

# NATIONAL SKILLS COALITION'S 2024 YEAR IN REVIEW

|  
A Stronger Workforce  
*A Thriving Economy*



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## A LETTER FROM OUR CEO

2024 marked a new chapter for National Skills Coalition (NSC) as I stepped into the role of CEO.

Together, we've championed the millions of skilled workers whose jobs require training beyond high school but not a bachelor's degree—workers whose essential contributions power our economy but often go unrecognized and unsupported in public policy. These are the people who build our roads, care for our families, and sustain our communities.

At NSC, we envision an economy where everyone can access affordable skills training, clear career pathways, and crucial supportive services like child care, long-term care, and transportation to help people succeed in good jobs. This thriving economy would also ensure that every individual and group get what they need to thrive and participate fully in the workplace, our education system, and across society.

In 2024, we worked alongside businesses, educators, workforce advocates, and policymakers to create meaningful, lasting policy changes. Together, we've achieved milestones that strengthen the future of working people and the local businesses that rely on them.

Thank you for being part of this journey. Your support helps ensure that, in 2025 and beyond, we can build a more inclusive economy where everyone prospers.



*Robert*

**ROBERT ESPINOZA**  
CEO, NATIONAL SKILLS COALITION

**WE ARE A NATIONAL COALITION THAT ADVOCATES FOR POLICIES THAT STRENGTHEN THE NATION'S WORKFORCE AND ENSURE LOCAL BUSINESSES CAN MEET THE DEMANDS OF A RAPIDLY SHIFTING ECONOMY.**

- **We organize** networks of working people, local businesses, training providers, and workforce leaders to develop long-lasting solutions to the systemic problems they face within the workforce.
- **We believe** that every person in America should have access to affordable skills training, career pathways to quality jobs, and services like child care, long-term care, and transportation that help them thrive in their jobs.
- **We rally** our networks around the growing movement for workforce policies informed by workers and employers, and together, we are helping to build a stronger economy and a more prosperous future for communities across the country.



**WE ENVISION A  
FUTURE WHERE  
EVERY PERSON  
IN AMERICA**

**IS GUARANTEED  
SKILLS TRAINING,  
GOOD JOBS, AND  
ECONOMIC  
PROSPERITY.**

# 2024 POLICY ACHIEVEMENTS

**AT NSC, WE KNOW THAT INVESTING IN SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE ECONOMY ARE ISSUES WITH BROAD-BASED BIPARTISAN APPEAL, AS EVIDENCED BY OUR MOST RECENT PUBLIC OPINION POLLING:**

**82%**

**of voters support increased government funding for skills training.**

**70%**

**of voters would back candidates who promote these investments – up from 59% in 2019.**

And in 2024, our policy victories and advancements on both the state and federal level demonstrate that even in a challenging, polarized environment, common ground can be found when we advocate for inclusive skills policies that benefit a wide range of industries and mobilize a broad range of stakeholders to action.

Our bipartisan wins on digital skills, workforce policy reauthorization, infrastructure jobs, and making college work for today's diverse student population have shown that when we rally around inclusive policies, we unlock opportunities that transcend party lines.



## HERE'S HOW WE'RE MAKING AN IMPACT AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL:

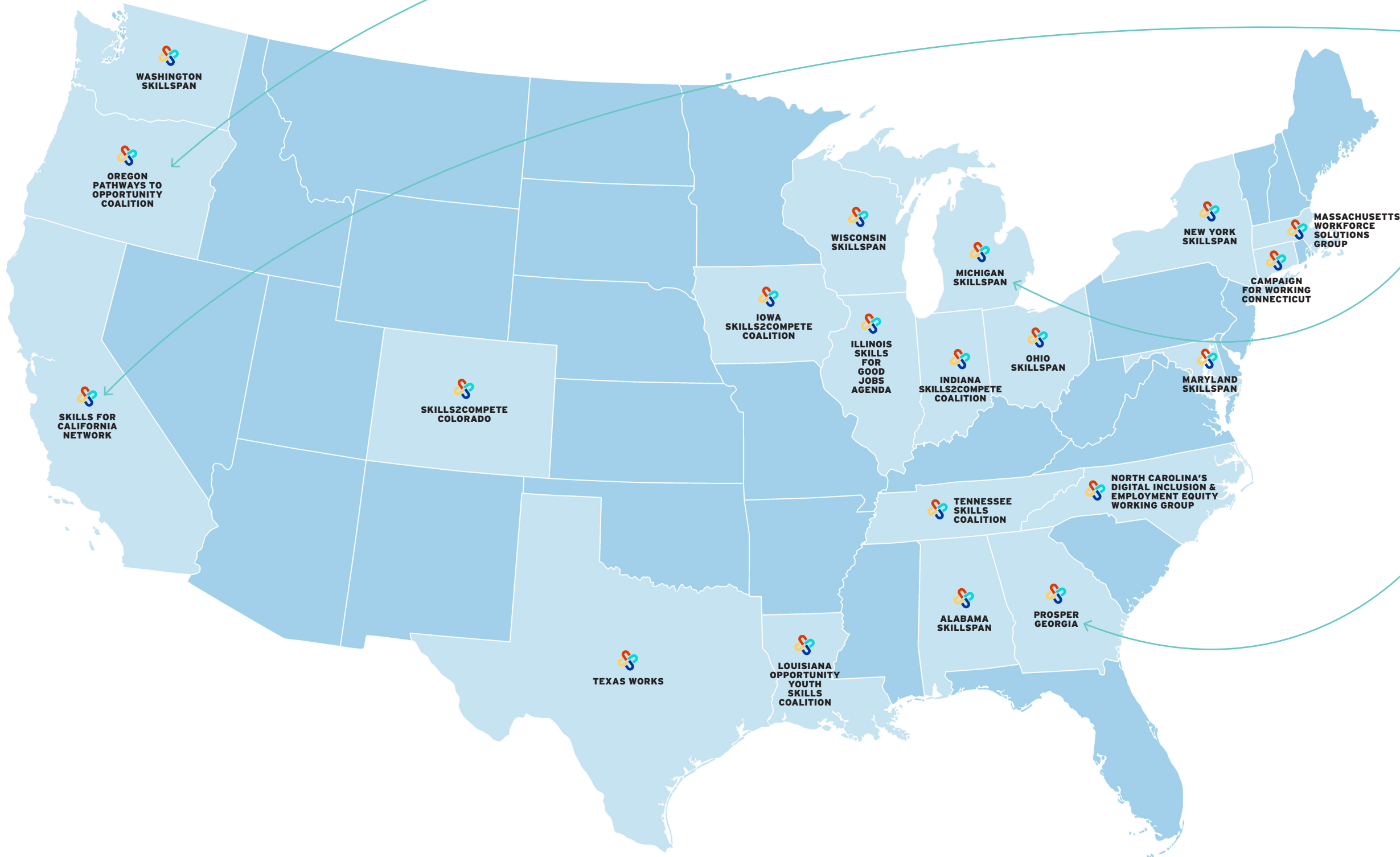
- **President Biden's Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Request** in March included an \$8 Billion proposal to establish a new Career Training Fund, reflecting our proposal for skills training grants, which would provide industry partnerships with up to \$10,000 per worker to train people from underrepresented communities for jobs in high-demand sectors. This fund would also provide supportive services like childcare and transportation—a key priority our *Creating an Equitable Resilient Workforce* campaign has advocated with federal lawmakers.
- **Congress introduced the Digital Skills for Today's Workforce Act** in April, a bipartisan bill to address the pressing need for digital skills training to bridge the digital divide—evidenced by our data showing that 92% of jobs require digital skills while one in three workers don't have the foundational digital skills necessary to enter and thrive in today's jobs. Through groundbreaking research and collaboration with stakeholders via our *Digital Equity @ Work* campaign, NSC provided key recommendations for this workforce act, aligning with the core campaign principles of reskilling and upskilling for all workers. NSC networks also sent letters of support to Congress, hosted Congressional briefings, and conducted Capitol Hill meetings.
- **A bipartisan bill to reauthorize the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) passed the House**, also in April. The bill included several NSC priorities and recommendations, such as a program that would expand access to training for dislocated workers. While the bill falls short overall of what workers and businesses need to thrive, our

*Creating an Equitable Resilient Workforce* campaign advocates for solutions that will modernize our workforce system so it better supports the efforts of people across the country who are working hard to navigate education, training, and employment to advance their careers and unlock economic prosperity for themselves and their families.

- **We advocated for investment in skills training for the clean energy workforce**, as part of our People Powered Infrastructure campaign. This year, we worked with the Department of Energy (DOE) to ensure that the agency's energy workforce advisory board, of which our board chair, Dr. Girard Melancon, is a member, prioritized the needs of workers without a college degree. Because of our advocacy, the needs of these workers were included in the advisory board's final report, "*Strategy for a 21st Century Workforce*." The report shares insights into how the DOE can enhance its workforce strategy to meet the evolving needs of both workers and employers in the energy sector, including developing and retaining a diverse and skilled workforce. NSC's *Business Leaders United* network played an important role in elevating these concerns on Capitol Hill, and our board chair also testified before Congress on the importance of the clean energy workforce.

- **Thanks to our long-time advocacy for short-term Pell grants** and our efforts from our *Making College Work* campaign, we garnered support for legislation that would expand Pell Grant eligibility for short-term training programs. This year, a bipartisan House bill, the *Workforce Pell Act*, was introduced by Chairwoman Foxx and Ranking Member Scott of the *Education and Workforce Committee*.

**SOME HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR STATE-BASED ADVOCACY WORK, LED BY OUR SKILLSPAN NETWORK, ACTIVE IN 20 STATES AND THIS YEAR CELEBRATED ITS FIFTH ANNIVERSARY.**



**OREGON PATHWAYS TO OPPORTUNITY COALITION**

Thanks to our Oregon SkillSPAN partners, Oregon now has a state fund that allocates millions to fund a program for students with emergency needs as well as a program to expand textbook affordability and accessibility.

**SKILLS FOR CALIFORNIA NETWORK**

Our SkillSPAN partners in California successfully advocated to protect critical workforce initiatives that were being targeted for budget cuts, safeguarding almost \$100 million in resources for the state's education and skills training programs.

**MICHIGAN SKILLSPAN**

Our SkillSPAN partners in Michigan worked with NSC, Business Leaders United (BLU), and other partners—including the Michigan Community College Association and the Michigan Manufacturers Association—to gather signatures for comments directing the state to use federal investments toward digital skills training. Since then, NSC's advocacy led to the state's digital equity plan reflecting several of our strategic recommendations and includes a chart from NSC's research on the wage outcomes of jobs that require digital skills.

**PROSPER GEORGIA**

Our SkillSPAN partners in Georgia leveraged NSC resources to educate stakeholders on the childcare crisis and its implications on job quality and economic mobility. PROSPER Georgia successfully achieved two wins to help address childcare barriers in the 2024 legislative session, including a \$9 million investment in the state's childcare subsidy program and the passage of a bill to create a committee on affordable childcare.

# SPOTLIGHT ON THE 2024 SKILLS SUMMIT.



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**IN APRIL, WE HELD OUR ANNUAL SKILLS SUMMIT, BRINGING TOGETHER MORE THAN 450 ADVOCATES FROM 41 STATES, THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, AND PUERTO RICO TO DISCUSS HOW WE CAN ADVANCE POLICIES THAT BUILD AN INCLUSIVE ECONOMY AND PRIORITIZE AFFORDABLE SKILLS TRAINING, CAREER PATHWAYS TO QUALITY JOBS, AND SUPPORTIVE SERVICES LIKE CHILD CARE.**

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**"THIS IS THE MOMENT FOR THE WORK THAT YOU ALL DO. THIS IS OUR TIME. IT'S YOUR TIME. IT'S GAME TIME."**

Acting Secretary of Labor  
Julie Su

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## SPOTLIGHT ON THE 2024 SKILLS SUMMIT

This year's event marked a turning point in NSC's advocacy and outreach. For the first time, members of the President's cabinet attended the event in person, speaking to the critical role NSC has played in uplifting the importance of workforce development in building an economy that serves everyone.

Acting Labor Secretary Julie Su and Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo each announced new agency efforts. Raimondo introduced a new Department Administrative Order to establish a Department of Commerce workforce policy agenda aimed at equipping workers with the education and skills needed for advancing critical and emerging technologies.

Su unveiled a comprehensive set of principles to guide employers and AI developers in creating and deploying AI in ways that improve job quality and safeguard workers' rights.

The summit also displayed NSC's commitment to lead bold workforce conversations, with plenaries and workshops on the care economy and workforce and the challenges and opportunities presented by AI. Both are areas of work that NSC plans on prioritizing in the coming years.

At the summit, we also unveiled our new polling series, "Public Perspectives,"

which showed overwhelming bipartisan support for increased government funding for skills training—and that more than two-thirds of voters said they would be more likely to support a candidate who champions investment in skills training, a 10 percent jump from 2019.

"This poll put skills policy on the policy agenda, which is critical," NSC's CEO Robert Espinoza said. The polling series analyzed American public perspectives on jobs, skills training, and the economy.

**" THIS WAS MY FIRST NSC SKILLS SUMMIT AND I EMBRACED THE OPPORTUNITY TO GAIN PERSPECTIVE ON A COLLABORATIVE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT EFFORT FOR POSITIVE SYSTEM CHANGE. THE ISSUES DISCUSSED WERE NOT SIMPLE FOR LEGISLATORS AND POLICYMAKERS OPERATING AT THE INTERSECTION OF LABOR AND EDUCATION. HOWEVER, ALL ADVOCATES SEEMED ENERGIZED, UNIFIED, AND FEARLESS ABOUT THE WORK THAT NEEDED TO BE DONE.**

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**GOREN DILLARD**  
SENIOR DIRECTOR OF WORKFORCE  
DEVELOPMENT AT THE URBAN LEAGUE OF  
GREATER CLEVELAND.

# MORE HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR CAMPAIGNS

## — College & Career Pathways

With college costs soaring, NSC's *Making College Work* campaign is tackling the big questions around affordability, quality, and support for students in non-degree programs. From seminal reports to practical handbooks, we're helping states build a better data ecosystem and more inclusive financial aid—laying the groundwork for a future where every student has a fair shot.

At the end of 2023, NSC's *Making College Work* campaign announced our *Expanding College & Career Possibilities* (ECCP) initiative, aimed at increasing college affordability, expanding holistic supports, and improving the quality of non-degree credentials via supporting our state partners with technical assistance, research, and policy support. This year, ECCP launched its work with key state partners, kicking off technical assistance programs in four states and holding several *Policy Action Labs*.

In July, the campaign released a first-of-its-kind report on state-based financial aid programs and how they benefit (or don't benefit) students in non-degree programs. As NSC's Director of Research Lindsey Reichlin put it, "The report brings together some of these conversations in a new way that is unique in the field. There hasn't been a lot of work done on this topic—how are states designing financial aid programs that benefit students in non-degree programs? We were able to highlight the way states are integrating holistic supports with

their financial aid programs, which will continue to be a focus of NSC's work moving forward." The campaign also published a comprehensive handbook, titled "Charting the Course to Quality," designed to guide states in building and enhancing the data ecosystem necessary to evaluate non-degree credential programs, based on several years of research and technical assistance provided to state partners.

## — Building the Workforce of Tomorrow

**America's infrastructure overhaul isn't just about roads and bridges—it's about people. Through our *People Powered Infrastructure* campaign, NSC is ensuring that federal investments go beyond projects and prioritize the workforce behind them.**

Since the passage of 2022's *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act*, also known as the *Bipartisan Infrastructure Law*, NSC has worked to ensure that this historic federal investment in American infrastructure prioritizes workforce needs. That's why in June, NSC's *People Powered Infrastructure* campaign launched our *Infrastructure Equity Policy Project* with partners in 11 states, with the goal of training the next generation of infrastructure and clean energy workers by advancing state policies that intentionally open the door to millions of people—particularly women and workers of color. This year, NSC, in collaboration with the BlueGreen Alliance, released a groundbreaking report quantifying

how the historic investments of the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act*, the *Inflation Reduction Act*, and the *CHIPS and Science Act* will provide a once-in-a-generation opportunity to strengthen the backbone of our economy by generating nearly 3 million jobs per year over the life span of the laws.

As NSC's Chief Strategy Officer Brooke DeRenzis put it, "That report is first of its kind research that really quantified the opportunity—the number of jobs being created in different fields, and the opportunity that represents for workers of color and women." The report, titled "Unprecedented Opportunity," had an immediate impact in the field. "We met with the White House to talk about the findings, and we heard from federal and state leaders that it was huge, because it was the first time there was this kind of very smart, data-driven analysis about what this funding can do for workers, their jobs, and their lives," said Espinoza.

## — Connecting Skills & Opportunity

**In today's digital world, skills mean access. Through our *Digital Equity @ Work* campaign, NSC is bridging the digital divide by pushing for bold federal and state policies. From California to Connecticut, we are bringing the country closer to a future where everyone has the skills and connectivity needed to thrive.**

This year, our *Digital Equity @ Work* campaign advanced on the federal level, with the introduction of the *Digital Skills for Today's Workforce Act*, and at state levels, as several SkillSPAN partners worked to shape how their state invests funding from the \$42 billion federal *Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment* (BEAD) program. NSC, through its SkillSPAN coalitions

in California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, North Carolina, and Texas, provided recommendations that shaped their states' digital equity and broadband proposals.

## — Strengthening Workforce Funding

**NSC is on a mission to secure a stronger future for workforce development. From our federal advocacy on WIOA reauthorization to our Business Leaders United network, we're amplifying the call for a stronger, more modern workforce investment that meets real worker and employer needs through our *Creating an Equitable Resilient Workforce* campaign.**

In 2024, NSC called for a reauthorization of WIOA that fully funds vital skills training and workforce development programs. While the House and Senate bills to reauthorize WIOA did not address all of workers' most critical needs, they made some important progress in improving our workforce development programs. Inspired by NSC's policy work and WIOA recommendations, both bills included an *Individual Training Accounts* (ITA) program with a floor of \$5,000 alongside dedicated funding.

We also mobilized our *Business Leaders United* (BLU) network to engage stakeholders and educate Congress on how funding for workforce programs should be allocated. The BLU network shared a letter signed by more than 150 organizations that urged Congress to allocate funding for industry and sector partnership grants, as well as technical assistance, to better align training programs with the needs of employers. The letter also called on Congress to expand federal Pell Grant eligibility to cover shorter-term skills training programs, making them more accessible and affordable.



# NETWORK HIGHLIGHTS

## AT NSC, WE KNOW THAT BUILDING A SKILLED, INCLUSIVE WORKFORCE REQUIRES THE VOICES OF MANY—FROM STUDENTS AND WORKERS TO BUSINESS LEADERS AND STATE PARTNERS.

This year, through our Voices for Skills, SkillSPAN, and Business Leaders United networks, we amplified diverse perspectives, advanced equity-driven policies, and empowered advocates to shape a stronger workforce for all. Together, we're driving impact on the ground and in the halls of power, ensuring every worker has the support and opportunities they deserve. Below is a snapshot of the remarkable progress made by each network in 2024.

### — Voices for Skills

The Voices for Skills network launched a new council made up of workers and students who are working with NSC to shape policy and educate the public and policymakers on the need for workforce development investments. The Student Advisory Council is made up of eight students currently (or recently) enrolled in a skills training program. They inform and shape policy recommendations via their lived experience. Working with our Making College Work campaign, members of the council have already participated in conferences, panels, webinars, and Hill briefings.



*“Serving on the National Skills Coalition’s Making College Work Student Advisory Council has been a powerful journey, amplifying my voice as an advocate in the push for student-centered policies. This year, preparing to attend the Skills Summit, and visiting Capitol Hill for the first time allowed me to advocate with confidence for workforce students’ needs. Presenting at the National Council for Workforce Education Conference this past October was another highlight, where I shared my insights from the Council and suggested impactful policies for adult learners. Until now I never knew there were so many people dedicated to the advancement of skilled workers/learners. These experiences, addition to collaborating with my peers has deepened my passion for creating pathways to success for all students, especially those balancing education with work and family.”*

**ALISHA SMALL**  
STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBER,  
CERTIFIED PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT COACH,  
AND ENTREPRENEUR FROM GERMANTOWN, MA

Voices for Skills members also played a key role in informing NSC’s work to reauthorize WIOA, sharing their experiences in more than a dozen listening sessions.

“Storytelling is a big part of the Voices for Skills network, because we want to illustrate the policy, and we want to be able to give folks a platform to tell their stories, share what their experiences have been, and advocate for policies that they are about,” said NSC’s Worker and Student Voices Director Michael Richardson.

### — SkillSPAN

In addition to the state-based policy victories highlighted above, NSC’s SkillSPAN network spent much of 2024 focusing on laying the groundwork for campaigns to leverage the historic federal investment in state infrastructure.

SkillSPAN coalitions are taking a leading role in the Infrastructure Equity Policy Project initiative, with state-based partners working with NSC to define and advocate for specific policy goals.

“We want to make sure that we use this opportunity to not only invest in the workforce, but diversify the workforce and put people of color and women in good paying infrastructure and clean energy jobs. That’s the opportunity,” said NSC’s State Strategies Managing Director Melissa Johnson. “I’m excited about the advancement of policy that will happen as part of the Infrastructure Equity Policy Project.”



*“Over the years, National Skills Coalition has brought expertise and a great network to the Ohio Workforce Coalition. Through events like the annual Skills Summit, we gain insights into critical issues, like the Biden administration’s climate and infrastructure investments, and get connected to experts. NSC’s SkillSPAN members have also informed Ohio’s conversations about infrastructure spending, childcare solutions, and applying a racial equity lens to workforce development. Learning from peers, while also sharing what we’ve learned, has accelerated progress and increased impact on policy and practice.”*

**REBECCA KUSNER**  
DIRECTOR OF THE OHIO WORKFORCE  
COALITION AND FOUNDER OF R4 WORKFORCE

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## NETWORK HIGHLIGHTS

### — Business Leaders United

In 2024, NSC expanded the Business Leaders United (BLU) network by increasing the number of members in key states by more than 70 members, as well as expanding the network of local businesses to three new states.

We also welcomed two new members to BLU's executive committee—Jamal Jessie, the Workforce Development Manager for Georgia Power, and MJ Ryan, the Senior Director for Workforce Development and Economic Opportunity at Mass General Brigham.

The BLU network played a critical role in supporting many of NSC's priority campaigns. In April, NSC held a clean energy event with 50 BLU members, paired with a Hill visit, that focused on what states should do to maximize federal infrastructure investments in clean energy, from a workforce perspective.



*“Business Leaders United has been a great partner, providing a platform for business owners and leaders to connect with each other and promote investments in skills training for a strong economy.”*

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**JAMAL JESSIE**  
**MBA, WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT MANAGER,**  
**GEORGIA POWER**

# LOOKING AHEAD





LOOKING AHEAD

**IT'S AN EXCITING TIME TO BE IN THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT FIELD. AS WE CONCLUDE OUR LATEST THREE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN AND LOOK TO THE FUTURE, NSC STANDS AS A PREEMINENT LEADER IN BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE ECONOMY THAT WORKS FOR EVERYONE.**

We championed the equitable workforce development policies needed at both the state and federal levels, ensuring that workers and businesses can thrive. These efforts are grounded in our core commitment to providing everyone with fair and full opportunities for good jobs, high-quality education, training, and career pathways.

Our new strategic plan, which we will unveil in the fall of 2025, builds on our existing initiatives—a deeper dive into the role AI will play in reshaping the workforce, for example. It will also expand our work into critical areas, such as the importance of the care workforce.

At NSC, we recognize that skills training and quality non-degree credentials are essential, but they are not the only dimensions that determine job quality. While we will continue to promote skills policies, we will form partnerships with organizations that are working to holistically improve job quality, such as increasing wages and benefits.

Looking to the future, NSC remains steadfast in our commitment to advocate for policies that ensure every person in America has access to affordable skills training, career pathways to quality jobs, and supportive services like child care, long-term care, and transportation that make it possible for them to thrive in their jobs.

We're excited to embark on our next phase, and we hope you will stay with us on the journey.

**NSC'S PHILANTHROPIC PARTNERS INCLUDE A BROAD AND DIVERSE RANGE OF FOUNDATIONS AND CORPORATIONS THAT SHARE OUR STEADFAST BELIEF THAT AFFORDABLE SKILLS TRAINING, CAREER PATHWAYS TO QUALITY JOBS, AND SUPPORTIVE SERVICES HELP BUILD A STRONGER ECONOMY AND A MORE PROSPEROUS FUTURE FOR COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE COUNTRY.**

We are deeply grateful for the generosity of the following philanthropic partners:

- Ascendium Education Group
- Autodesk Foundation
- Ballmer Group
- Breakthrough Energy
- The Annie E. Casey Foundation
- Comcast
- ECMC Foundation
- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund
- Conrad N. Hilton Foundation
- The James Irvine Foundation
- JP Morgan Chase & Co.
- Kapor Center
- W.K. Kellogg Foundation
- The Kresge Foundation
- Lumina Foundation
- Truist Foundation
- Walmart
- Workday

To learn more about supporting NSC, email Krista Batey at [kristab@nationalskillscoalition.org](mailto:kristab@nationalskillscoalition.org).



Karina Paredes-Arzola, State Network Manager at NSC, meets with SkillSPAN members during the network's fifth-anniversary celebration.



**NATIONAL  
SKILLS COALITION**

1250 Connecticut Ave NW, Suite 200  
Washington, DC 20036

[nationalskillscoalition.org](http://nationalskillscoalition.org)