



COVID-19 Policy Priorities

April 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic will have an unprecedented emotional and economic imprint on California's communities and economy. During this crisis, one thing is clear: California depends on its working people. Those who are stocking grocery shelves, keeping the internet up and running, driving trucks, sanitizing hospital rooms, and caring for patients and children are the very backbone of our state. These workers and their communities are being acutely impacted by the COVID-19 crisis.

The pandemic is exacerbating existing inequities, which resulted from policies and systems that systemically limited economic opportunity for people of color, immigrants, and other historically marginalized people. The COVID-19 crisis is:

- Disproportionately impacting workers of color – in particular Black and Latinx workers -- and immigrants who are over-represented in both frontline jobs that cannot be done remotely and industries highly affected by the economic shutdown.
- Compounding challenges already faced by Californians who are structurally disconnected from economic opportunity, including opportunity youth, the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals.
- Threatening the vitality of small businesses -- many of which are owned by and employ people of color, immigrants, and women.

Skills for California is a statewide network of organizations advancing workforce development policies that remove systemic barriers and promote an inclusive economy for all Californians.

We are calling on the state's leaders to use every policy lever possible to immediately protect and support our most vulnerable workers, communities, and small businesses. As the state charts a roadmap for recovery, we urge policymakers to create a better and fairer economic future for all Californians where everyone has what they need to thrive.

Workforce solutions should specifically reflect the economic needs and career aspirations of California's most vulnerable workers and historically marginalized residents. Indeed, the success of California's economic recovery should be measured in large part by its progress toward reducing inequities in the workforce. A skilled and diverse workforce will be critical to helping businesses recover from the recession. Workforce development strategies should create equitable pathways to good jobs that are safe and free from discrimination and harassment, pay family supporting wages, welcome workers' concerns and ideas, provide for worker advancement, and give workers the stability, predictability, and support necessary to take care of family needs that arise outside of the workplace.

Based on principles of equity, pathways to good jobs, and systems innovation, Skills for California is promoting the following policy priorities to support vulnerable people and small businesses now and create an inclusive and economic recovery in the future:

- Secure basic needs and protections for California's most vulnerable workers and communities, and shore up small businesses
- Protect and create good jobs in high-demand industries and build equitable pathways to them
- Modernize and democratize access to skills training
- Promote collaboration, systems innovation, and transparency among public, private, and nonprofit stakeholders.

Secure basic needs and protections for California’s most vulnerable workers and communities, and bolster small businesses

- Expand income support, healthcare and retraining to the millions of California’s workers who have been displaced by COVID-19.
- Remove barriers to existing federal and state safety net programs, including food, cash, healthcare and housing assistance.
- Increase funding for state financial relief and safety net support to the state’s 1.5 million undocumented workers and mixed-status families who do not qualify for federal relief or benefits programs due to their immigration status.
- Ensure and enforce safety, health, and wage protections for frontline workers, including domestic workers, and address their immediate childcare and upskilling needs.
- Expand access to digital literacy, electronic devices, and affordable home and business broadband internet access so that more Californians can access basic benefits, services, and education and training online.
- Bolster small businesses and provide them with support to halt layoffs.

Save and create good jobs in high-demand industries and build equitable pathways to them

- Retrain and re-employ workers to address new industry needs during and after the recovery, including by expanding California’s High Road Training Partnerships and supporting industry partnerships between businesses, labor, education, workforce, and community partners.
- Invest in infrastructure – such as broadband and tools for climate resilience – to create good jobs; Ensure that training and jobs are available to workers of color, immigrants and women who have traditionally been excluded from these opportunities.
- Preserve and expand pre-apprenticeship, apprenticeship, and paid work-based learning – particularly for workers of color, immigrants, women, and other marginalized Californians – by partnering with community-based organizations and worker centers that provide culturally competent services.
- Expand subsidized employment programs with a training component for Californians who are exiting incarceration or face significant employment challenges, even as the economy recovers.
- Help small businesses create a recovery plan, transform their business models, and keep/bring back their workforce.

Modernize and democratize career and technical education

- Expand digital learning, including English language learners as well as new modes of instruction and applied learning that protect students’ safety.
- Expand access to short-term upskilling or reskilling and identify ways for adults to earn quality, in-demand credentials and degrees in an accelerated fashion.

- Ensure that ALL California community college's career and technical education students have access to financial resources to continue their training during the recession by providing financial aid that can cover tuition, books and other supply costs, including digital devices, and basic needs such as food, child care, and housing.
- Create new partnerships between adult education, community colleges, and employers to invest in upskilling and career advancement for low-wage, frontline workers by combining foundational, digital, English language, and occupational skills training.

Promote collaboration and systems innovation among public, private, and nonprofit stakeholders

- Develop an inclusive economic recovery plan that engages public agencies in the areas of education, labor and workforce development, health and human services, economic development, housing, corrections, and civil rights, as well as non-governmental labor, industry, and community leaders, and identify strategies that state agencies can adopt to reduce inequities.
- Conduct a comprehensive assessment of federal and state workforce funding to ensure that the state is spending dollars as effectively and equitably as possible and ensure that state funds are used to fill gaps in federal funding.
- Provide public data disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, geographic region, and other characteristics on the economic impacts of the pandemic and recovery response in order to identify equity gaps and strategies for addressing them. Data systems should not report personal identifiable information, should protect the privacy of individuals, and maintain data security.
- Align public workforce, education, human services, and corrections systems to move state policy to regional implementation.
- Support an infrastructure of community-based organizations capable of expanding high-quality, industry-based job training and support services through innovative partnerships with workforce boards, community colleges, and other public agencies.