



**NATIONAL
SKILLS
COALITION**

Every worker. Every industry.
A strong economy.

New Federal Investments in Digital Equity: What Skills Advocates Need to Know

Caroline Treschitta
Amanda Bergson-Shilcock
December 13, 2021



THE TEAM



**Caroline
Treschitta**



**Amanda
Bergson-Shilcock**



THANK YOU!

- ▶ NSC members helped us develop a vision for digital equity

- ▶ Our Digital Equity @ Work principles went live this summer
 1. High quality hardware in all hands
 2. Every community connected
 3. A digital skill foundation for all
 4. Upskilling for every worker in every workplace
 5. Rapid reskilling for rapid re-employment



TODAY'S CONVERSATION

- ▶ Our DE principles are starting to become reality
- ▶ Your work helped get us here
- ▶ Where is “here”?
 - What did Congress just do?
 - What are the immediate implications for skills advocates?
- ▶ What do federal policymakers still *need* to do?
- ▶ How can NSC members take action?



CONGRESS PAID ATTENTION TO YOU

- ▶ You made your voices heard on Capitol Hill despite the pandemic:
 - **December 2020-February 2021** Hill meetings on Skills for an Inclusive Economic Recovery
 - **May 2021** NSC's infrastructure fly-in with digital equity ask
 - **August-November 2021** Hill meetings on infrastructure and reconciliation
 - **Fall 2021** Action Alerts to Congress



BIG PICTURE: WHAT WE ASKED FOR

- ▶ Dedicate \$100B in any infrastructure package to workforce training, *including necessary digital skills*, and supportive services
- ▶ Empower small and mid-sized businesses hit hardest by the pandemic to invest in skills training via sector partnerships
- ▶ Expand federal financial aid to cover short-term, high quality training programs



WHAT IS CONGRESS DOING?

- House passed the Build Back Better Act on Nov 21, 2021
- Bill includes **\$40 billion** for workforce training
 - Substantial funding for the sector partnerships
 - Funding for community college partnerships
 - Money that will help those most impacted by pandemic
- ***Senate is still negotiating their version of the bill***
- We need your help to get it over the finish line



CONGRESS DID TAKE ACTION ON OUR PRINCIPLES!

- ▶ Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act (IIJA)
 - Passed the Senate on August 10 (69-30)
 - Passed the House November 5 (228-206)
 - ***Signed into law*** by President Biden November 15, 2021

- ▶ Includes key investments in 3 of NSC's principles:
 - **\$65 billion for broadband and devices**
 - Broadband deployment in underserved communities
 - Expands Emergency Broadband Benefit Program - \$30 monthly subsidy to eligible households

 - Reflects NSC principle #1. ***High quality hardware in all hands*** and NSC principle #2. ***Every community connected***



ALSO IN IJA...

▶ **\$2.75 billion over 5 years for the Digital Equity Act.**

Reflects NSC principle #3. *A **digital skill foundation for all** - Nearly 50 million people in the U.S. need to build foundational digital skills to harness the power of connected devices. Every person must have the opportunity to develop broad-based, flexible digital problem-solving skills for current technologies and ongoing technological shifts.*



LET'S DIG IN TO THE DIGITAL EQUITY ACT (IN IIJA)

- \$2.75 billion (over five years)
- For comparison, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Titles I & II are just over \$3 billion/year.
- Senate co-sponsors Murray, Portman, and King ensured workforce and education woven throughout Digital Equity Act
- Read the [full legislative text](#)



WHAT'S IN THE DIGITAL EQUITY ACT?

- ▶ Every state will need to create a Digital Equity Plan (\$60M in ***planning grant*** funds) and then will be eligible for ***formula*** funding via Digital Equity Capacity Grants (\$1.44B over five years)
- ▶ Governors will need to appoint an ***administering entity*** to oversee planning



DIGITAL EQUITY ACT

(continued)

- ▶ **Digital Equity Competitive Grant program (\$1.25B over 5 years)**
- ▶ **Eligible to apply:**
 - A political subdivision, agency, or instrumentality of a State
 - An Indian Tribe, an Alaska Native entity, or a Native Hawaiian organization
 - A foundation, corporation, institution, or association that is a not-for-profit entity and not a school
 - A community anchor institution
 - A local educational agency
 - An entity that carries out a workforce development program
 - A partnership between any of the preceding entities
 - A partnership between any of the preceding entities and an entity that the Assistant Secretary determines to be in the public interest; and is not a school (*Cannot be or have been an administering entity under the Capacity Grant Program*)



WHAT'S NEXT?

- ▶ Digital Equity Act will be rolling out through the Commerce Department's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (**NTIA**)
- ▶ They are staffing up now – consider applying!
- ▶ NTIA will issue Requests for Information soon – be ready to provide input



Let's talk about immediate implications.



START NOW!

- YOU have the power to make sure your state takes full advantage of this federal investment
- Connect with **key national partners** to make your voice heard through their networks too:
 - National Digital Inclusion Alliance (www.digitalinclusion.org)
 - DigitalUS coalition at World Education (www.digitalus.org)
 - Coalition for Adult Basic Education (www.coabe.org)
 - National Governors Association (www.nga.org/workforce-innovation-network)



WHAT DOES THAT LOOK LIKE?

- Urge your governor's office to make sure **workforce** and **education** agencies are at the table from the beginning, not an afterthought
- Consider whether there is a particular agency you'd like to recommend that your governor appoints as the **administering entity**



WHAT DOES THAT LOOK LIKE?

(continued)

- Example: **National Digital Inclusion Alliance**
 - NDIA has 625 local affiliates – [see who is in your state!](#)
 - NDIA's free **listserv** is a useful source of information on digital inclusion (broadband, devices, basic skills) for practitioners
 - Use the [State Digital Skills Scorecard](#) to inform your advocacy (and give NDIA feedback on improvements!)
 - NDIA is also working on developing a state digital equity framework and other materials that advocates can use

Already on top of
these things?





THERE IS MORE YOU CAN DO NOW

- Make sure your governor's office is aware of any digital skills work your organization is *already* leading
- Review NSC's 10 state policy recommendations on digital skills to identify potential opportunities under DEA implementation
- Advocate for your state to **replicate innovative practices** even while waiting for federal rollout (e.g. Hawaii's recent digital skills survey of state residents)

There are practical steps to take at the federal level too.





CONNECT WITH FEDERAL AGENCIES

- Key agencies: **Commerce**: NTIA; **Education**: OCTAE; **Labor**: ETA
 - Participate in **listening sessions** (NTIA has 6 scheduled between now and Feb 2022)
 - Respond to **Requests for Comment**; help shape upcoming Notices of Funding Opportunity)
 - Make **informal recommendations** (e.g., encourage agencies to issue guidance clarifying how workforce and education funds can support digital equity work or how state workforce/education agencies to engage with DEA planning)

More needs to be done to make Principles #4 and 5 reality.





A QUICK REFRESHER:

- **Principle # 4. Upskilling for every worker in every workplace.** Technology is impacting different industries and occupations in different ways. We must empower every worker with industry- and occupational-specific digital skills to adapt and advance in their careers.
- **Principle #5. Rapid reskilling for rapid re-employment.** Each industry has specific technical demands. Overnight the pandemic brought structural shifts to our labor market, reminding us that every worker must have access to rapid reskilling to move from one industry to another.



Remind Congress of the need for investment in industry-specific digital *upskilling* and *reskilling*.



USE NSC RESOURCES TO MAKE THE CASE:



Full report:
www.tinyurl.com/BoostingDL

Digital skills fact sheets by industry (Summer 2021):

- Manufacturing
- Retail & hospitality
- Health & social work
- Construction,
transportation & storage



WHAT YOU CAN URGE CONGRESS TO DO

- Explicitly **seed digital skills** throughout all major workforce development legislation (such as the **upcoming reauthorization** of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act)
- Make additional **new** investments in digital skills, especially industry-specific digital skills
- Pass the **Build Back Better Act** – so that the investments in digital equity are paired with investments in workforce development training \$

On your mark...





GET SET...GO!

1. Sign on to NSC's 5 Principles for Digital Equity
2. Ask your **partners** (including businesses) to sign on too
3. Contact your **allies in state government** to ensure that skills advocates are represented in digital equity planning conversations
4. Join us in Washington DC **February 15-17** for the Skills Summit. Hear directly from federal leaders and tell Congress what else is needed!



Time for your questions!



STAY IN TOUCH

Caroline Treschitta

Policy Analyst

carolinet@nationalskillscoalition.org

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock

Senior Fellow

amandabs@nationalskillscoalition.org

215-285-2860 (mobile)