

Essential In Deed:

State Application Materials

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Application deadline and logistics

- **Deadline for application submission:** **October 22, 2021 at 5:00 p.m. Pacific Time.**
- **Process for submission:** Complete application narrative as outlined in “What to include in your state’s application” section below. E-mail application (in Word or PDF form) to amandabs@nationalskillscoalition.org.
- **Questions?** Refer to the Frequently Asked Questions document for this project (*provided separately*) or contact Amanda Bergson-Shilcock, NSC Senior Fellow, at 215-285-2860 (mobile) or amandabs@nationalskillscoalition.org.

Overview of this project

This year-long technical assistance project will help state government officials to think creatively about what kinds of administrative or other policy changes can help them *upskill more essential workers*, particularly those working in frontline jobs for *small businesses*. Better upskilling policies can help workers adapt to new demands for *digital skills* and can help states *close racial equity gaps*.

The five (5) states selected to participate in this year-long project will receive new, state-specific qualitative and quantitative data analyses to help them identify potential policy interventions, as well as expert technical assistance in designing and advancing a relevant policy solution.

Why National Skills Coalition is leading this project

Jobs that require skills training are the backbone of our economy. National Skills Coalition (NSC) fights for a national commitment to inclusive, high-quality skills training so that more people have access to a better life, and more local businesses see sustained growth.

Since 2000, through expert analysis and technical assistance, broad-based organizing, targeted advocacy, and cutting-edge communications, NSC has changed hundreds of state and federal skills policies that have changed thousands of lives and grown local businesses and economies.

We build networks representing businesses, workers, colleges, community organizations, public officials, and advocates. We engage these networks to craft policy proposals and mobilize them to win concrete policy change.

NSC recognizes the disproportionate impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and economic crisis on workers of color, immigrants, and workers with a high school diploma or less. We advocate for an ***inclusive economic recovery*** that acknowledges the essential role of small businesses who hire locally and invest in their people, but need policymakers to be their partner.

NSC's staff of nearly 30 policy, organizing, and communications experts is well-positioned to provide the technical assistance and other support necessary for state success via the Essential In Deed project. In particular:

- We see a moral and economic imperative to dismantle structural racism within workforce education and training. To that end, we worked closely with our National Advisory Panel on Racial Equity and other NSC members to produce [***The Roadmap to Racial Equity: An Imperative for Workforce Development Advocates***](#) in 2019, and are continuing to advance its recommendations through ongoing advocacy, technical assistance provision, and partnership with state agencies and other workforce stakeholders. Just last month, we launched a six-state [***Racial Equity Learning Group***](#) to further deepen state policy work to close equity gaps.
- We have conducted substantial previous research about effective policies for upskilling frontline workers, including a report on state incumbent worker training funds ([***Funding Resilience: How Public Policies Can Support Businesses in Upskilling Workers for a Changing Economy***](#)) and another report highlighting best practices in addressing skill needs among frontline service-sector workers ([***Foundational Skills in the Service Sector***](#)).

- Finally, NSC’s robust expertise in digital skills policy is reflected in an array of recent publications, many of which explore the rapid increase in digital skill demands for frontline jobs spurred by the Covid-19 pandemic. [*The New Landscape of Digital Literacy*](#) and [*Applying a Racial Equity Lens to Digital Literacy*](#) provide detailed statistics, while [*Boosting Digital Literacy in the Workplace*](#) focuses on emerging best practices and policy tools for building occupational digital skills.

NSC’s desired outcomes for this project

Overall, this project is intended to ensure that:

- Participating states adopt policies that expand participation in essential worker upskilling programs, including by small businesses
- Policies are developed with the explicit intention of producing more equitable outcomes for essential workers of color
- Policies specifically include digital skill-building as an eligible component of upskilling
- Policies are informed by quantitative and qualitative data gathered through this project (data profiles and focus groups), including input from frontline essential workers and small businesses
- Policies are responsive to individual state conditions (political, economic, etc.) while also having broader potential for other states to replicate

In addition, each individual state selected for this project will identify its own *specific* outcome(s) in collaboration with NSC staff. For example, a state might seek to increase the percentage of small businesses that receive state Incumbent Worker Training grants, or to increase the participation of Latinas in work-based learning programs in essential industries.

States are being asked to identify *potential* outcomes in their application to participate in this TA project, but will not need to *finalize* their outcomes until after states are selected and the project has begun. States will likely wish to draw on the qualitative and quantitative data provided through this project to inform their decisionmaking about what outcomes they are working toward and how policy change can help to achieve them.

The technical assistance (TA) states will receive under this project

This initiative will help small teams of state officials to enact or strengthen policies that help essential workers engage in upskilling opportunities, helping to narrow racial equity gaps. These policies will be inclusive of small businesses, which often struggle to access incumbent worker training funds or other upskilling support due to limited capacity.

NSC will accomplish this goal by providing technical assistance to five selected states as described below.

Activities and Support:

- **Data profiles.** NSC has contracted with a consultant, the [Center for Regional Economic Competitiveness](#), which will work with state officials to determine the design of a data profile containing key demographic and labor market information on frontline essential workers within the state. The consultant will complete the data profile using publicly available data, and may also include internal state data if available and appropriate. **See note in next paragraph.**
- **Qualitative data from essential workers and small businesses.** NSC will provide a consultant who will conduct two focus groups (via Zoom) in each state. One focus group will consist of essential workers in frontline roles, including workers of color. The other will consist of representatives from small and mid-sized businesses, including entrepreneurs of color. Both focus groups will explore the factors that encourage or preclude essential workers from participating in upskilling opportunities, whether through state incumbent worker training funds or other policies. Both focus groups may be supplemented by a handful of individual interviews if necessary to gain a broad range of perspectives. Each state will receive a short memo synthesizing key findings from their state's focus groups. **Please note:** While the qualitative data snapshot and quantitative focus group data produced as part of this project are primarily intended for use by state agency staff, NSC will also make these documents publicly available to workforce and education advocates. States are encouraged to explore ways to use these documents to strengthen collaborative relationships both within and outside government.
- **Development of an action plan.** Based on the qualitative and quantitative data gathered through the above-mentioned data profile and focus groups, NSC will work with states to identify a policy-related goal and an action plan for accomplishing that goal. The action plan will include:
 - Technical recommendations on how the state can strengthen its upskilling or incumbent worker training policies to better serve frontline essential workers and small businesses
 - A short list of tasks and milestones necessary to achieve the proposed policy changes
 - A customized outreach and engagement strategy to build momentum for the proposed policy changes among influential stakeholders, including other state officials and external advocates (if appropriate)

- **Direct technical assistance to advance action plans.** Following the creation of states' action plans, NSC will host periodic calls with individual states (roughly every 4-6 weeks) to support advancement of their action plan. In between these calls, NSC staff will gather additional information on an as-needed basis to support state progress. In addition, NSC staff will be available to participate in briefings as necessary to build momentum for proposed policy changes across state agencies and/or with the Governor's office or legislature.
- **Cross-state learning.** During the year-long initiative, NSC will provide at least two opportunities for states to engage in peer learning with other states participate in this technical assistance project. As appropriate, NSC may also connect individual states with exemplar states, to enable them to get behind-the-scenes information about a policy they are considering that has already been implemented by the exemplar state.

Project milestones and timeline

NSC will select five (5) states to participate in this project, per the following timeline:

- **July-August 2021:** NSC invites states to participate in September 22 information session
- **September 20, 2021:** States receive advance copy of technical assistance application form
- **September 22, 2021:** States attend information session to learn more about the TA project and get questions answered by NSC staff
- **October 22, 2021:** States submit applications to NSC for participation in TA project*
- **November 2021:** NSC notifies applicant states of whether or not they have been selected for participation; work on data profiles and focus groups begins
- **November 2021-February 2022:** States will work with NSC and its consultant to inform the development of state-specific data profiles and the implementation of state-specific focus groups (via Zoom); results of both the quantitative and qualitative data gathering will be shared with state teams
- **March-April 2022:** NSC staff work with states to finalize their policy change goals and develop action plans for meeting those goals. NSC will hold individual meetings with each state team (virtually or in-person depending on health and safety considerations of the pandemic) as part of this process.
- **April 2022-January 2023:** NSC staff will provide TA to states in carrying out action plans. States will have check-in calls with NSC every 4-6 weeks, and will participate in two cross-state virtual meetings for peer learning.

- **January 2023:** States will close out action plans, and NSC will publish a final report with cross-state learnings from project

***Note:** NSC may request a call with a state’s primary contact person after proposal has been submitted to clarify any information in the proposal

Criteria by which states will be selected for this project

To be considered for this technical assistance project, states *must* meet the following criteria:

- The state team must comprise a cross-agency team, including support from or participation of a representative of the Governor’s office, and must describe how team members have the authority required to advance essential worker upskilling policies
- The state team must commit to using this technical assistance project to advance a policy or policies that promote racially equitable outcomes for upskilling of frontline essential workers, including those employed by small businesses
- The state team must commit to participating actively in all of the technical assistance activities described earlier in this document
- The state team lead must demonstrate a commitment to participate in all milestone meetings as described in the previous section, along with regular check-ins with NSC technical assistance providers
- The state must submit an application that includes ***all*** of the items described in the below section (“*What to include in your state’s application*”)

NSC will also consider other factors, such as geographic diversity among applicant states and responsiveness of each state’s proposed goal to the project’s overall goal.

What to include in your state’s application

Please ensure that your application includes ALL of the following. Note that the application should be no more than four (4) pages long in total.

- **Point of contact for your state.** This person should be available by e-mail and phone for brief clarifying questions about your application between October 22-November 10, 2021, and should be the team lead throughout the project if your

state is selected. Please provide their name, job title, agency, phone, and e-mail address.

- ***Names, job titles, and agency names of the team members for this project.*** We recommend that states identify 3-5 appointees and civil servants who would be the participants in this TA project. Participants should be in decisionmaking roles, with the authority and expertise needed to advance policy changes. Include a brief statement of support from the Governor's office and identify who will serve as a representative for that office on your team for this project.
- ***Why your state is interested in this project.*** In particular, this should include:
 - why your state wants to participate in this project,
 - how the quantitative data profile and qualitative focus group data would be helpful to you,
 - what you hope to learn from the cross-state conversations, technical assistance from NSC, and development of an action plan as part of this project,
 - what policy change(s) you are considering, and
 - how those changes would close racial equity gaps in upskilling for essential workers and small businesses.

If you do not yet know exactly what type of policy change you would like to make, please describe to the best of your ability the program or service that you hope to improve (e.g., state tuition assistance program, state incumbent worker training fund, etc.) and why you think it is the appropriate place to target policy change.

In addition, please make sure to describe any ways in which this TA project would complement or support an initiative that the state is already engaged in – such as a postsecondary attainment goal, a racial equity goal, or other workforce development-related effort.

Submit your completed application via e-mail to amandabs@nationalskillscoalition.org by October 22, 2021 at 5:00 p.m. Pacific Time.