



## Insights from Businesses: How Digital Transformation Is Impacting Work and Skill Needs – Transcript

Hosted by the Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Program

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### Description

This summer, we've been speaking with employers to learn how businesses are adopting technology in the workplace, and if COVID-19 accelerated these efforts; how digital transformation is impacting skill needs for frontline workers; and what approaches businesses are taking to support development of digital skills for frontline workers. This virtual event looks at what we have learned from employers and what can and should be done to help workers build the skills they need to advance in the workplace. This is the third part of a year-long study looking at how COVID-19 and heightened attention to racial inequality were affecting businesses, their operations, skill needs, hiring and HR practices, and education and training programs.

Learn more about this event: <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/events/insights-from-businesses-how-digital-transformation-is-impacting-work-and-skill-needs/>

### Speakers

#### Andres Alcantar

Senior Workforce Lead, Texas Association of Community Colleges

Andres Alcantar is principal at Alcantar Public Policy Consulting, providing a full range of public affairs, management, and consulting services.

Andres recently served as executive vice president and chief operations officer at the Texas Association of Business, the state chamber of commerce, working to advance policies to support a strong business and job creation climate for Texas employers.

Alcantar previously served as chairman and commissioner representing the public at the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC). He was appointed in 2008 and designated chairman in May 2012. At TWC, Andres helped build and lead the premier workforce development system in the country for a decade. Alcantar worked with leaders across the state to implement solutions to meet the needs of

Texas' vast array of industries, strengthen regional public private partnerships, and build education partnerships to advance the development of a skilled, strong, and competitive workforce.

Prior to his appointment, he served as deputy director of Governor Rick Perry's Budget, Planning, and Policy Division, advising the governor on federal, state, and local issues, and providing executive oversight to state boards and commissions. His focus included workforce, business, economic development, education, and competitiveness issues. Alcantar also served as an advisor to former Governor George W. Bush in the Office of Budget and Planning working with state boards, commissions, and the Texas Legislature. He advised on business regulatory, health and human services, child welfare, workforce, and economic development issues.

Andres previously served as a director for the Texas Health and Human Services Commission, where he worked with the commissioner and other agency heads on strategy development and enterprise reforms.

Andres received a bachelor's degree and a Master of Public Administration from Texas Tech University.

### **Kelly Ryan Bailey**

Global Skills Evangelist, Emsi Burning Glass

Kelly Ryan Bailey is an entrepreneur, podcaster, global skills evangelist, social impactor, transformational leader, and mama of three kiddos. For over 17 years she has helped people navigate their education and career by using data and technology to create innovative skills-based hiring and learning solutions for companies, educators, governments, initiatives, and more. Kelly is currently the global skills evangelist at Emsi Burning Glass, the podcast host of '[Let's Talk About Skills, Baby](#)', the founder and CEO of Skills Baby, the co-founder of Growth Network Podcasts, and a founder member of Equity Cities.

In her role at Emsi, Kelly focuses on facilitating the change to a skills-based hiring and learning economy through open skills data standards, innovative products and services, and global initiatives and partnerships.

### **Amy Blair**

Research Director, The Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Program

Amy Blair is research director of the Aspen Institute [Economic Opportunities Program](#). She has served as lead researcher/evaluator on a wide range of projects designed to promote learning about highly promising poverty alleviation, sectoral workforce development, and self-employment strategies implemented by community-based and public organizations nationwide. Her expertise includes learning-focused and highly participatory approaches to process and outcomes evaluation, primary research, strategic grant-making, and learning meeting design and facilitation. Amy's work focuses on research that is designed to identify and explore innovative and emerging new practices and strategies and is geared toward program capacity-building and field-building. Amy is the author of numerous publications and has presented findings from the Economic Opportunities Program's work for local, state, and national workforce development audiences. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in English and a Master of Science in Community and Regional Planning from the University of Texas at Austin.

## **Patti Constantakis**

Director, Corporate Philanthropy, Walmart.org

Patti Constantakis, PhD, is a director on the Economic Opportunity team for Walmart.org. She leads the Foundation's Equitable Talent Systems portfolio that seeks to engage employers in more equitable hiring and advancement practices. She brings decades of experience working to increase economic opportunities for underserved adult learners. Previously at Digital Promise, Patti was the director of adult learning and workforce development initiatives, where her work focused on using technology to build the literacy and numeracy skills of our lowest-skilled frontline workers. She also developed a competency-based digital skills program, backed by Facebook, for nontraditional adult learners and workers. Prior to Digital Promise, Patti was the director of product, content, and curriculum at GreatSchools.org and was responsible for developing e-learning programs for teachers, as well as apps and other electronic resources for immigrant parents. In the years prior to GreatSchools, Patti worked with several startups, designing and developing products for community college students and other nontraditional adult learners.

Patti grew up on the US-Mexico border and, as a Latina, is fully bilingual in Spanish and English. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in Journalism and Spanish from New Mexico State University and her Ph.D. and Master of Arts in Communications from the University of Texas, Austin.

## **Maureen Conway**

Vice President, The Aspen Institute; Executive Director, Economic Opportunities Program

Maureen Conway serves as vice president at the Aspen Institute and as executive director of the Institute's [Economic Opportunities Program](#) (EOP). EOP works to expand individuals' opportunities to connect to quality work, start businesses, and build economic stability that provides the freedom to pursue opportunity.

## **Reggie Davis**

Senior Director of Distribution, The Container Store

Reggie Davis is a supply chain leader who provides strategic and tactical direction for driving processes and equipment and facility optimization with an emphasis on ecommerce fulfillment. As senior director of distribution at The Container Store, he oversees an omni-channel distribution network, engineering, training, and distribution operations. He also drives a continuous improvement culture and is responsible for developing and executing improvement initiatives and maximizing service levels while lowering total delivered costs. Reggie is a proud alum of the University of Kansas (KU) and has several years of leading successful supply chain operations for various Fortune 500 companies including Walmart, Target, and Kohl's department stores. Outside of work, Reggie is in senior leadership at his church and enjoys traveling with his family and watching KU basketball.

## **Daryl Graham**

Senior Vice President of Philanthropy, Strada Education Network

As senior vice president of philanthropy, Daryl A. Graham oversees Strada Education Network's strategic philanthropic investments and overall grant management efforts.

Prior to joining Strada in 2017, Graham spent 15 years with JPMorgan Chase & Co., in Wilmington, Delaware, serving more than a decade as vice president and relationship manager where he identified grant-making, sponsorship, and volunteerism opportunities for the firm.

His background also includes accounting and auditing positions at J.P. Morgan Chase & Co., ConocoPhillips, and General Electric.

He has served on a variety of nonprofit boards, including the Philanthropy Delaware Board of Directors, which he chaired. Graham has been honored for his leadership with the YMCA Black Achiever in Business and Industry Award, the H. Fletcher Brown Leadership Award, and the Community Reinvestment Act Leadership Award.

Graham is a graduate of Morgan State University in Baltimore.

## **Rachael Stephens**

Program Director, Workforce Development & Economic Policy, National Governors Association

Rachael Stephens serves as the director of the [workforce development and economic policy program](#) in the National Governors Association (NGA) Center for Best Practices. Rachael oversees a team of analysts providing research, policy guidance and technical assistance to governors and state leaders on expanding economic opportunity by removing barriers to economic participation; fostering economic dynamism; supporting quality job growth; and providing training and employment opportunities that support employers' talent needs and lead to family-sustaining careers. Current areas of focus for her team include entrepreneurship and small business growth, best practices in workforce system governance, and most recently, the launch of the [NGA Workforce Innovation Network](#) (NGA WIN), a first-of-its-kind nonpartisan learning and action collaborative bringing together state governments, industry leaders, research and technical assistance organizations, and philanthropic organizations to advance governors' workforce innovation priorities for their states.

Before joining NGA, Rachael was the economic policy fellow at Third Way, where her research and policy work with Congress focused on workforce development, infrastructure, automation, and the future of work. Prior to that, she aided the launch of the NYC Tech Talent Pipeline and managed career-mentoring and job-connection programs for low-income adults in the New York City area at StreetWise Partners. StreetWise is a nonprofit founded on the understanding that talent is widely distributed but opportunity is not, and that we all have a role to play in redistributing opportunity – a belief that has served as the foundation to Rachael's work throughout her career.

Rachael has been interviewed and published in Real Clear Policy, The Hill, The Federal News Network, Information Security Media Group, RouteFifty, WorkforceRx, and Working Nation, and her research has been featured in publications including Bloomberg Businessweek, Forbes, Philanthropy Daily, and Inside Higher Ed. Outside of work, Rachael serves as chair of StreetWise Partners' Washington, D.C. Leadership Board, leading volunteer support of fundraising, partnership development, and program content development for the organization. She also has experience in state and national political campaigns

and has been an active advocate for increasing women's representation across all political parties and in all levels of elected office.

Rachael holds a master's degree in public policy from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, and a Bachelor of Arts in Economics from Bryn Mawr College, where she graduated magna cum laude as the sole recipient of the Jeanne Quistgaard Memorial Prize for Excellence in Economics.

## Moderator

### Jaime Fall

Director, UpSkill America at the Aspen Institute

Jaime S. Fall is the director of [UpSkill America](#) at the Aspen Institute, an employer-led movement to expand opportunity for America's workers and to help our economy and communities thrive by promoting training and advancement practices to help workers progress in their careers and move into better-paying jobs.

Jaime has worked in the field of workforce development for nearly 25 years. Previously, Jaime served as Vice President for Talent Sustainability for the HR Policy Association and its nonprofit foundation. Jaime's government service includes serving as Deputy Secretary, Employment and Workforce Development, for the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency. As a Senate-confirmed leader in the Schwarzenegger Administration, Jaime provided policy and guidance to California's \$11 billion workforce system and the nearly 9,000 employees that made up the entities within the agency. Previously, Jaime spent more than a decade in Washington, DC, working at the US Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration; the National Association of State Workforce Agencies; Fall Communications, a workforce development-focused marketing and website development company founded by him and his wife; and on Capitol Hill.

Jaime was born and raised in tiny rural towns in North Central Kansas. He now resides in Sacramento, California. He has been married to his high school sweetheart for over 30 years and is the thankful father of two awesome daughters. He worked his way through college as a broadcaster before earning his degree in journalism from the University of Kansas.

## About

The Economic Opportunities Program's [Opportunity in America](#) discussion series has moved to an all-virtual format as we all do what we can to slow the spread of COVID-19. But the conversations about the changing landscape of economic opportunity in the US and implications for individuals, families, and communities across the country remain vitally important. We hope you will participate as we bring our discussions to you in virtual formats, and we look forward to your feedback.

We are grateful to the Ford Foundation, Prudential Financial, Walmart.org, the Mastercard Center for Inclusive Growth, and the Surdna Foundation for their support of this series.



## Transcript

### Maureen Conway (00:00:00)

Good afternoon and welcome. I'm Maureen Conway, vice president at the Aspen Institute and Executive Director of the Institute's Economic Opportunities Program. It is my pleasure to welcome you to today's conversation, Insights from Businesses: How Digital Transformation Is Impacting Work and Skill Needs. This conversation is part of the Economic Opportunities Program's ongoing Opportunity in America discussion series, in which we explore the issues facing individuals, families, and communities across the country and accessing economic opportunity and ideas for change. I want to thank Prudential Financial, Walmart.org, the Surdna Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and the Mastercard Center for Inclusive Growth for their support of our Opportunity in America discussion series. Today's event is based on the Economic Opportunities Program's UpSkill America initiative. And for those of you who are not familiar, UpSkill America is an employer led movement that promotes investment in workers that will help them pursue economic mobility and build careers and also that advances understanding of what works in doing that work.

The upskill movement has a strong focus on frontline and entry-level workers, workers who are disproportionately women and people of color and who historically have been least likely to benefit from employer investments in training and mentoring. UpSkill seeks to build inclusive strategies that expand opportunities for working people. For the past year, our UpSkill America research team has been looking at the impact the pandemic and heightened attention to racial inequality are having on work and the workplace and the implications for hiring, skill needs, and education and training strategies. This research has been funded by the Strada Education Network and Walmart.org.

The project began with a series of in-depth employer interviews, exploring how they were adapting to a rapidly shifting economic environment and the multiple crises of 2020. Employers shared their challenges managing changing and variable state and local safety and health guidance, shifting customer demand, workers' need for flexibility and work arrangements, societal demands for more thoughtful diversity, equity, and inclusion practices, and more. And some honestly were just expressing that they were struggling to see how they were going to stay in business. In that context, employers talked about how they saw skill needs shifting and workforce practices changing in ways that they actually thought would be with us for the foreseeable future. They described the rising importance of digital skills, the growing interest among frontline workers in employer sponsored education and training programs as they were seeing through growing enrollment in these programs. They were talking about the ways in which HR processes were changing, including things like moving to virtual interviews, onboarding processes, virtual internships, and also expressing concerns that the shift to all this digital work would widen the digital divide and the challenges that's been presenting.

The range of concerns both personal and professional employers were hearing from employees in 2020 were causing them to rethink things such as safety and health, needs for flexibility, a variety of issues around work arrangements, and more. Following the interviews, we developed a survey and fielded that survey early this year, early in 2021, to hear from a much broader array of employers about these issues. We received responses from over 340 business leaders, including leading employers in food service, healthcare, manufacturing, and retail on the ways that they've been responding to the variety of changes, but in particular to technological change and racial inequities in employment and what their strategies have been. We followed that survey with an additional round of in-depth interviews that really allowed us to dive more deeply into how digital transformation is affecting workplaces and industries today. So today's event draws on all this research really and in particular, some of these interviews that we just did. And just yesterday, we released a deck that summarizes some of this. This research is available on our website. I'm not going to say the web URL because it's really long, but hopefully my colleagues are putting in the chat so you can find it because there's a lot of terrific information in there. And I hope everybody will get a chance to take a look at it. And there will be

more. In the coming weeks we'll be releasing a tool to help education and training providers and others discuss important issues about digital transformation with employers in their communities, so please keep an eye out for that.

And we're going to begin our discussion now, but before we begin, I want to do a very quick review of our technology. All attendees at today's conversation are muted, but we very much welcome your questions. Many thanks to those of you who submitted questions in advance. Please keep them coming. Post in the Q&A tab in the Slido box on the bottom of your screen and we'll do our best to get to as many questions as we can today. We also encourage you to share your views. If you have ideas, examples, resources, or experiences related to today's conversation, please introduce yourself and share those ideas in the Ideas tab, which is also in your Slido box. In your third Slido box, there is a tab in your Slido box, there's a polls tab. We always appreciate everybody's feedback. Please, before you leave today, take a moment to respond to the quick feedback poll that you'll find there and let us know what you think. We're always trying to improve these events, so we'd really like to hear from you. We also encourage you to tweet about this conversation. Our hashtag is #talkopportunity. If you have technical issues that you can't use the chat boxes for, please email us at [eop.program@aspeninstitute.org](mailto:eop.program@aspeninstitute.org). This webinar is being recorded and will be shared via email and posted on our website. Closed captions are available for this discussion. Please just click the CC button at the bottom of the video stream to activate them.

And now I'll briefly introduce our speakers for today. There's bio information in our website. Please take a look at it. They're a wonderful group of speakers, but in the interest of time, I will just do a quick names and titles. Today we have with us Amy Blair, research director at the Economic Opportunities Program, Kelly Ryan Bailey, global skills evangelist—I love that title—at Emsi Burning Glass, Patti Constantakis, director of corporate philanthropy, Walmart.org, Reggie Davis, senior director of distribution at The Container Store, Andres Alcantar, senior workforce lead, Texas Association of Community Colleges, Rachael Stevens, program director of workforce development and economic policy at the National Governors Association, and Daryl Graham, senior vice president of philanthropy, Strada Education Network. Thank you all so much for being with us today. And now, let me introduce our moderator for today's conversation, my colleague Jaime Fall, director, UpSkill America. Jaime, we're excited about today's conversation so let me hand it over to you.

#### **Jaime Fall (00:07:22)**

Thank you, Maureen. Appreciate it. Thank you everyone. We really appreciate you being with us today for this conversation. Over the course of the last year, we've had a really wonderful opportunity to learn directly from employers about their efforts to adapt and survive in 2020 and the significant changes coming about during that time. We set about to learn, among many other things, what workforce skills are increasingly important in today's rapidly changing business environment and economy, in what ways skill needs affect employment practices including education and training programs for frontline workers, and how the current context influences hiring practices and plans to support career advancement for frontline workers. As Maureen said, all the learning from the past year is available on the UpSkill America website. I really do encourage you to check it out when you have the opportunity.

It's been fascinating work, which has given us a unique look behind the scenes in some of America's best known companies. And we would love to share that learning with you. Since the very beginning of UpSkill America in 2015, employers had spoken of the accelerating pace of change brought about by technology and innovation, but few were prepared for how quickly things accelerated in 2020. We heard from manufacturers who accelerated the use of smart factories to help keep workers safe and to meet the increasing demand for products. We heard from healthcare providers who shifted to remote delivery of some healthcare services, creating a whole new occupation, managing remote waiting rooms. And we heard from restaurant operators who shifted to an online ordering and takeout model in weeks after years of trying and failing. No industry that we've spoken with has escaped some form of

rapid transition during this time, and many of these changes are likely to be with us for some time. Here to tell us more about what we've learned from our recent conversations with employers is my friend and colleague Amy Blair, Research Director, Economic Opportunities Program. Amy, what do you have to share with us today?

**Amy Blair (00:09:32)**

Thank you, Jaime. And hello everybody. I'm really pleased to be joining the group today and to be just to be in this exciting conversation. Maureen and Jamie have given you a pretty good description of the research we've been doing over the past year, listening to and learning from business representatives about how their work and workforce have responded to what have been really extraordinary challenges. Let's see if I can't... I'm not able to advance the slides. I've got some technical support here. I'm going to keep going and hopefully Tony can catch us up. Let's see if that works. Okay. As Maureen described, we have a number of resources that we hope you'll take a look at that provide a lot of detail at what we've been hearing from businesses through different phases of this study. Today, I'm going to be giving you highlights really from the most recent phase, which was a set of interviews, a second set of interviews with representatives of businesses in different sectors. I hope that what I'm going to talk about is helpful for giving you a framework for thinking about different types of digital skills and some practical examples of digital skills for frontline workers in different occupations and industries, and for setting the stage for our conversation to follow. We can advance.

I'll dive right in as the segment of the event is short. Our most recent interviews focused in on digital transformation in the workplace that ramped up during the pandemic as businesses adapted and made changes to keep workers and customers safe, to shift a wide range of operations to virtual work, and to increase production or service delivery in some industries increasing actually their work. Business representatives we interviewed are operating in retail, including e-commerce, restaurant and hospitality, healthcare, manufacturing, and logistics and distribution. Across the board, we heard that many of the shifts to digital technology changes that have been adopted in this most recent period will be sustained and even built out more in the near future. And of course, just want to point out there are a lot of differences in what this looks like by industry and occupation, but also by the size of the business, with smaller businesses having really different challenges to adopting technology than do larger companies. Advance. We asked business representatives about how their companies adopting new technology is affecting the skills that workers need to do in their jobs. Our focus was on frontline workers, those working directly in production or distribution or in customer facing roles. You'll see on this slide how we've organized what we learned about foundational digital skills that are common to many industries and cross frontline occupations in a lot of ways. Foundational digital skills include skills that are needed directly to do a work task as well as skills needed to do things that are less directly linked to serving customers or producing or distributing products. And I'll give some examples of that. But across industries, business reps talked about foundational skills in categories, well, we categorized them, but groupings and things like operating digital devices, using company or an industry specific digital platform, using software to communicate and collaborate, collecting and interpreting data, recognizing and avoiding cybersecurity threats, and even setting up and troubleshooting technology in remote workplaces and with remote IT support, things that have really all of which have been really accelerating in the past year among the frontline workforce, which is the focus of what we were talking about.

So we can advance the slide. More and more, I'm going to get into some examples to kind of make this a little more clear, but more and more frontline workers are using new technologies in their daily work. And the need for foundational digital skills is growing in a lot of occupations and sectors. Across industries, the business representatives we talked with, talked about growing use of email and other software for communications with frontline workers, not only for communications about things related to individual workers' employment, which might've been more than norm in the past with frontline work, such as their scheduling, but also for communications now within and across work groups and shifts



about things such as status of production or equipment. In retail and restaurant and hospitality settings, workers need skills to use mobile devices, to search inventory, to collect contactless payments, and even to help customers use their own devices to access services such as a remote check-in at a hotel. Workers need skills to navigate information management systems related to their work such as inventory, reservations, scheduling. Workers in healthcare settings are increasingly using digital devices for tasks such as recording health assessments or coordinating and facilitating tele-health visits, monitoring patient vital signs.

In manufacturing, logistics, and distribution, and even in other settings such as retail and hotels workers need skills to work alongside or to direct robots that are performing production activities or they're cleaning or making deliveries within a facility. And that's crossing a lot of sectors, not just what you might think in being in manufacturing. And business representatives also described frontline workers increasingly needing skills to monitor, program, and maintain digital equipment. And across sectors, we heard about increasing use of learning applications that workers need to be able to use to get guidance about how to do other tasks. So there's more of a movement to online learning, even for skills training in the workplace. We can advance.

I know that's been a really quick run through, through a lot of different types of skills, and I hope that it's been helpful to hear just some examples of digital skills in different industries and frontline occupations as you listen to the rest of the event today. We're working now in our group on a discussion guide to help workforce development professionals have conversations with employers like we did in our interviews about digital skills in the workplace. It's coming soon. And I want to just say, we couldn't do this type of research without support on a number of fronts. We really want to thank Strada Education Network and Walmart.org for support. And the employers and industry experts who informed our research, we really appreciate their generosity and the time and their insights. And we also want to recognize Digital US and Markle Foundation. Their materials related to digital skills have been very helpful to us. And we want to acknowledge that they really were helpful in terms of hopefully doing something that's additive in terms of the research on digital skills. So with that, I'm finished and I guess I'm going back to Jaime.

### **Jaime Fall (00:17:00)**

Great. Thank you, Amy. I really appreciate it. Thank you for sharing that with us and being with us today. And again, those are just a few highlights from a full deck of approximately 60 slides that we've posted on our website on UpSkillAmerica.org. And again, we would encourage you to check all of that out. So next we're going to hear from Kelly Ryan Bailey, Global Skills Evangelist at Emsi Burning Glass. Kelly recently completed a digital talent forecast study, which I thought was fascinating. She worked with General Assembly, and looked at what's happening in the labor market in regard to digital skills. Kelly, please tell us what you were looking at, what you learned and how that either reflects or maybe differs from what we've done. So thank you, Kelly.

### **Kelly Ryan Bailey (00:17:47)**

Happy to, Jaime, and thank you all for the opportunity to join you today. Just to clarify as well that, although I'd love to be able to say that I was the one who did this work, I was just the wonderful beneficiary of this work of some fantastic people, both at Emsi Burning Glass and at General Assembly. And actually this particular report is a second collaboration between these two organizations on the exact same topic, which is the evolving role of digital skills. Funny enough, the first one happened about five, six years ago, and a lot of what we saw in that timeframe, pre-COVID of course, was quite telling and very similar to what we're seeing now, just highly accelerated as Amy had mentioned, because many of these digital skills were already changing. It was just really evident that business leaders in this

extremely changing environment needed to have a better understanding of what the landscape looked like, because it is changing so quickly.

And how would they ever be able to forecast their need for tech talent? It's not even just today, it's in the future years to come. So to tell you a little bit more about this, at least the background methodology of this report, so when we joined together, we actually pulled some original research from Emsi Burning Glass, as well as some insights from General Assembly's community of business leaders, and again, with the idea that we were going to shed light on the challenges and opportunity is with this labor market that is being increasingly defined by digital skills. On the backend from an Emsi Burning Glass perspective, our research methodology allowed us to pull skills information from our database of over 13 million job postings. We looked at a subset, a specific subset of both industries and occupations designed not to present a comprehensive picture of the US economy, but rather a representative sample of major sectors and roles that are seeing noteworthy trends with regard to specialized digital skill sets.

In this report, we actually chose tech, retail, and the manufacturing industry because together they comprise a large section of the American economy and because they include a wide variety of roles at different levels of pay, types of skill, and type of career trajectory. We also looked at key business roles, occupations in sales and marketing, management, human resources, and operations. And again, just as a reminder, for the purposes of this report, we were focusing on the digital skills and technical skills that are more specialized, specifically digital skills emerging at every level across these variety of industries and occupations we mentioned. If you need more information on the methodology, I won't go into the full detail, but it is available on page 10 of the report. And if you're following our hashtag on Twitter, I'll go ahead and tweet that out after I finish up here.

So in short, this clearer understanding of the need for digital skills across the labor market is really an equity imperative, as well as an economic one, as Maureen had mentioned in her opening comments. So just to give you some of the top line, again, this is an extremely rich in analytics, this report. So I'm just going to share three quick pieces, which is some 83% of all retail postings mentioned at least one digital skill. Data analysis now dominates operations roles, so appearing in 18% of all job postings. And other data related skills appear in 46% of all postings for operation jobs. And I can't imagine this is going to be surprising to any of you, but marketing is now a highly digital role as well. All postings for marketing jobs mentioned at least one digital skill. And probably, I would say while these findings suggest that specialized digital skills are becoming increasingly important, one of the most striking conclusions of this report is that jobs are not becoming hyper-technical as we might need to believe. Instead, they're becoming more increasingly hybrid, so this mix of human and technical skills. And this is why I think employers and workers alike are still struggling to keep up.

So I really want to push on that for a moment just for the audience to remember that, although this report highlights the need for specific digital skills, it shouldn't overshadow this broader need for non digital skills. And one example being, half of all computer occupations do require at least one business skill. So Jaime's last question, how does that complement? I would really say actually very complementary to the work that Amy just described. I noticed on many of the slides that Amy shared that there seems to be some combination of human skills such as communication, problem solving, creative thinking, business skills such as scheduling, records processing, and more. And all of those just are enabled by technology, which is why we're seeing the requirement of digital skills. So I hope that helps set the groundwork for you guys to jump in on this wonderful discussion.

### **Jaime Fall (00:23:13)**

Yes, Kelly, thank you. Really appreciate it. Thank you for being with us. And just a reminder that we'll have a time for questions and answers toward the end of this session and would welcome them. So thank you, Kelly. So now it's my pleasure to invite Patti Constantakis as Director of Corporate

Philanthropy, Walmart.org, and Reggie Davis, Senior Director of Distribution, The Container Store, to the conversation. Thank you both for being with us today. We really are wanting to spend a few minutes here at the beginning to get the business perspective and to dig a little more into what we've heard both Kelly and Amy talk about. Maybe the best place to begin is, if you could take us back to 2020 and just kind of walk us through what some of the biggest impacts of the pandemic and the way that that-

**Jaime Fall (00:24:03)**

The biggest impacts of the pandemic in the way it affected your company and workplaces. Patti, let me start with you.

**Patti Constantakis (00:24:08)**

Sure. First, let me just quickly say too that while I am part of Walmart.org, the Walmart foundation, I kind of have a dual role that I play. And several of us in our organization do in that we both do philanthropic work, but we also serve as consultants to our people team in the business as well. So just to give you a little context there. So back to 2020, so we were, as most of you probably can remember, we were one of the few businesses that stayed open always, from the very beginning. Which the challenges there were super interesting. They were number one, how do we keep all of our employees safe and everybody safe? So safety was a number one priority. Then came sort of demand. There was significantly more demand for all kinds of things. If you guys remember the paper towel hoarding, and sort of all of those things are happening too. So there was suddenly tremendous demand and strain on our supply chains and sort of all of that was half happening all at once. And we were getting essentially demand for contactless shopping. That suddenly came to be a big thing. Can we pick it up? Can we get delivered? Sort of all of those things that we had in our minds. We had infrastructure that was beginning to support all of that, but we didn't quite have it all in place but there was a demand for it. So I would say we were... I feel like with some of what we said, what was said earlier was, there were a whole bunch of the things that happened as the pandemic began that made us accelerate things that we hadn't really thought about. That we were going to go that fast with, let's put it that way. I'll leave that there for now and I'll let Reggie give us his perspective.

**Reggie Davis (00:26:21)**

Okay, good afternoon. So 2020 was certainly unlike anything we've ever seen. I agree with Patti, safety of our employees was first and foremost, that's for sure. And then I would say the demand for change and most people went from working in their office to working at home so The Container Store, of course, with our product line, there was a great demand for home office. And so we saw things just... Our volume from a director customer direct to consumer business just exploded. And so we had to do an audible because many of our stores were not selling or not open or had to have a minimal type services to really being able to handle the demand of our directed customer business. So we had to redirect resources, redirect our focus operationally to meet this great, great new demand that was out there.

So certainly I don't think anybody could plan for it. I've been in retail for a long time and many of my comrades who work at other major retailers, everybody was caught off guard and trying to figure out a way to handle this new way of doing business. So it was certainly something that caught us by surprise. But I think as Kelly mentioned about the demand for digital skills. We saw things change and we were trying to get people to come in and do the things we need to do at that time. Thank you.

**Jaime Fall (00:27:59)**

Great. Thank you, Reggie and Patti. So I know that both of your companies made a number of changes to really meet the challenges that you were facing. Why don't we talk a little more about that? What types of changes did you make in the workplace and are continuing to make? And can you give us some specific examples and ways that digital transformation is playing a role in how you're managing or overcoming the challenges that you talked about?

**Patti Constantakis (00:28:28)**

Sure. You want me to start?

**Jaime Fall (00:28:32)**

Thanks, Patti.

**Patti Constantakis (00:28:35)**

So many changes is about what I would have to start right there. So many changes. Let's start with we are calling... We've basically begun we'd started this move and then we accelerated this move to what we are calling an omnichannel model, which basically means you can shop however, you want to, you can shop in store, pick up, delivery. You can have it shipped to you, right. So this notion that you pick it as a customer and we want to serve you that way, which from a digital point of view is a big deal. But let me also say that the other thing that we did was hire more workers, that was sort of the number one piece of this.

Talking about the safety issue. Part of the reason we had to hire so many more workers was demand. Don't get me wrong. But we were also working with associates who maybe didn't feel comfortable coming in and we still had to run the store. And so there were... and PTO, if they had been exposed and so on. So all of that sort of cycle of workers there and so one of the things to hire, we actually hired like 500,000 workers over the summer. And one of the ways we did that was that we actually changed the way we hire. And we started to use more technology to do that. There's a longer explanation, but we shortened using technology. We shortened our hiring time from two weeks to 24 hours. And we were able to get people through that process very, very quickly with technology which was great.

The other sort of... You can sort of imagine if you think about the... You can shop in a store or pick up delivery shipping, you can imagine then the environment in the store and in our distribution centers, et cetera. Everything is highly digital. So if you're coming into work, then your environment now is highly digital. I would say at this point, most, if not all associates at all levels really are using technology in some way. So think about a personal shopper. So that role is a new role sort of, but for Walmart, it's a larger role than it used to be. There's a lot more of them at this point than there were before, but that person is using technology in order to go fulfill all those pick up and delivery orders.

And other ways that we'd think about this... Some of the ways that we've addressed the in-store technology piece is that we essentially gave 750,000 and of our in-store associates cell phones to use for personal work well for personal use and for work use. And they use that device ultimately at work for several different kinds of things, they use it for training actually. So our training is delivered that way at this point. And then they also use it for actual in-store work. So that personal shopper will use that device for that reason. And several other ways that we connect our inventory to what's going on in the store, et cetera. To us, that was a really big deal because if you weren't...

Ultimately, if you think about it, there are a whole lot of like... how do I put this? That is both an advantage... Giving away those devices is both an advantage to those associates personally, and also to work. Obviously we are doing it from an environment point of view is great but those workers then also get a access to technology that they probably didn't have before and we thought that was a key piece to this.

**Reggie Davis (00:32:57)**

Wow. So the container store, some very similar things. I mean, retail and supply chain is really very similar. We did have to hire more people. We had to hire more people because of the increased demands, but in a distribution center, it's not designed for social distancing. It's not designed for the things that COVID brought about and this new demand. So we had to really go back and look at everything that we did. The break room, we had to go in and put up barriers between areas that people could eat. We had to stretch out our breaks and lunches so that we could allow for social distancing. And then we had to go through a deep cleaning in each building on a regular basis, just to make certain that we were doing all that we could to prevent a disaster of a COVID spread.

So it really changed what we did and then the technology pieces of it when we were hiring new people. Of course, we would need them to come in and be ready to work in a quick way and in a fast way. So we were looking for people who had similar backgrounds in supply chain, but at the same time, the demand to get people was such was so great that we had to try to flex that and try to use ways to train faster and train a more simplified manner. We had to do things even like temperature taking for everybody walking to the building. So that was a digital process as well. And then even we had what we call COVID pay that we increased our... So we did so many things to try to adapt and adjust to the change of environment. And again, it was something that, it was really kind of learn as you go but I'm really proud of the team. And we really pulled through that and was able to meet the needs of our customers.

**Jaime Fall (00:34:57)**

Great. Thank you. So last question before we bring in some more folks to visit with us, both of your companies really have a history of making investments in training and education. And I'd love to know, which predates the pandemic, right. So what [inaudible 00:35:15] really know, are there ways in which being on that path had an impact on your company being able to get through this time. This difficult period, as you were orienting staff to do technologies. Could you talk a little about this? Go ahead, Patti.

**Patti Constantakis (00:35:32)**

Sure. Short answer is yes, it was great that we had our, what we call our Walmart academies in place before the pandemic began. What I'd say is just super briefly, we had kind of two major training and education initiatives. One's our Walmart academies, which is our store level training. And then we have our Live Letter U which is really more for those pursuing college degrees, et cetera and skilled trade certificates. But really the academies was the piece that during the pandemic was probably the most helpful, I suppose. So the academy's up to this point, what they are is, again, for store level associates who sort of want to move up or move around within the store. Historically, they've been in person, there's about 200 sites across the country that deliver these trainings and they're usually a combination of in classroom training and in-store training.

But as of the pandemic, they actually had to go completely virtual. But they're the kinds of things that really are that... There the everyday kind of training. And so what they added in, in the virtual world is all

of the things around safety. The constant changing of what are the guidelines today across the stores, they will be able to sort of leverage the academies and the virtualness of that across all of our stores. And ultimately, these are the numbers that even during the pandemic we trained like 95,000 associates via Walmart academy. Some of it that was actually in person, but it's a wonderful way.

So I talked also about the devices that folks have now. So we've moved from computer based, and now you can actually take all of those academy trainings via Me@Walmart is what the app is called at this point. So all of that is now centered on that device, which I think is great. I think the other thing I would say about our academies just in general. I mean, it was great during the pandemic, but what's wonderful about this training is that we have really found that leaning in on our training really has an effect on keeping people on retention. We've found that like more than 80% of folks who go through our Walmart academies programs stay at least for another additional year. So it's kind of a long way of saying that we were committed before the pandemic and we're probably even more so now on our training. We're committed honestly, to sort of the growth and wellbeing of our associates. And we really will believe that education and training is a big deal.

And I could go on and on about that, but I know that we don't have a whole lot of time, but there's a lot. It was there before. It proved to be a payoff during pandemic and we are super committed to moving forward with it as well.

**Reggie Davis (00:39:14)**

Yes, I would agree training is very important at The Container Store and pre pandemic training is one of our foundational principles. And so we invest up to 75 hours of training in first year alone for some of our DC specialist employees. We call them specialist. And that didn't change. We didn't deviate from that in 2020, because we know how important it is. We know that it certainly leads to retention, and it leads to really good employees. We also have this micro training system called Axonify, which allows us to do micro training two to three minute training and updates, whether it's on safety or whether it's on something change or some new protocol that we have. But that allows us again to use little segments of training and get information out so that we can continue to upgrade the skillset or, again, in this changing environment, being able to have audibles and flex things as things change.

So training is something that we make a very big investment in, and that we actually are hiring some additional training executives in the very near future because we know how important it is in this new age of making things, digital, making things faster, making things safer as we continue to meet the demands of our customers.

**Jaime Fall (00:40:50)**

Great. Thank you. So now it's my pleasure to welcome, Andre Alcantar, senior workforce lead, Texas association of community colleges and, Rachael Stephens, program director, workforce development, and economic policy with the national governor's association. Thank you both for joining us today and being a part of this conversation. Andre and Rachael, you both have your ear to the ground. You're hearing from state officials and community colleges about ways in which their employers have described what's happening in their workforce. Does this resonate or differ from what you're hearing from your member states or colleges? Rachael, how about you?

**Rachael Stephens (00:41:31)**

Thank you, Jaime, and for the introduction, the audience on my role within NGA, I direct a team of analysts and staffs that are providing consulting and research services to governors. We're actually the



only... In addition to being the information's only membership organization that is nonpartisan in surveying governors of all 55 states and territories. My team is one of several policy teams that kind of serve as the only consulting and research firm dedicated to supporting governors and executive branch leaders. And digital skills has really been at the forefront of a lot of the work [inaudible 00:42:04] we've been doing since my time at NGA, really over the past four years. And I would say I was taking some notes and I think perhaps with the exception of being able to nail a 24 hour hiring process pipe, a lot of employers or governors are talking to are going to want to know more about how you will pull that off.

But I think largely, what we just heard really resonates with what I've been hearing governors talking about when they're saying, these are things that employers and businesses of many different sizes within our states are dealing with, and what does this mean for our workforce and the skills that we're really going to need to train people with? I think especially, hearing from these two companies was really insightful. We have been hearing that in instances where employers already had investments in training and education as a priority within their company, where they already have relationships with whether it was the state's workforce system or with regional or state universities and colleges that they really benefited and really kind of already were a step ahead in being able to kind of pivot and accelerate changes that they needed to make in a really unique environment during the pandemic.

I think that speaks a lot to the importance of these investments for resilience in business, in range of industries, really. I also think... We've heard a bit about the ripple effects of the pandemic changing business models, changing skills. And I think that's something my team has really been focused on exploring with states and really exploring governors, how they can use their convening power, their authorities in their state to bring people from across state agencies together and bring them together specifically with business. Engaging in partnerships that are going to kind of be innovative that are going to be helping us kind of close the gap between what's needed and what's out there in the labor market, in the workforce right now. And as far as what they're reporting to their own priorities around this.

This has made its way into governors federal priorities [inaudible 00:43:48] NGA in July, and has also made its way into a lot of the work we're doing now with states, especially around thinking about how can we challenge... What I think is a particularly difficult aspect of all this, brings in those foundational digital skills and digital literacies to adult workers... I mean adult job seekers, which I hope we'll talk about a little bit more but anyway, to elaborate a bit on what was just shared. Absolutely a lot really resonates that before governors [inaudible 00:44:14].

**Jaime Fall (00:44:16)**

How much from the community college perspective?

**Andres Alcantar (00:44:20)**

Jaime, good afternoon and thanks for the question. It certainly resonates as we had over 50 college districts transform their operations overnight, creating virtual learning hubs to meet the education and 20 requirements at the start of the pandemic. And they continue to operate in a manner that is very deliberate to offer these virtual in person and hybrid learning options to meet the needs of these students. The integration of technology has absolutely transformed the way that they operate and very much focused on delivering value to students and employers. This includes all the support services that are vital and critical to student success. So if you're looking at it, everything from the onboarding to the professional development, to the accommodation for digital access issues facing our students.

All of these things [inaudible 00:45:16] to be accounted for as the transformations occurred, and they continue into the fall semester this year. At the state level the association of community colleges form a business advisory council comprised of members representing key sectors of the state's economy, every sector of the economy, communicating to our college presidents and offering insights on how the transformations are occurring, how they're impacting operations and the skills requirements that they will face moving forward in order to meet the challenges out there. To be competitive in the marketplace and to keep creating jobs. These are very important communications that are occurring between these business leaders and our college president. And they are significant in our ability to really develop solutions that mirror what is happening in our local communities, all across the state. And so when you're looking at the economy, every sector of the economy was impacted by this.

Every sector had to integrate technology and transform digitally their operations at many different levels. This led to a very significant need for onboarding and training transformations. It led to the need for new training solutions that allowed for the equipping of incumbent workers with the skills needed for success. But it's certainly also highlighted what we needed to do together to address the dislocated workers who had become separated during the early part of the pandemic and who are still out there struggling and coming together between these different parties, through a very robust partnership. Employers working together with our community colleges, we're committed to really making sure that we offer solutions that will meet the needs driven by these transformations and equip our workforce by reskilling and up skilling strategies that meet the requirements that are out there.

**Jaime Fall (00:47:35)**

Great. Thank you. And I'd love to hear from both of you now about some of the different approaches that your members are trying to support employers, students, and incumbent workers as well. So what are your members focused on and what are some of the strategies they're trying and what seems to be working? Go ahead, Rachael.

**Rachael Stephens (00:47:54)**

Sure. Happy to start.

**Jaime Fall (00:47:55)**

Thank you.

**Rachael Stephens (00:47:56)**

So first I think, one thing our members are really... we're really working with a lot of our members on is recognizing that when we talk about digital skills, especially about inequities in obtaining digital skills and all the opportunities that go with that, it's really part and parcel of similar conversations, taking place around inequities that exist in our workforce and education systems more broadly. This is where these inequities begin and we need to really be tackling it holistically. And sometimes I think digital skills has been a conversation kind of off to the side. We've been really working with our members to bring it all in sync into one dialogue, as they're thinking about solutions for their states. I think we've seen some states engaging in really interesting activities that are really driven through partnerships either through their state workforce boards or even at a local level through community colleges or through local boards with employers that I think are really exciting.

So for instance, we've been in close communication with Arizona, Maricopa county community college partnered with Intel to establish the nation's first associate's degree program around artificial intelligence and through an NGA peer learning opportunity, they were able to share that with more states and now are actually spreading that to additional community colleges because the governor's office was able to say that sounds really amazing, that sounds really promising. It sounds like something relevant to the industries I know are important in my state. I'd like to try that out in some community colleges here. So governor, through NGA, I think has a lot of opportunities to see best practices happening, other states bring them into their state.

And back on the theme of how this fits into the broader picture of equity and workforce participation. I think there's also real recognition emerging, especially out of the pandemic that, we can't train our way out of the problem. That's not necessarily going to be the be all end all. There's also the ability of people to access training programs, to access education programs, to access work, where that work is, and addressing barriers such as childcare affordability, transportation, really thinking about the whole worker and understanding that you're going to have to meet different people where they are, and not just to deliver the digital skills training that they may need, whether that's in a job center or in a public library or in a community college.

But you might also need to be thinking about the other barriers, inhibiting them beyond just their skillsets. We've seen states, I think taking really exciting approaches, again, partnering with the private sector in many cases to help make these things happen. And one great example is Michigan's Tri-Share program dedicated to supporting childcare costs for workers who were impacted by COVID looking for work and eligible employees split the cost of childcare with their new employer and with the state through a state currently pilot program. I think some of these federal resources coming down the line provide opportunities for states to experiment with solutions like that.

### **Andres Alcantar (00:50:41)**

Jamie in Texas, the community colleges provide over 90% of the workforce credentials in this state and they understand their vital role in building a stronger workforce and economic recovery. Key to that is really understanding what is happening within the companies in the different sectors, whether they're manufacturing, healthcare or technology. Understanding what is needed by these small and large importers is critical in terms of developing solutions and working in partnership to drive policy and a responsive approach to getting the job done. And so in Texas, the colleges have come together with the support of employers, chambers, and other leaders to launch a new initiative called the Texas re-skilling and up-skilling through education initiative, the true initiative to meet the needs of employers and position our workers for success. They're committed to help close skills gaps by really aligning the curriculum development and the programs that you're being offered to help employers build the jobs that are out there that need to be filled and to put people back to work.

When you look at the past 18 months, transitioning from significantly historic high levels of unemployment in April to having 10.9 million unfilled jobs on the last business day in July, speaks to the challenge that we face in terms of understanding these challenges out there in the marketplace. How we need to work together with employers by our side and evolve solutions that will get the job done. The true initiative really is focused on re-skilling and up-skilling the workforce through new redesigned and expanded programs. Programs that can ideally and will be completed in six months or less. And it will result in a credential is certification in a high demand, occupational pathways.

These credentials must be aligned and stackable in this career pathway so that we can respond to the changes that are occurring in the marketplace, in the workplace and reflect the needs of our employers in terms of what they need in terms of their incumbent workforce. And as they look to fill these jobs that are unfilled, they are very significant challenges that are facing the displaced worker. Many of which are young, many of which come from low socioeconomic families, many of which are

workers in-groups that do not have high levels of completion. And our efforts to really provide wins together or opportunities for a quick education and training went through these credentials and these stackable pathways will go a long way in really increasing the labor force participation of these individuals that are hurting right now, and help us with our overall efforts to close these achievement gaps that are very significant challenges in this country.

**Jaime Fall (00:53:52)**

Great, and now I'd like to invite Reggie and Patti to rejoin us if they'd like, and we'll talk a little more broadly from each of your perspectives on a couple of issues. We've heard today, that innovation is accelerating, no doubt in the workplace. Employers are using technology in new ways, across a wide range of occupations. And those who are with us today are investing heavily in training and in education. We have a once in a generation federal investment in education and training to help close the gap between what employers say they need and the skills that appear to be available in the workforce. And governors and community colleges are trying to be innovative and meet the challenge, right? So all that's the good news. I do believe, how are we doing as a nation from your perspectives as we work to meet this challenge and build a digitally resilient workforce. Where do you think we're doing well? And where do you think we are falling short and still have a lot of work to do?

**Reggie Davis (00:54:56)**

I'll go. I'll tell you that in supply chain specifically, the technology that's being created is really designed to be simplified so that if a person can use a smartphone, then they can pretty much come in and do the things that we need them to do in supply chain.

The strategy is to make the work so that we can bring people on, we can get them onboarded quickly, and they can be a contributor in some of the lower skillset type jobs. So I think from what I see and when we hire people from all walks of life, that the most people that we bring on board, that they can operate in our digital environment, because most people grew up with that type of technology, whether it's cell phone or whether it's games or whatever that they've been doing. So I think from a moving forward standpoint, I see the demand is to make the simplify things with technology to make things faster, to make things easier so that we can process things quickly get things to our consumers more quickly, but also not make it so difficult that it creates a greater barrier. That's what I see.

**Patti Constantakis (00:56:26)**

So I'll take it from a slightly different perspective, which is the notion of, how do we make sure folks have the digital skills that they need? And I think interestingly, my colleagues sort of believe that people do have the digital skills, just because they live in a digital world that we live in at this moment. Right, so there's the basic assumption that they have them and we can quibble, a lot, with whether some people do and some people don't, but there's the assumption that they do. So like... creating the environment, probably exactly the right thing to do moving forward. Right. There's nothing like conceptualized learning then when you're like, I got to use this device and do it. So, I think that's actually a good thing and we need to keep moving forward with that.

However, in those places where there are gaps, what is it, what do we do with that? And how do we understand, especially in a workforce as big as ours, right? That assumption that they do have the skills that are needed is probably not exactly the right one. So how do you figure out where the gaps are and how do you fill those in, in the right kinds of ways? I think we still have a bunch of work to do there, sort of assessing. And then there's the specialized skills, those ones are important too.

I think the one other comment I would make here is really that I feel like... golly, my brain just went blank for a second there, I was like, I had a comment. I really feel like the notion of digital resilience is the key piece here. I think we look a lot for somebody who can just keep up with the change, because what you're using today is probably not going to be here in six months, we're going to change the app and it's going to keep going. So I think in our minds, when we're hiring folks and if we had the ideal associate, it's that person who's going to just come in and be okay with change and will adapt with us. And then that's the most important piece.

**Jaime Fall (00:58:49)**

Rachael, how about you?

**Rachael Stephens (00:58:51)**

Sure, I think taking it from a leadership perspective, leadership and really getting things done, moving the needle in a large-scale way is absolutely critical. And governors are really well-poised to provide that leadership, to provide that kind of convening authority, to provide the advocacy for this as a real priority, and to bring agencies and systems from K-12 to post-secondary education, to the workforce system and the business community all around a table to really address this together. There's a challenge inherent in doing that, but I think it's one that we're seeing more and more governors have stepped forward and lead on. And that's something that we're really focused on supporting governors in doing in the near future as well. And I think there's a real opportunity. I want to highlight something that Kelly presented earlier when she mentioned that in the midst of this conversation on digital skills, there's an opportunity to be recognized around human skills, being really important to go alongside those digital and technical skills.

And I think that that presents a real opportunity to use technology in a positive way for economic growth and for economic participation. If the right policy decisions are made to make sure that's really something that's true and accessible for everyone. So I am happy to share, this is something we're working on with states through the NGA workforce innovation network, which is one of NGA's flagship workforce development initiatives, which we launched earlier this year, with support from the Cognizant foundation. We've been working with states first on really kind of getting their arms around what was needed to deliver better coordinated service delivery through the workforce system, make sure people were reconnecting with jobs and training quickly and with the supports needed to really address those other barriers to work and training that I mentioned earlier. Up next, we're actually going to be focusing on a new grant round that we just announced a couple of weeks ago on digital skills specifically.

And we're going to help a state teams led by the governor's office, work through a number of challenges, including some Patti touched on, and I think apply not just kind of at a business or industry scale, but when you're thinking about what policy makers really need to be able to do and understand, there's a huge challenge around assessing needs, understanding what the priorities are, really building a shared definition of what are the skills that are needed and that we need to be training for. What are they doing to understand them, and do we know in quantity and quality, what the needs really are, and then understanding what works. And that's another thing where, as I mentioned earlier, I think we're providing a real resource to governors and states and plan to do that in even greater, fuller force through the NGA workforce innovation network.

And we're really excited to have support in addition to Cognizant foundation from the Western Governors University and Microsoft and Intel, all real leaders in actually advancing digital skills in the workforce, are benefiting from not just their support, their expertise. And we have over 20 organizations from across the country representing a range of subject matter experts and practitioners, including the economic opportunities program, actually. So thank you all. We're so excited. Our states have already

benefited so much from your expertise and your knowledge on a number of topics. I'm sure this will be another one. And to answer your question, will we ever get there? I think we might never feel like we've checked the box or like we've arrived somewhere. I wouldn't tell my members to expect to feel like you've done it and we're good. We're always going to be pulled forward by the business community and evolving business needs. But I am really confident that through initiatives like the NGA workforce innovation network and with governor's leadership, we're going really be able to take advantage of the moment that we're in right now and make some real progress.

**Jaime Fall (01:02:10)**

I'm wondering how about you? How, where are we doing well and where do we still have a lot of work to do?

**Andres Alcantar (01:02:14)**

Well, we are certainly doing well in terms of really focusing on building partnerships with industry and trying to maximize the focus on solving this problem. As an example, the association through this Texas success center, forming a partnership with AWS to make sure that our students at our colleges and our high schools have access to these very much valued cloud computing skills, working in partnership to use those relationships, to develop the teachers and to make those available to our students. We're going beyond that, making sure that as we're working with our high schools, that we're building high quality dual credit, early college programs, that again, result in curriculum and certifications, we can obtain in these pathways of study that are already equipping our students with the skills that are needed, adding inefficiency component to how we educate our students, not just throwing stuff out there, but providing efficient learning pathways, is very critical.

How do you inform the students about these opportunities and how do you really get them to completion at a level that is more acceptable overall in this country. We have to work together. We have to leverage things like the guided pathways work that is being undertaken here in Texas and around the country so that students can more effectively select the program of study. And then we work together to make sure that we're equipping for every sector of our economy, curriculum and learning pathways to allow our students to complete the credentials, the two year degree, all in high school, stackable and leading to either work or ongoing, lifelong learning within the partner institutions, whether that's the ongoing work at the community college or the university partner.

And again, working together to inform our students about these wonderful opportunities in manufacturing and in healthcare, in just about every other sector of the economy, because they all are hiring right now and they all need individuals with talent. And the only way we solve this is to make sure that we provide access through these partnerships. And what I'm talking about access is, think about having a student in a classroom, having the option to access a community college or university of learning experience while there, and completing something of value. And for them Jamie, understanding that they're the first one in their family, and in the broader family, in many cases to complete post-secondary work. That is a big win, and those are big wins that we need to notch. And then having the benefit of having a valuable credential certificates to really boost that momentum is something that we can all work together on to achieve greater results.

**Jaime Fall (01:05:18)**

Great. Thank you. So I'd like to invite Amy and Kelly, if they'd like to join us and we'll take questions from the audience for the remainder of the time, so this is going to be a little tricky, right? We have three different audiences that we're talking about at least, probably more than that, but we have young



people who are just getting out of school that we need to help get into the workplace. We have dislocated workers, which I'd seen some comments on as well. People who are now out of the workforce, we have to get them back into the workforce. Then thirdly, one of the advanced questions was about the older workers who are in the workforce, but they need to have their skills kept up to date. What are some practices that you see that are successful in those areas?

**Reggie Davis (01:06:09)**

Jeremy I'll go. You're right, we're seeing such a demand for people who are reinventing themselves or taking new careers. We had a lot of people who were in our stores who came to distribution center. So again, the key that we've seen is to make the onboarding and the learning as simplified as possible so that it will be user-friendly for most people.

I think Patty had some really good insight about certainly there are some folks who may be a little more challenged, but when we can simplify the training, when we can do things to understand that we have a diverse workforce from what they bring from a skillset standpoint. So we have to have a lot of agility in our development and our onboarding and our training as leaders so that we can meet those needs of those different backgrounds, and so that we can help make them useful for the container store. And again, that's exciting from the standpoint of, we have seen people who have changed careers and that they've come and they've been successful because they were adaptable and they were willing to learn. So certainly it's a challenge, certainly from a corporate America standpoint, I think we have a responsibility and an obligation to have that agility in our onboarding and our training to meet the needs of different backgrounds.

**Jaime Fall (01:07:49)**

Thank you, Reggie. Patti, how about you, do you mind jumping in here?

**Patti Constantakis (01:07:53)**

Sure. I'll take it from the perspective that we have a big belief at Walmart and @walmart.org, honestly, in skills-based training and skills-based hiring and skills based advancement. We believe that in the end, all of these audiences, young, dislocated and incumbent workers...all of them will benefit from being able to essentially acquire the skills that they need to create their own career path. So from a Walmart point of view, even our academies at this point, our academies are skills-based. So there's stackable, as Andres said, these are skills-based and stackable to a credential, a badge for each one of them, and off we go. That's wonderful for the workers. It's also wonderful for a hiring manager who says, "oh, okay, now I understand what skills this person has, and I might be able to move them into this position."

So that's a piece that we're doing in Walmart, the other place we're going to hopefully, eventually go here is to what folks across the industry here are starting to call talent marketplaces, right? That's an internal way for you to essentially again, create your career path. You can find the job that you want, go see what training is available, how is it that you match those things together so that you can advance into that job. Or you happen to have the skills and you see a job in a different area, and what can you do with that? So, some way that even internally you can use your skills and essentially, even market your skills that you've developed to get the jobs that you want. I could talk forever about this particular thing, but we really we have a belief that ultimately skills-based hiring advancement training and all of that, unlocks a particular piece of, of, well, how do we put it unlocks the equity piece here in our opinions? And so, it's a long journey to get there, but we're doing a lot to try to see what we can do as part of that.

**Jaime Fall (01:10:34)**

Great Andres, there's going to be a lot there for you to jump in on, right. But love to hear how the community colleges are thinking about this.

**Andres Alcantar (01:10:43)**

Certainly, a major concern in terms of one of the cohorts who described is the declining enrollment nationally in fall 2020, and it continues. The fact that our students are not enrolling and they're not going to work, based on labor market data. That shows that age cohort under the age of 24 has the highest levels of unemployment. And then if you look at the racial breakdown in terms of which students are not going to college, and which students have the highest rate of unemployment, it's a major concern. And so if you're able to focus on offering solutions that pull these students in and you don't lose them for that whole first year, because if you lose them in that first year and they don't enroll, it's extremely difficult to get them back in, into a post-secondary institution. Then the focus on the work that has been undertaken here by the colleges around these true credentials, working in partnership with employers to provide these accelerated learning opportunities that have demonstrated value to the employers, because the employers help build them. I think it's critical.

The employers, because the employers help build them. I think it's critical, but the additional aspects to that work are one stackable as Patty just highlighted but the other part is the scaling of that. So that, that work and those courses, those certificates are available across institutions, in different regions of the state where the same companies operate or that same industry clusters demonstrating need for those skills. If we're able to scale more efficiently, the work that we are able to do on an ad hoc basis, when we bring employers in, we can be more successful in terms of how we move forward. Those same certificates can be pushed down into our dual credit learning opportunities are available to the displaced worker that is older than 25 and the work of really outreaching and pulling in the different age cohorts and the different targeted groups can be assessed more effectively in terms of the difference in the learning option and the alignment with what our workers were telling us are needed, that would be different.

And that is very important for us to do in terms of maximizing these employer partnerships that we're building. We haven't even touched on some of these other groups that are really having a hard time like the ex-offenders and the huge percentage of individuals that have literacy challenges, but together we can take some of these same principles about partnership, engagement, scaling, and in sharing across regions and replicating the success is going to be so necessary when we're talking about the situation that we're in right now. And they were actually conveyed very nicely in a digital learning platforms that are now available and more widely used. So those are some of the things that we might want to think about.

**Jaime Fall (01:14:04)**

Great. And Rachel, if you don't mind, I'll switch the question up a little bit for you. So for all the horrible things that 2020 and so far in 2021 have brought about, it's also brought more resources to some of the challenges that we faced, which certainly is a positive, as you look around at what governors are doing, how were they using these additional resources, where are they really focusing them and are they trying to build sustainable programs or do they just look at this as one-time money, trying to get people through this very difficult period? What are you seeing? And what's really working, right?

**Rachael Stephens (01:14:43)**

Yeah. It's a wonderful question. And it's early to really talk about what's working, but what I am excited about is I think that the conversation around the use of these funds is definitely centered around understanding what works and either maybe using this as a way to formally or informally pilot, try new things out, see if a longer-term investment could be worthwhile and a good idea. And it's also generated a conversation around the role of not just the governor's office, but other state agencies, the state legislature in bringing businesses to the table as partners in some of this work as well.

I'd say on the question if this is one time or not, I think governor's definitely know, of course it's impossible not to recognize that it is a one-time pot of money and they do have sustainability in mind. But again, I think with more of an approach of in some cases bolstering or supplementing ongoing programs and activities that are either part of their existing systems or part of programs they'd already launched, but in many cases, our opportunities to deliver shorter term support and try something new with the potential for a longer term investment by the state, if there's really a benefit paying off to it. And I'm really excited, I think it's giant lab experiment and policy in a way, right. To really high stakes, certainly, but an experiment to see what's going to work in a lot of areas. As far as how they're spending these resources, there's a huge range. I think we've seen them spending resources on supporting initiatives and areas, including some of my colleagues just talked about.

So for instance, advancing work that perhaps they'd already started around building stackable and transparent credentials, skills-based training and hiring initiatives, and a couple states we work with have been working on initiatives in those areas, developing and advancing work-based learning strategies, whether that be registered apprenticeship programs for adults, use apprenticeship, dual enrollment, other types of work-based learning opportunities for youth, and I think those are great ways to impart digital skills, right. Especially when you think about some occupation, specific digital skill sets and what Patty mentioned, I totally agree with, you're using it in the workplace, using it day to day, that's the best way you're going to learn and understand those connections and be able to really use those skills and practice. I think embedded in a lot of these investments that we've seen, it's also been the theme of partnership.

These investments are often either in partnership with businesses that have been hardest hit partnership with nonprofits or agencies, serving populations that have been hardest hit by the pandemic, really a theme of partnership and of really targeting the communities that were the most adversely impacted during the pandemic. So for instance, some states are doing things like providing funding to workers whose employment was affected by the pandemic to better match them with jobs and align with their skills and their interests and their geographic area and helping them actually overcome barriers like childcare and transportation. I mentioned some examples of that earlier. We're also seeing states, direct financial support to businesses, to help with recruitment and hiring, to support and match resources, dedicated to training incumbent workers and really incentivizing employers to make investments there. So we're seeing a lot of different approaches I think, taken across states right now, again with this, I think spirit of seeing what can we build on that we believe is working well in other places already? And what can we perhaps experiment with a little bit or change and modify that we can build on in the future?

### **Jaime Fall (01:18:00)**

Great. So I'd like to bring our employer partners back again, Patty and Reggie, and really one of the many topics that we haven't touched on yet that I don't want to leave alone is the lasting impact of the increasing digital skills in the workplace and what it means to jobs. And so there were like a whole range of questions around that, that I would love to get your take on, are people without digital skills is going to be left out or do you think employers are going to be providing even more training to really help people get into the workplace, but even around job, even relative positions themselves and the way the jobs are designed, are we going to see workers earning increased wages? If they have the digital skills, what's the lasting impact, or they can have more hours, any thoughts that you have or comments on just the lasting impact of digital skills in the workplace and its impact and their impact on jobs.

**Reggie Davis (01:19:05)**

I'll just share a little bit, again technology for supply chain is which we talked about requiring the digital skills sets and it's really to help us to be faster and to have a higher quality of processing or getting work done than ever before. So we welcome the technology and the technology will only enhance our ability to serve our customers. So we don't see it as a way to decrease our workforce. We see it as a way to get more done, to meet the demands. And so those who don't have the skillset again, our job is to train and to onboard.

I mean, today's economy, many retailers, the numbers are astronomical of the need of trying to bring workers into the workforce. So it would be who of course to have a training program that will help to onboard them, whatever skillset they have. And I think when you have such a great demand, then we have to be, again, as I said earlier, have the agility to adapt to different backgrounds, different skillsets to make them useful for that particular situation.

**Jaime Fall (01:20:36)**

Patti.

**Patti Constantakis (01:20:37)**

Yeah. I'm probably going to echo more of what Reggie is saying that we're not in the business, I don't think any of us foresee replacing all our workers, people will point off into, "Oh, but you're already replacing cashiers with the self-checkout. And what people don't see is that what we've actually created in this new shopping experience has many, many, many, many more other different kinds of roles that maybe you just don't see, because you don't see that cashier out there. Right. But what we might want to do is automate something tedious, like the cashier and that's okay. But we have a whole lot of other roles that have now been created as a result of the new ways of doing things. So I think the long-term view of this to me is really about adaptability honestly.

And so, yes, I agree, there's specific skills that we should all be committed to, how do we make sure the full population gets those skills? Whether you go all the way back into K-12 or how that works? So there's something about getting those skills, but the important piece of it, I think moving forward as we all can think about new ways of shopping or new ways of doing business or new ways of the adaptability is the most important piece there. And that if you enter the workforce at 18 and you retire at a lovely age of 65, the change that you're going to see when it comes to in particular digital, right, is just tremendous. And you've got to be able to go with it for that entire time you're in the workforce. I think that's the most important piece.

**Jaime Fall (01:22:29)**

Great. Okay. And so it looks like we have just a little over a minute, so we're going to try to work in a quick lightning round question, and then I want to bring in Daryl and get his take from what he's heard today. So what would be one thing that you're going to take away from today, or that you would advise our people in the audience to consider as they go away, one take away, something that you hope people remember, or a piece of advice. I'd just love to get all of your take. Kelly, we haven't heard from you in a while. Would you like to kick us off?

**Kelly Ryan Bailey (01:23:09)**

Sure, no problem. I would say the one takeaway that I am thinking about as I'm hearing this wonderful dialogue is just being able to communicate the skills that you have. And I mean that from all angles, like all audiences, Jaime, that you mentioned earlier, employers really let's push on them doing a better job at understanding the skills that are most important and writing job postings that reflect that to any educators out there that are, that lifelong process that Patti just mentioned.

All throughout this timeframe, being able to help those lifelong learners understand the skills they're learning when they come to you so that they can communicate those back to employers. So important. And really honestly, just for the average person out there that lifelong learner take this agency into your own hands because you really need to understand the skills that you're gaining. And it's not only in that formal education, in that formal work experience, it's in your life experiences because those are really valid and they should be part of the employment process.

**Jaime Fall (01:24:17)**

Great. Thank you, Amy, how about you?

**Amy Blair (01:24:22)**

Thanks. I have been thinking along with this conversation and feel, I feel like we have not only a once in a lifetime opportunity to invest in skills training and trying to help you make sure they have skills to move forward in the future, but I'm struck by not only our interviews that we did over the last month, but also today's panel about how much change is happening do in job design and in the workplace and in how work is structured around access to new technologies that change the nature of how the work is performed in a lot of different ways.

And it feels like we have an opportunity right now to be thinking about job designing in ways that also help the worker to earn more, to make sure that they're getting a strong set of strong schedule to be thinking about more holistically about job design and job quality along with skills. And I feel like that's a conversation that I want to keep continuing in other forums.

**Jaime Fall (01:25:31)**

Great. Thank you, Amy. Great points, Andres.

**Andres Alcantar (01:25:35)**

Thank you, Jaime. Innovation has built the world's greatest economy. These technology integrations and digital transformations that we've talked about really increase productivity and they make our companies competitive and in doing so allow for more job creation and new business opportunities. We must understand what these changes mean, work together and partnership, and really work together to up-skill and re-skill the workforce so that they are successful and can fully participate in the economy moving forward. Thank you.

**Jaime Fall (01:26:12)**

Rachel.

**Rachael Stephens (01:26:14)**

Yeah. There's so many great takeaways. It's hard to pick a couple. I think one that I think is really present in this conversation, I think it's also a broader takeaway from just the climate that we were in and have been in over the last several months is the shifting paradigm in the conversation away from thinking about like a worker almost as a widget or just an input, but really thinking about the whole person behind that worker, the range of things that they may need, want, desire, be striving for and how that impacts the many elements of job quality.

There are multiple dimensions to that conversation, the multiple dimensions of addressing training needs, making sure people are able to access opportunity and then really engaging employers in all those conversations. I mean, the value that the employers just on this panel brought to the discussion truly irreplaceable. And I think just really, to me, underscores something I'm so lucky to be able to do and excited to be able to do in supporting governors, making sure they're able to hear from the business community broadly and then their states and support them in their efforts to do that through things like the workforce innovation network, hearing directly and in depth from businesses about [inaudible 01:27:23] what's really changing and what they see working is just, it's incredibly impactful and that can't be said enough. And so I think even just the group here being here altogether, this combination of voices in and of itself and the value there was a huge takeaway for me.

**Jaime Fall (01:27:38)**

Thank you, Reggie.

**Reggie Davis (01:27:40)**

Yes. I think the takeaway that I have is that really hits home with me. We have to really understand the frontline worker and we talk about digital skills and all that. But imagine the change that they couldn't work from home, they didn't have that option. They had to be there, whether it was at a store or a distribution center, healthcare providers and they had no choice and all of the major, major shifts and changes that we've experienced in the last 18 months is incredible. But look at how resilient they are and they were.

They came to work every day because they had to in spite of all the risks that other people chose not to take. So I think as we look at this whole concept of work and change and skillset, I don't want to minimize the fact that there's a tremendous people doing some tremendous things during that time that kept all of us going right. That we could go to the Walmart and get the things that we needed. So I say hats off to them and as an employer, I say that we need to certainly, do all that we can do to make certain that we make that environment for them the best we can. Thank you.

**Jaime Fall (01:29:01)**

Thank you, Reggie. Excellent. Patti, how about you?



**Patti Constantakis (01:29:04)**

I'll keep it super short. I feel like when I think about transformation, transformation is change, it's necessarily change. And so I think there's a lot of work for all of us to do, to help us manage ourselves through all of that change. Right? Like that's the key piece? How do we get through the change and be open to it?

**Jaime Fall (01:29:25)**

Great. Thank you. And Darrell, you get to bring it home here before we turn things back to Maureen and let her close us out. But Daryl Graham is senior vice president of philanthropy at Strada Education Network. Daryl, your support of this project is greatly appreciated. And [inaudible 01:29:46] has been kind of at the intersection right of employment and education for years, and we would just love to hear your reaction today and how your organization is thinking about this unique moment in time and the challenges that we're facing.

**Daryl Graham (01:29:59)**

Yeah. Thank you so much, Jamie. And thank you for all of you for participating in this. And for all those who are joining us today. We are really excited about this work for many reasons. Some of who know us, a social impact nonprofit organization, we're always looking for insights and solutions that drive meaningful outcomes for individuals, whether they're through our own research, the network of nonprofits that we support, our grant making efforts, as well as our investments as an organization. We engage in a lot of high level discussions about barriers, needs and pathways, just like this one. And while the discussion is needed and valuable, our work has taught us the importance of some of the things that we've heard here today. Quality is much better than quantity and the depth of engagement with an institution or partner matters. And that's what's really making this exciting for us because this study was valuable in many ways.

We've gotten to hear directly from employers who can describe exactly how the world of work is changing and it's continuing to change even now and about how the needs of workers have certainly changed and accelerated. So here's some takeaways that we are thinking about as it relates to this conversation and the study, and I'll go through them really quickly. The truth is that we can all better predict the next five years or so going forward better, we could probably predict one year out, it's just been a changing environment for the last two years and accelerated. Digitization has only accelerated right? The access remains a key issue for people just because someone is a digital native doesn't necessarily mean they're digitally skilled. And so there's a lot of work.

And I saw lots of questions coming through about, are people going to get re-skilled or people are going to be able to be re-skilled who are already on jobs, already in employment situations. And how does that begin to work a little bit better? And how do we get people and organizations to think about that very well. We had many conversations with Patti about that. We must continue to ways to examine how we build these digital skills, which are increasingly basic life skills at this point, those opportunities seekers, who are going to be out there, whether they're employed or trying to be upskilled are going to need that in order to move forward. And lastly, change is coming so much faster from what we've heard today, what we've seen ourselves and what we've seen in this study.

And we certainly can't predict that, but we certainly know that the world just got turned upside down and we find that we don't have a view from this angle. So we're going to have to be responsive and attentive to how these needs change, whether it's what Reggie talked about with market demand, was talked about the need that existed with Walmart and staying open and what they had to do in order to move forward and continue to keep people safe. That's a very different thing that we were not

prepared for. And so because of employers created upscaling and rescaling pathways, workers still need guidance. They need financial tools, they need resources to avail themselves. And there are so many key roles that post-secondary institutions, nonprofits, intermediaries, policy-makers can do to help meet those needs. To the future work, we cannot yet predict, but we're going to have to begin to respond to the needs of employers and the needs of employees who need jobs. So thank you all for such a wonderful opportunity. And we're very grateful for all the great work that was done here. Thank you.

**Jaime Fall (01:33:45)**

Thank you, Daryl and Maureen, we'll turn it back to you to close this out. Thank you very much.

**Maureen Conway (01:33:50)**

Great. Thank you, Jaime and thank you everybody. Thank you, Amy, Kelly, Patti, Reggie, Andres, Rachael, Daryl, really appreciate you spending so much time with us today and sharing your insights. Thank you, Jaime, for all your work and, and Amy on the research and leading this and pulling this all together. I also want to thank my behind the scenes, Aspen colleagues that takes a lot of work to pull these events together. So a big thanks to Tony Mastria, Adrienne Lee, [inaudible 01:34:18], Victoria Prince, who were really helpful in pulling today's events together. Thank you to the audience for joining us and sharing your questions and comments. Please do take a moment to respond to the feedback poll if you haven't had a chance to do that. It's in the Slido box at the bottom of your screen. You can also, again, send us an email at [eop.program@aspeninstitute.org](mailto:eop.program@aspeninstitute.org). We do love to hear from you and really value your feedback.

So please let us know what you think. As a reminder, we'll be releasing an interview guide to help those who want to engage with employers on these topics and have conversations like the ones we got to have and learn about shifting digital skill needs and changes happening in the workplace. So stay tuned for that. We have a couple of events planned coming up. One will focus on universal work-related benefits, and then we have a book talk coming up in October as well that I'm really excited about. So you will see more information about those coming to your inbox soon, and I hope you'll be able to join us again. Thank you again for your time today and hope to see you again.