

Written Testimony of Girard J. Melancon, Ph. D.
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*Hearing on Educational Freedom and Opportunity for American Families, Students, and
Workers*

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Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Neal and members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify today. My name is Dr. Girard Melancon, and I am the Director of the National Green Jobs Advisory Council (NGJAC) at the National Council for Workforce Education (NCWE) and Board Chair of National Skills Coalition (NSC).

My work with NGJAC focuses on engaging employers to identify the mismatch between workers current skills, or those currently being taught by community and technical colleges. It also focuses on researching and distributing new and existing curricula that support current for-credit and noncredit programs run by community and technical colleges. This brings together colleges, businesses and other workforce stakeholders to integrate competencies needed for clean energy jobs of tomorrow into existing academic and training frameworks and credentials. For example, I have worked with schools to integrate solar Photovoltaic Technology Basics in to existing electrical programs.

I recently completed my 10-year tenure at Baton Rouge Community College (BRCC) as the Vice-Chancellor for Workforce Solutions. I have also served as an appointed authority for Democratic and Republican Governors at the Louisiana Department of Labor and the Office of Juvenile Justice.

I am deeply grateful to the committee for allowing me to provide testimony on this important topic.

Historic investment, historic opportunity

Every day, in communities across our nation, workers seek out opportunities to ensure their families can thrive. At the same time, businesses want to hire skilled workers—people trained for jobs in growing industries. But without access to inclusive, high-quality skills training, workers are locked out of opportunities to succeed, and local businesses can't expand.

A significant portion of good jobs in the US require training beyond high school, but not a four-year degree.¹ Postsecondary education and training have become essential to economic mobility, especially for adults of color. They are also critical to building an inclusive economy — one where workers and businesses who are most impacted by economic shifts, as well as workers who face structural barriers of discrimination or lack of opportunity, are empowered to equitably participate in — and benefit from — a growing economy.

¹ <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/3pathways/>

This challenge is particularly acute within industries targeted by historic federal investments and incentives that were part of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), the CHIPS and Science Act (CHIPS) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA).

Combined, these laws will support nearly 3 million jobs per year over the span of their authorization.²

Some of the largest job growth is expected to be in construction, with a demand for nearly 500,000 workers each year, manufacturing at 336,000, transportation and warehousing with 257,000 jobs and utilities with 15,000 jobs each year. Many of these jobs will be in clean energy technology.

According to the 2023 United States Energy and Employment Report (USEER), the number of jobs in battery electric vehicles increased by 27% from 2021 to 2022.³ This growth was almost 17 *times* faster than the increase in gasoline and diesel vehicle employment over the same time period. Additionally, across this period, clean vehicle production and maintenance accounted for more than half (59%) of all new jobs in the automobile industry.

The report also highlights rapid growth in offshore wind (20%) and other grid modernization (12%), coal fuel (22%) natural gas fuel (24%), petroleum (13%), hydrogen fuel cell vehicles (25%), natural gas vehicles (14%) and plug-in hybrid vehicles (10%).

The jobs created could provide meaningful improvement in workers economic security

These federal investments create the opportunity to boost economic security and job quality, redress long standing inequities, and expand the opportunities for communities and workers across the country.

Policies aimed at training the next generation of infrastructure workers should create equitable pathways to quality jobs. Quality jobs seek diversity in recruitment and hiring, provide good wages and benefits, ensure a safe, fair, healthy, and accessible workplace with a predictable schedule, provide opportunities to build skills and advance within a career, ensure that workers have a meaningful voice, and foster diversity, equity and inclusion so that all workers feel respected and empowered.

Job creation directly related to the IRA will lead to median wages that are 11% higher than the median wages across the workforce and are also more likely to provide workers with health benefits. Wages for those created under CHIPS are 28% higher than the median, and those directly created by BIL are 6% higher.

² <https://nationalskillscoalition.org/news/press-releases/new-research-finds-federal-clean-energy-manufacturing-and-infrastructure-investments-will-support-three-million-jobs-per-year/>

³ <https://www.energy.gov/sites/default/files/2023-06/2023%20USEER%20REPORT-v2.pdf>

Most of the jobs created will require skills training

Most of the jobs created under these investments will be accessible to workers with skills training and do not require a four-year degree. In fact, according to estimates from Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce, 60 percent of jobs created through BIL will require six months of training or less and it is expected that much of that training will be delivered by community colleges.

Yet, hiring trained workers for these jobs (as well as the success of planned infrastructure projects) hinges on a new generation of workers having access to the education, skills training, economic supports, and hiring and career advancement opportunities they need to land jobs in the booming infrastructure and clean energy sectors.

The challenge is that while these laws created jobs there is not a dedicated funding source within those laws to address workforce training. To realize this, though, *now* is the time for action to ensure training providers have the ability and purpose to build a pipeline of workers who can access good jobs.

The Problem:

U.S. workers do not, today, have access to the skills necessary to fill these jobs

A key premise that has emerged through this work is that there are many jobs in the green energy sector, yet there is a shortage of skilled workers. Energy workers are aging out and there is also a paucity of diversity among energy workers/electricians (Rewire America, 2023). According to US Census Bureau, Bureau of Economic Analysis, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023, and the Interstate Energy Renewable Council (IREC) Solar Census Survey 2023, approximately 70% of the electricians and green energy sector workers are comprised of white males.

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, the nation will need at least one million new clean energy workers by 2030. Concomitantly, a climate change crisis is occurring in that the U.S. must move strategically to decarbonize and eliminate nearly all greenhouse emissions from manufacturing, energy, and construction sectors. Where will we find the workers? There is also a major retirement issue facing all legacy crafts with not enough workers to fill the current demand.

The transportation sector is also changing rapidly and experiencing a lack of skilled workers. The number of jobs in battery electric vehicles increased by 27% from 2021-2022 accounting for the fastest energy technology growth (U.S. Energy and Employment Report, 2023). Most community colleges have infused vehicle electrification into automotive technician training programs. The non-fossil fuel vehicle technology sector is also growing rapidly. School buses, farming equipment, semi-tractor trailer trucks, small aircraft and others are becoming electrified or are utilizing hydrogen-electric technology. Hydrogen fuel cell vehicles increased by 25% from 2021-2022. And power plants are moving from traditional fossil fuel generated electricity to

hydrogen fuel cell stationary power. Community colleges do not have the curriculum to change traditional mechanic or heavy equipment programs from diesel to electrification or hydrogen technology. Currently, Cummins, CAT and others have developed training curriculum to reskill their existing workforce. However, the curriculum developed in-house is proprietary.

Training these workers will take investment, policy support and commitment to equity. The strategies to bridge this unprecedented demand and where we are now, though, are well established.

Without policy modernization, the U.S. does not have a scaled plan to prepare workers, either

For decades, our nation has failed to invest in high-quality, inclusive skills training that supports the careers of working people, the sustainability of local businesses, and an economy where everyone can thrive. As a result, people who may want to train for infrastructure careers often face barriers to doing so and projects are often critically understaffed, making it challenging for infrastructure employers to fill job vacancies. In addition to the lack of access to infrastructure skill-building opportunities that keeps people from getting good-paying infrastructure jobs, the sector is facing a “silver tsunami” of retirements as its aging workforce approaches the end of their working years. The additional jobs created by recent federal infrastructure investments will only heighten the demand for trained workers.

If our country is serious about training the next generation of workers, as well as ensuring that federal investments contribute to an inclusive economy, we need to intentionally open the door to millions of workers who want to train for a new career in infrastructure and clean energy—particularly workers of color, and women, who have been long been underrepresented in these sectors.

According to OECD data, the U.S. invests less in workforce policies than nearly every other industrialized country in the world.⁴ The U.S. would need to invest \$72 billion more annually just to reach the average investment of other industrial countries.

The World Economic Forum estimates that the U.S. needs to double its investment in the workforce each year for ten years just to adapt to technological change.

Congress has steadily cut investments in workforce programs, CTE, and adult education programs over the past twenty years.⁵ Congress provided virtually no dedicated funding as part of COVID response, recovery packages to address the needs of our public workforce system. Even funding included in BIL, CHIPS and IRA falls far short of what businesses, communities and workers need.

Without investments in our workforce, training programs, human service providers, community and technical colleges and others in the workforce ecosystem have too few resources to implement the strategies highlighted in this testimony. The strategies we know work.

⁴ <https://data.oecd.org/social/exp/public-spending-on-labour-markets.htm>

⁵ <https://nationalskillscoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/CIAW-Invest-in-AW-1.pdf>

Future proofing legacy careers with established strategies: *Robust Sector Strategies, career pathway programs and a focus on equity*

While the country has failed to make necessary investments in workers, we do know the strategies necessary to do so.

In my experience, strong education and training programs in the energy sector - and beyond - have three key components:

These programs convene and support partnerships between the local workforce ecosystem through industry or sector partnerships, they support bridges between where workers are and the skills businesses need, and they have an intentional focus on equity.

1. These programs convene and support partnerships between the local workforce ecosystem through industry or sector partnership

Sector strategies bring together primary stakeholders in the workforce ecosystem – community and technical colleges and other training providers, businesses and industry associations, community organizations, labor and labor management partnerships, and others – to create industry-led, sector-specific training programs. Programs created under this model engage local employers in order to keep curriculum relevant. These partnerships are designed to create a pipeline where workers can move from recruitment to training programs, and into quality jobs supported by employers engaged in the sector strategies. Additionally, participants in training programs associated with these industry or sector partnerships have access to not only training, but also supportive services that facilitate retention and completion.

The Hampton Roads Regional Workforce Training System (RWTS) is one such program, led by the Hampton Roads Workforce Council in the Hampton Roads region of Virginia. HRWC has a long history of convening and working within the region's partner network to implement sector partnerships. In 2019, HRWC commissioned a study of the regional workforce and talent pipeline, finding that Hampton Roads has a growing labor shortage. Prompted by the report's findings HRWC created the Coalition for Talent Development — a group dedicated to forming sector partnerships in major industries in the region. The coalition organized leaders from local businesses, education and training institutions, municipal government and economic development groups including HRWC to create their first sector partnership in the maritime industry.⁶

Industry partnerships also have the potential to expand access to quality infrastructure careers for people of color and women.⁷ In addition to fostering regional collaboration and expanding training capacity, the RWTS plans to enroll more than 950 people in maritime training programs

⁶ https://nationalskillscoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/NSC_infrastructurePlaybook_webFINAL.pdf

⁷ <https://nationalskillscoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/08-24-2020-NSC-Roadmap-for-Racial-Equity-Immigration-Special-Edition.pdf>

with Black, Indigenous and other people of color; women, veterans and young people who are neither in school nor working making up 70% of the talent.

2. These programs support bridges between workers' current skills and entry points for training programs and jobs

In addition to engaging businesses and workforce stakeholders in partnerships, strong training programs also meet students where they are in terms of prior educational attainment, demonstrated competencies, flexible options, affordability, and necessary supports. This means programs often support rapid reskilling and upskilling for workers. They help workers efficiently leverage existing expertise and prior learning to then build upon those demonstrated competencies and skill sets. For many workers in these programs it is not a linear pathway to credential attainment, hence there must be flexibility built into the development of these programs in order to meet the needs of workers and businesses.

3. These programs have an intentional focus on equity

Realizing the full equity promise of new jobs and meeting the workforce needs of infrastructure sectors requires local areas to analyze existing demographics within an industry, identify areas on which to focus and to measure and track success advancing those areas on which they focus.

The Illinois Workforce Innovation Board (IWIB) created an Equity Task Force to develop recommendations for reducing inequities in Illinois' workforce and education systems.⁶⁵ In addition to its recommendations to the IWIB, the Equity Task Force also identified opportunities for local workforce boards, recognizing the critical role local workforce system leaders and practitioners play in advancing equity. Three of the six recommendations relate to strengthening the delivery of equity advancing career services including: 1) Diversifying workforce system leadership and staff and providing systemwide training on equity, cultural competence, and cultural awareness and humility for those served by the system; 2) Providing funding to, and partnering with, organizations providing culturally specific services with a track record of success in serving target populations; and 3) Prioritizing workforce services that include supportive services.

Successful strategies in practice: North Baton Rouge Industrial Training Initiative

The North Baton Rouge Industrial Training Initiative (NBRITI) is a strong example of a training program and sector strategy, combined with this bridged learning approach, that has focused on equity.

NBRITI has trained over 450 people since 2012. Baton Rouge—located on the banks of the Mississippi river in southeastern Louisiana—is a significant port and major petrochemical center. It is also the home of the ExxonMobil Baton Rouge Refinery, which is the third-largest refinery in the United States and the eleventh-largest in the world.

By 2012, despite the productivity level and size of operations at the refinery, ExxonMobil executives were unable to deny that they were facing a worker shortage—specifically in the areas of welding, pipefitting, and electricity. Even though there was a significant number of individuals looking for work in the Baton Rouge area, the lack of foundational skills needed to begin a career at the refinery was evident.

As a solution, industry leaders sought assistance from Baton Rouge Community College (BRCC)—a two-year academic institution that strives to equip students with the skills they need to be successful in the workforce or transfer to a four-year degree program to continue their education. Together, ExxonMobil, BRCC, and other local partners including the Capital Area Technical College and community-based organizations created the North Baton Rouge Industrial Training Initiative (NBRITI). The goal of this collaborative effort is to train eligible North Baton Rouge residents at no cost to them for well-paying careers through an intensive, short-term training program designed to fast-track them to success.

To become eligible to enroll in the NBRITI, students must go through a screening process, which includes academic testing, drug testing, academic assessments, and interviews. This process helps identify and resolve any existing barriers to success that a potential trainee might face during the length of the program, such as limited access to transportation, unreliable housing, or lack of childcare.

Once enrolled in the program, which is financed with the help of participating companies and partially supported by Louisiana's Rapid Response Fund supported by funding from the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act funds,, students receive one-on-one guidance and professional development resources to set them up for long-term success. Students who successfully complete their programs can be immediately employed if they meet the requirements of NBRITI's "Ready to Go!" framework. This means they are consistently punctual, can use hand tools safely and effectively, and are strong team players. Ready to Go! is designed to be a fair and easy system that empowers students to be accountable for their own success.

Partners involved in this training model remain connected and engaged on a regular basis both during and outside the academic year through an Industrial Training Initiative steering committee. Consisting of approximately 40 individuals from various petrochemical and manufacturing service companies, committee members review curriculum content to ensure it is up-to-date, discuss the effectiveness of recruiting techniques, assess job placement rates, etc. Due to consistent stakeholder engagement, student support services, and intensive coursework, NBRITI has proven to be tremendously successful. More than three-quarters (80 percent) of individuals who have been trained through this program have been placed in jobs throughout the community. The NBRITI program has recently built pathways to Exxonmobil's apprenticeship program.

Policy recommendations to meet business and worker need

To realize the impact and opportunity at the center of the BIL, CHIPS, and IRA, Congress must advance policies that meet business demand while also ensuring that workers have equitable access to the education and training necessary to attain quality jobs. To that end, I recommend the following policies for your consideration.

1. Support affordable access to skills training and quality credentials

The cost of attaining a high-quality credential remains an obstacle for many current and prospective students and workers. Nearly half of students cite cost as the most significant barrier to achieving their postsecondary goals.⁸ While grant aid is available to many low-income students and workers, it typically falls far short of covering all education and training-related expenses, including tuition, fees, books, housing, transportation, food, and child care.⁹ Additionally, there remains a gap in the availability of federal student aid for students enrolled in high-quality shorter-term education and training programs – a policy which is sometimes mirrored at the state level further widening the disparity around access. As a result many students cannot afford a credential without taking on debt. Others may postpone their skills training goals or forgo them altogether. In order to address barriers associated with cost I recommend the following.

Create a mandatory funding stream to support business and worker need

Congress should rectify ongoing disinvestment in the workforce system by creating a new mandatory funding stream to support worker access to in-demand credentials. The funds under this proposed program should support Skills Training Grants, a modernized version of Individual Training Accounts currently included in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).¹⁰

Skills Training Grants would allow more workers, including many who may not be eligible for Pell Grants, to receive skills training with a broader set of nonprofit program providers like community-based organizations, labor-management partnerships, and apprenticeship programs while also providing workers with resources for supportive services like transportation, housing, child care, and course materials.

Skills Training Grants would also give workers flexible options for training at various stages of their career and to enter into career pathway programs. For example, a worker might use a Skills Training Grant to pursue a training credential at the start of their career, which in turn could support stackable credentials and articulate for credit to be applied to future education or training opportunities at an institution of higher education.

In addition to linkages to in-demand sectors and occupations, Skills Training Grants would be keyed to quality job opportunities. Not every credential leads to good opportunities for workers. Hence, it is essential to ensure that this investment benefits not only businesses but also workers.

Modernize the Work Opportunity Tax Credit by passing the bipartisan SKILL UP Act

⁸ Report: Barriers to Post-Secondary Education: https://cengage.widen.net/s/w52pbrzwlmcg_barrierspostsecedreport_final

⁹ College Board. Trends in College Pricing. <https://research.collegeboard.org/trends/college-pricing>

¹⁰ <https://nationalskillscoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/FinalWIOARecs.pdf>

Congress should also expand the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) to support businesses providing work-based learning to populations currently targeted under the tax credit.

WOTC provides credits of up to \$9,600—totaling nearly \$1 billion claimed by employers each year—to companies for hiring workers such as veterans, the long-term unemployed, and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Family (TANF) recipients.

By updating WOTC to provide an additional credit for businesses who hire *and* train workers from these target populations, the credit can help businesses build a pipeline of workers and help workers access skills they need.

Make Pell Grants Tax Free

Congress should pass The Tax-Free Pell Grant Act. This bipartisan legislation before this committee will help low-income students retain more of their Pell Grants, and ensure that community college students and other students attending low cost institutions qualify for the American Opportunity Tax Credit (AOTC).

As currently structured the AOTC often does not benefit students attending low cost institutions, as the credit is largely tied to tuition and cannot help offset the full cost of attendance. This structuring seems counterintuitive given the intent of the AOTC in assisting low-income students. It shouldn't be set up to punish those who choose to attend postsecondary education and training programs that are comparatively lower in cost.

Pass the Bipartisan JOBS Act

One area where Congress can help support affordable access to high quality workforce training is passage of the bipartisan JOBS Act. The JOBS Act would expand Pell Grants to high-quality, short-term training programs that help meet students where they are. Many students enrolled in these programs currently do not have access to Pell, thus impacting access to quality short-term credentials.

This eligibility limitation results in a gap in federal higher education grant aid for students who may have otherwise qualified based on income. It also impacts postsecondary affordability and potentially increases the debt burden for students enrolled in a myriad of programs in sectors such as health care, manufacturing, and IT. Expanding access to Pell will help students and workers who are looking for greater flexibility in how they achieve their postsecondary goals, including the ability to earn a high-quality credential in a shorter time frame.

In addition to lowering the time threshold for Pell Grant eligibility, the JOBS Act would also institute a number of accountability standards that tie programmatic eligibility for these shorter-term programs to quality metrics.

2. Ensure equitable access and success for broadest set of workers

Meeting the demands of industries most impacted by the BIL, IRA and CHIPS - along with industries across the workforce - will mean supporting equitable access to and success in skills training programs for the broadest set of workers. This should include people of color, women and others who have historically been excluded from jobs most impacted by those recent investments.

To accomplish this, Congress should:

Modernize WIOA reporting to support and require data collection and disaggregation that measures equitable impact of programs

Under WIOA, local areas are required, currently, to measure short-term employment and earnings outcomes for workers at six and twelve months after exit. These short-term outcomes do not sufficiently capture how people progress from entry-level jobs, experience wage and skill advancement with an employer, and continue their education to progress along a quality career pathway

To measure if workforce programs are leading to long-term economic gains for workers and businesses, WIOA performance indicators should be expanded to include measures on quality credential attainment, employment and wage outcomes for at least 2-years after program completion, occupation specific job placement and measures on job quality, such as hourly wages and hours worked.

WIOA should also disaggregate all training performance outcomes by race, ethnicity, gender, and other important demographic or socioeconomic factors like English language proficiency, income, and geography, in order effectively evaluate progress toward racial equity goals and the efficacy of the public workforce system for workers of color.

Supporting Career Pathway Programs

Career pathways provide an important gateway for many workers and adult learners seeking a postsecondary credential.¹¹ They combine adult education, occupational skills training, career counseling, and other supportive services, often within the context of a specific industry sector or occupational field. Career pathways support workers in achieving their training and career goals by providing flexible on and off-ramps for students looking to build upon their education and training at their own pace. Workers often pursue career pathways training as the move between employers within the same industry over time. As such, career pathways strategies developed in tandem with multi-firm industry/sector partnerships can provide a systemic approach to expanding training opportunities that can increase economic mobility for large numbers of workers in a sector.

In addition to a dedicated funding source to support quality career pathway programs, the career pathway structure has been integrated as a quality component into a number of laws and

¹¹ <https://nationalskillscoalition.org/resource/publications/building-state-career-pathways-systems/>

grant programs. For workers who have been unemployed or underemployed and claiming public benefits like those provided under Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), support services - provided in tandem with training and early employment services - can help move families out of poverty and into careers that offer economic mobility. Career pathways support this through a continuum of aligned services and programs, instead of focusing on immediate employment that moves people off of benefits in the short term. To fully meet worker and business need, however, Congress should modernize TANF to better support connections between the public workforce system and programming and investments states make with their TANF funds.

One example of strong alignment between TANF and skill training is Arkansas' Career Pathways Initiative (CPI), a partnership between the Arkansas Department of Workforce Services (DWS), the Arkansas Department of Higher Education (ADHE), and the state's community colleges and university technical centers. Using funding from the TANF block grant, CPI aims to ensure more student parents — specifically those receiving TANF, SNAP, and/or Medicaid and/or those with incomes below 250 percent of the federal poverty level — access and complete postsecondary credentials that support them to advance over time to higher levels of education and training in a given occupation or industry sector.

Support and Expand Integrated Education and Training

Congress should modernize WIOA to provide additional support for Integrated Education and Training (IET) models that teach literacy, numeracy, digital skills, and English language skills in the context of training for a specific occupation. IET models are effective in part because they teach foundational skills in a meaningful context that has immediate application in the workplace; enable credential attainment; and can directly increase earning power. Recent research confirms that IET models have positive outcomes for underrepresented workers.¹² While WIOA defined and allowed IET as a Title II activity, it does little to invest in the capacity and delivery of these programs by already under-resourced adult education providers, including those in corrections facilities. As a result, less than five percent of WIOA Title II participants have been enrolled in IET programs nationally,⁴⁵ and states and local partners have struggled to take this approach to scale.

Additionally, IET is supported by the Pell Grant program through a provision known as 'ability to benefit.' Essentially, Pell is largely limited to people who have a high school diploma or equivalency. There is an exception for students who wish to enroll concurrently in an adult education program and a postsecondary education or training program. These students may qualify for Pell if they otherwise meet eligibility requirements and can demonstrate that they have the ability to benefit from this concurrent enrollment model. While this form of IET has strong evidence of success it is still vastly underutilized by colleges limiting access for students. It is important that policies support greater participation from colleges that have IET programs with strong outcomes.

¹² Amanda Bergson-Shilcock, "Better Together: How adult education/CTE collaborations benefit workers and business," National Skills Coalition, January 2019, <https://nationalskillscoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/NSC-EL-PASO-Dec2018-Online-FIN.pdf>;

Ensure programs meet needs of adults and young people

In addition to supporting adult learners, WIOA should be a vehicle for supporting young people's education, training and career aspirations. Many young people are experiencing a disconnection from education and work as a result of systemic barriers.

There are over four million young people between the ages of 16-24 who are not working and not in school. Among these so-called 'opportunity youth', there are equity gaps: Black, Indigenous, and Latino youth experience higher rates of disconnection from school and work than white and Asian youth; young people living in rural areas experience higher rates of disconnection than their counterparts in urban and suburban areas.

As part of WIOA reauthorization, Congress should prioritize youth programming that centers racial equity, supports trauma-informed practices, and prioritizes those most in need of services.¹³

3. Invest in industry or sector partnerships that bring together a broad set of practitioners and expand training provider capacity as part of reauthorizations of the Trade Adjustment Act and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

Much of the financial support for sector partnership activities comes from private, local, and state funding. Still, the federal government has a history of recognizing their value— both by defining them in statute and allocating resources to support and expand them. The George W. Bush administration provided \$250 million over two years to expand community college training in high-growth industries as part of its Community Based Job Training Grant initiative. In 2011, Congress built on this model by allotting \$1.9 billion to the U.S. Department of Labor's Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) grant program.

The purpose of these grants was to increase the ability of community colleges to partner with employers to offer students industry-aligned curriculum and training programs that could be completed in two years or less. Under the TAACCCT grant, students across 700 community colleges earned more than 320,000 industry-recognized credentials. Mandatory funding for these multi-year grants expired in 2017. However, since then Congress has provided a smaller pot of funding to support these partnerships through the Strengthening Community Colleges Training Grant. That program does not have a permanent authorization, and there remains a need for robust funding and an updated authorization to support these community college and business partnerships.

Additionally, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), a bipartisan bill that was signed into law in 2014, aims to increase the role of industry in the public workforce development system. WIOA requires states and local workforce boards to support sector partnerships as a method of workforce improvement at both the state and local levels. Partnerships under WIOA must include multiple employers connected to a local or regional industry, as well as education and training providers. While this provision in WIOA has allowed states to create new partnerships or build upon those that exist, this policy does not contain

¹³ <https://nyec.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/NYEC-WIOA-Recommendations-June-2021.pdf>

targeted funding critical to realizing the impact these partnerships can have on businesses, workers and communities.

[1] Anthony P. Carnevale and Nicole Smith, “15 Million Infrastructure Jobs, An Economic Shot in the Arm to the COVID-19 Recession,” Georgetown University McCourt School of Public Policy, Center on Education and the Workforce, 2021, https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/cew-15_million_infrastructure_jobs-fr.pdf