

# INVESTING IN OUR MOST CRITICAL ASSET—THE AMERICAN WORKER

America requires a multifaceted approach to talent development that meets the needs of young adults entering the workforce for the first time, mid-career adults, and those poorly served by the education system in need of reskilling or retraining. Policymakers at the state and federal level have the dual responsibility of helping American workers dislocated by the pandemic return to work and while also partnering with job creators to build a workforce development infrastructure that prioritizes the skills necessary for the 21st-century economy. Close collaboration between program providers and employers ensures learners and jobseekers acquire in-demand skills and facilitates a faster, more seamless entry into the workforce. Strong economic fundamentals increase labor market demand and incentivize employers to engage closely with education and training providers and adopt human resource policies that benefit workers.

Creating a holistic and responsive talent development ecosystem requires preparing Americans for the workforce and facilitating lifelong learning.

The following policies should be considered:

**FUELING ECONOMIC GROWTH:** A robust labor market that provides ample job opportunities is a precondition for a successful workforce development agenda. Anti-growth policies are most detrimental to vulnerable workers on the fringes of the economy.

**FACILITATING WORKPLACE-RELEVANT TRAINING:** Public support for workplace training must be oriented toward programs that provide skills the marketplace values and that employers demand. A full-spectrum approach must include career and technical education, apprenticeships, and other on-the-job learning experiences.

**PARTNERING WITH EMPLOYERS:** Businesses have the on-the-ground, industry-level knowledge about economic trends and needs that government bureaucrats lack in their failed efforts to engage in economic central planning. Coordinating and collaborating with employers is a promising way to assist before workers are at risk of job displacement instead of afterward when they are already in a position of government dependency.

**REMOVING ARTIFICIAL BARRIERS:** Workers often face unnecessary impediments to switching occupations or are shut out from jobs for which they are perfectly qualified based on their skills and experience simply because they lack the endorsement given by a formal degree or educational institution.

Workforce development policies should align to create a system that encourages upward mobility, recognizes the acquisition of skills, and addresses the barriers within occupational licensing that reduce competition and access to opportunities.