (SkillSPAN)



NSC's SkillSPAN is a first-ever national network of non-partisan coalitions focused on advancing state skills policies that expand economic opportunities for workers while boosting local businesses' capacity. SkillSPAN coalitions develop and promote skills policies that help workers obtain jobs that reflect their career aspirations, help businesses find skilled workers, and help states build strong, inclusive economies. Unique among state networks supported by national organizations, SkillSPAN coalitions include policy and research organizations, community-based organizations, businesses, unions, community colleges, workforce boards, state and local agencies, and others advocating for a shared agenda. As a national network, SkillSPAN leverages the combined expertise of state coalition members and amplifies their collective voices in state capitols across the nation.

Local communities have developed effective strategies to support an inclusive, skilled workforce

The largest portion of jobs in every state require education or training beyond high school, but not a four-year degree. These jobs are the backbone of local economies, but too many local workers can't access the training needed to obtain them. Communities throughout the nation have developed innovative education and training models that help more workers advance in the labor market and meet the skilled labor needs of local employers. These include upskilling strategies for entry level workers, efforts to diversify apprenticeship, and models that make college work for working people.

States can only scale these strategies through public policy

These effective local models, typically funded through philanthropic investments, struggle over the long-term to sustain and grow their impact unless public dollars become part of their funding model. This is an opportune moment to sustain, scale, and replicate effective local workforce development models through state policy. In response to pressure from the business community, labor/worker organizations, and other stakeholders, a growing number of governors from both parties are

recognizing the need for more aggressive and effective skills investments. And they are looking across higher education and workforce development policies to prevent skilled labor shortages from putting the brakes on economic growth in local communities.

SkillSPAN supports a national network of coalitions changing state skills policy

SkillSPAN coalitions advocate for state policies to scale and replicate these effective local models, significantly increasing the number of communities and people benefitting from these innovations. Through its SkillSPAN network, NSC and its state partners are poised to capture this interest and bring skills training opportunities to significantly more people. By working in coalition, SkillSPAN partners are organizing a variety of voices in support of a common skills agenda and elevating that agenda as a shared priority with state policymakers. By being part of a network, SkillSPAN coalitions can tap a braintrust of experts from NSC and other states; amplify key skills policy issues across a number of states at the same time; and share and elevate state policy innovations. Together, these coalitions can bring skills training to the forefront of policy discussions in state capitals across the country while also influencing national policy debates.

The SkillSPAN Strategy

Making a monetary investment in state coalition capacity

- NSC makes grants to lead organizations to support the capacity needed to organize and convene stakeholder toward a shared agenda and advocacy strategy.

Supporting capacity building and peer learning

- To support the unique multi-stakeholder SkillSPAN model, NSC assists state coalition leaders in bringing the diverse perspectives of coalition members together toward a consensus agenda and shared process for achieving policy impacts.
- NSC provides regular cross-state learning opportunities for SkillSPAN network members to share information, analysis, and ideas on policy innovation and advocacy strategies, including the annual Skills in the States Forum.
- NSC supports structured, targeted cross-state academies open to teams from any state, including those with a SkillSPAN coalition. This includes regional academies (e.g., southern states) as well as issue-based academies (e.g., work-based learning).

Analyzing and promoting model policies

- NSC analyzes state policy developments and trends through ongoing publications that lift up and promote effective state models.
- NSC identifies innovative policy ideas being pursued by SkillSPAN members and documents them for other states to learn from.

Developing policy proposals and mobilizing for passage

- NSC assists SkillSPAN coalitions in the development of state-specific policy proposals, including development of technical language.
- NSC assists coalitions with stakeholder organizing and advocacy strategies as well as with earned media and messaging essential to winning policy change.
- NSC supports the alignment of SkillSPAN coalition efforts with our state Business Leader United (BLU) affiliates.

SkillSPAN's impact

Examples of the network's impact in 2019 include:

- **Making college work for adults:** The Georgia SkillSPAN coalition developed and passed a proposal in Georgia's General Assembly extending the time college students can earn the HOPE scholarship from seven to ten years after high school. The Iowa SkillSPAN coalition won \$13 million in funding for the Future Ready Iowa Last-Dollar Scholarship, which fills financial aid gaps for low-income students seeking in-demand credentials. The Tennessee SkillSPAN coalition won a quadruple increase in funding for the Tennessee Higher Education Initiative, which provides postsecondary education opportunities to people who are incarcerated.
- **Broadening the apprenticeship pipeline:** Members of the Illinois team in NSC's Work-Based Learning Academy, including Young Invincibles and SkillSPAN coalition lead Chicago Jobs Council, successfully advocated for a study on the expansion of apprenticeship programs and shaped the Illinois Apprenticeship Expansion Program, a \$2.5 million initiative to expand apprenticeship through regional intermediaries and navigators.
- **Expanding support services and removing barriers to skills training:** The Colorado Skills2Compete Coalition successfully advocated for the state to create a fund to help cover the costs of support services like transportation, emergency child care, and work equipment for low-income people in skills training, job search, or at the start of employment.

National Skills Coalition (NSC) is a broad-based coalition working toward a vision of an America that grows its economy by investing in its people, so that every worker and every industry has the skills to compete and prosper. We engage in technical assistance, analysis, organizing, advocacy, and communications to advance state and federal policies that support these goals — policies based on the on-the-ground expertise of our members.