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Make the Economic Recovery Work for All Americans with Better Public Data and Accountability
How the Biden Administration Can Measure an Inclusive Economic Recovery

- **Our recovery from the deepest and most abrupt recession in history requires better data and data systems to hold skills policies accountable to equitable outcomes**
- **Now is the time for immediate executive action to boldly lay out a vision for public data and accountability to build back a stronger American economy for individuals, families, and businesses**

Our recovery must invest in those first who have been hurt the most

The pandemic threatened the lives and livelihoods of American workers, families, and communities. It reinforced long-standing injustices and structural barriers faced by Black, Latino American, Native American, and all people of color. Our recovery from this global health crisis and the deepest and most abrupt economic recession on record[1], is an opportunity to directly confront and dismantle structural racism, including the labor market and educational inequities that led to workers of color facing higher rates of job losses and economic uncertainty. This is a moral and economic imperative.

It is time for a new call to ensure that our full array of skills investments works well for *all* Americans – from the education and workforce training programs which directly prepare individuals for meaningful employment to the social services programs that work to maintain stability for individuals and families as they strive for economic prosperity.

While we are rich in collecting data, we are poor in harnessing it to drive the change we need. Over seventy million individuals annually engage in our nation's education, workforce, and social services systems. Yet without common measures across federal program investments, we cannot begin to evaluate the success or failure of our economic recovery efforts on those who have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic recession. Nor can we begin to

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[1] https://www.ilr.cornell.edu/work-and-coronavirus/work-and-jobs/how-job-losses-during-covid-19-recession-compare-past-recessions

leverage the interventions, administrative changes, and new policies that will ensure an inclusive economic recovery.[2] We cannot show the American people the effects of our federal investments to rebuild the economic livelihood of their families and communities.

This pandemic also laid bare the inadequate data system infrastructure needed to support an unprecedented sixty-five million Americans seeking employment assistance since mid-March. Not only were state Unemployment Insurance systems unable to process and activate critical income supports as workers waited for safe conditions to return to their jobs, but many more millions of eligible workers are estimated to not even have tried to apply.[3] Data systems that support these workers who now qualify for federal reemployment support and training will now be taxed to meet the increased demand for their services. The American public deserves functional and modern data systems, and policymakers need efficient data systems that can produce timely, actionable information.

The White House should take immediate action

Creating and implementing an effective data and accountability policy will require a strong, clear vision from federal leadership. The Biden administration can articulate this vision – one that says policymakers must invest in modern data systems and robust reporting in order to maximize the impact of their investments, set targets to achieve desired outcomes, and augment policies to ensure that *all* can benefit and be successful. This vision would build on President-Elect Biden's previous leadership in this area; in 2014, Vice President Biden led President Obama's call for an across-the-board review of America's job training programs to make them more job-driven, engaging employers, and improving information on employment results so we know what's working well and what's not.[4]

Here are specific actions that could be taken:

- Under the direction of a proposed White House Interagency Sub-Taskforce on Skills for an Inclusive Economic Recovery, create a Data Working Group cooperatively led by the Departments of Education, Labor, and Commerce with participation from federal agency leadership overseeing American education, workforce, and safety net programs, including Higher Education Act, Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA; e.g. six core titles spanning the Departments of Education

[2] https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/NSC-Skills-for-an-Inclusive-Economic-Recovery-web-Sept-2020.pdf
[3] https://www.epi.org/blog/unemployment-filing-failures-new-survey-confirms-that-millions-of-jobless-were-unable-to-file-an-unemployment-insurance-claim/
[4] https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/skills_report.pdf

and Labor); other Department of Labor (DOL) programs that include occupational skills training; and Department of Commerce programs that serve small businesses, disadvantaged, and minority-owned businesses.

- Charge the Data Working Group with establishing a set of measures would center those most impacted by the pandemic to show progress towards an inclusive economic recovery. Measures should show improved self-sufficiency for individuals who receive skills training and obtain quality credentials and for businesses who participate in sector partnerships and invest in publicly subsidized on-the-job training, work-based learning, and upskilling for workers without a four-year degree. These measures should populate a public dashboard to track the aggregate progress of individuals and businesses benefiting from recovery efforts. The dashboard must disaggregate outcome measures for individuals by race, ethnicity, English language proficiency, gender, and age, whenever possible, to reveal disparate outcomes when they become apparent.[5]

- The Data Working Group should review the baseline economic outcome measures and recommend targets that can be reviewed quarterly for equity or other structural gaps that would trigger corrective responses from agencies and administrations. Corrective actions could include administrative changes to existing policy, the issuance of individual, departmental, or joint guidance, and/or opportunities for technical assistance to states to encourage or incentivize action to closing outcomes gaps.

- The Data Working Group should also estimate the investments needed to modernize the data systems which support federal education and training programs and provide technical assistance to states who want to prioritize or must upgrade their data systems before another economic shock causes catastrophic system failure. The Employment and Training Administration (ETA) at the DOL has begun this work; it should be supported and extended.

- Finally, the Departments of Labor and Education should make administrative changes to serve the data needs of an inclusive economic recovery, including:
  - Adapt the WIOA Title I Statistical Adjustment Model (SAM) to the conditions of a recession economy to strengthen and encourage states to use the SAM to better serve historically marginalized worker populations who have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

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[5] https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/Racial-Equity-Report_6x9_web.pdf

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- Capitalize on the historic cross-agency system and state partnership of the State Wage Interchange System (SWIS) agreement that makes available state administrative wage data collected from businesses by expanding SWIS access to all education and workforce training programs to ensure that complete and accurate employment and wage outcomes of all future stimulus investments are streamlined.

The American public supports these changes

Seven out of ten voters support collecting and publicly reporting data on which groups of people are and are not benefiting from stimulus and recovery efforts, including investments in skills training. Better data, increased transparency, and more efficient data systems are important to broad-based groups of state and local officials eager to understand the successes and failures of workforce programs serving their constituents, worker-advocacy groups, community-based organizations, racial justice and civil rights champions, and anti-poverty groups.

The time for bold action is now

We cannot simply return the economy to the way it was pre-pandemic, with structural inequities and an uneven playing field for some workers. This moment in time represents an opportunity for the Biden Administration to fully welcome Black and Latino Americans, Native Americans, immigrants, and women as equal participants of this economic recovery.

Measuring the impact of skills interventions through data transparency is essential to ensure this recovery is investing in those who have been disproportionately impacted and to eliminate structural racism that contributed to those inequities before and during the pandemic.

This pandemic has magnified the need for timely, accurate and complete data, as well as data systems that are agile enough to get actionable information into the hands of policymakers to build a stronger American economy for individuals, families, and businesses.

For further information regarding these recommendations, please contact Katie Spiker, National Skills Coalition's Director of Government Affairs, at katies@nationalskillscoalition.org.

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