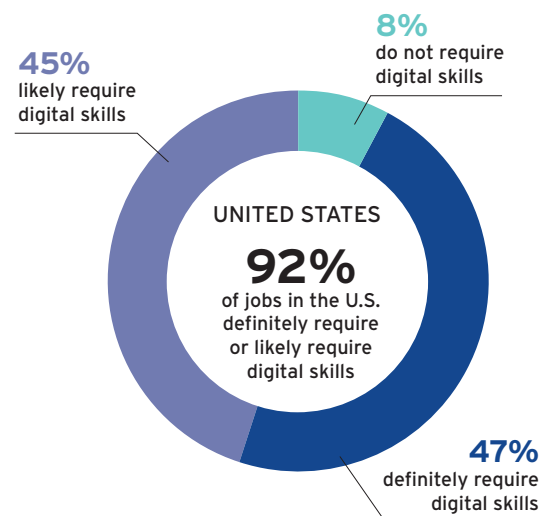
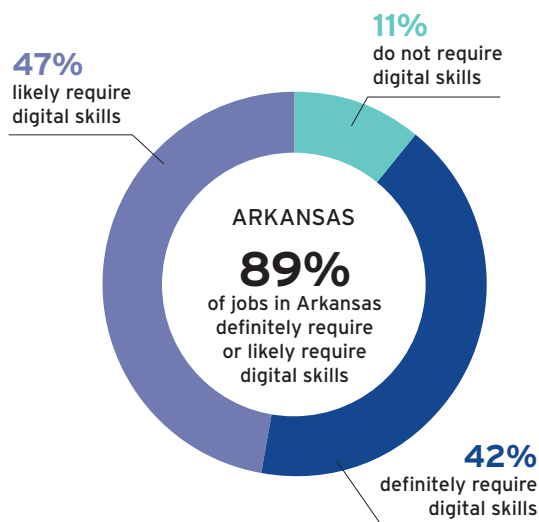


# CLOSING ARKANSAS' DIGITAL SKILL DIVIDE

The digital divide isn't just about access to broadband and computers and other hardware, it's also about access to **skills**. Massive investments made through the bipartisan infrastructure law will send billions of dollars to states and localities across the U.S. over the next five years to help close the digital divide. This includes more than \$1 billion that is slated to flow to Arkansas through the Digital Equity Act and the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program. New research demonstrates the urgency and the payoff if Arkansas directs a significant portion of these resources to high-quality digital skills training programs.<sup>1</sup>

## 89% OF ARKANSAS JOBS REQUIRE DIGITAL SKILLS, CLOSE TO THE U.S. AVERAGE



### BUSINESSES OF EVERY SIZE & INDUSTRY HAVE HIGH DEMAND FOR DIGITAL SKILLS

Nationally, the demand for digital skills is significant for jobs posted by **small** (90%) and **large** (94%) businesses alike.<sup>2</sup> Demand is consistently high across industries, including priority sectors for Arkansas, such as **manufacturing** (93%); **agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting** (86%); and **transportation and warehousing** (77%).



### ARKANSAS' MOST IN-DEMAND FOUNDATIONAL DIGITAL SKILLS

- Computer literacy
- Data entry
- Typing
- Microsoft Excel & Word
- Word Processing

### EXAMPLES OF IN-DEMAND, INDUSTRY SPECIFIC SKILLS:

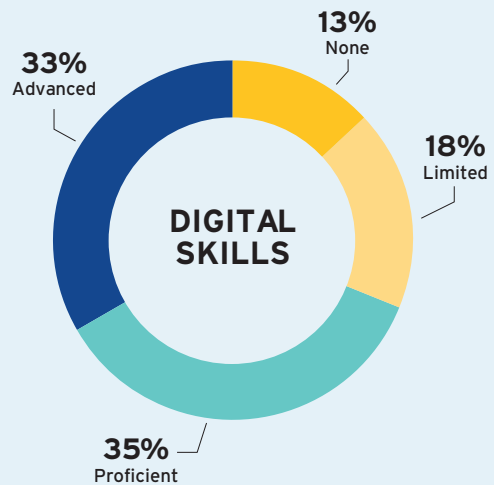
- **Healthcare:** Electronic medical records; radiologic technology
- **Manufacturing:** Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software
- **Finance & insurance:** Mobile banking; information security
- **Information:** Fiserv financial services technology
- **Accommodation & food services:** Empower human resources software

## BUT ARKANSAS, LIKE THE NATION, FACES A DIGITAL SKILL DIVIDE

Nearly 48 million US workers – one-third of all US workers – do not have the foundational digital skills needed to secure in-demand jobs.<sup>3</sup> This points to a digital skill divide in Arkansas and the nation – a divide between those who have access to digital skill building programs and those who do not.



## FOUNDATIONAL DIGITAL SKILLS AND THE US WORKFORCE



Currently employed US workers ages 16-64. Foundational digital skills refer to skills like email, simple spreadsheets, data entry, or timecard software. Source: OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) 2012-14.

## CLOSING THE DIGITAL SKILL DIVIDE: THE PAYOFF

- **FOR EMPLOYERS:** Providing workers with upskilling opportunities can help retention and save businesses \$25,000-\$78,000 in turnover costs per employee.
- **FOR WORKERS:** Moving from a job that requires no digital skills to one that requires just one digital skill can yield a 23% increase in wages for workers.

## ARKANSANS STRONGLY SUPPORT INVESTING IN SKILLS TRAINING

Given the benefits of investing in skills training, it's no surprise that it's a popular topic with voters. 90% want to provide access to digital skills training for workers throughout their careers so they can adapt to new technologies at work.<sup>4</sup>

## WHAT ARKANSAS LEADERS CAN DO

Arkansas can close the digital skill divide by ensuring that massive federal investments through the **Digital Equity Act** and the **BEAD program** expand access to high quality digital skills training. Arkansas can deploy these resources to support skill building strategies that have demonstrated impact, including:

- **Industry sector partnerships** between education/workforce training providers and employers.
- **Programs that teach digital skills** in the context of job-specific skills, often called contextualized or integrated learning.
- **Training that yields credentials** that are valued and recognized across an industry, not just by a single employer. This allows public investments in training to simultaneously support career advancement and economic growth.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Unless otherwise cited, all national data in this brief is from *Closing the Digital Skills Divide* (National Skills Coalition, 2023). Unless otherwise cited, all Arkansas-specific data is from an analysis by NSC of additional data that was not included in *Closing the Digital Skill Divide*.
- 2 Small businesses are those posting 1-50 job ads/year; large businesses are those posting 501-1,000 job ads/year.
- 3 *The New Landscape of Digital Literacy* (National Skills Coalition, 2020.)
- 4 National Skills Coalition commissioned a nationwide online poll of 1000 registered voters. Impact Research conducted the poll between March 11-17, 2024. The margin of error for a sample of this size is +/- 3.1 percentage points at the 95% level of confidence.